

Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences

Brady Wagoner
Tania Zittoun *Editors*

Experience on the Edge: Theorizing Liminality



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Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences

Series Editor

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Editors

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Series Editor's PREFACE to Stenner Volume

Liminality Fields as the Arenas for Development

This volume brings together three venerable traditions in the social sciences. First, there is the anthropological look at loosely organized social fields in between other structured ones. These have been known as *liminal zones*. At the same time, it is the systematic look at development—emphasized in developmental science—that focuses on the phenomena in-between the ones that have already emerged and those in the process of emergence. These liminal zones organized in irreversible time are often considered to be *zones of proximal development* (Valsiner and van der Veer, 2014). In development, liminality is the obligatory part of the basic process—whether we look at human or societal development, the immediate future that looms at the present is not yet structured. It is in-between what is and what is not yet. Finally, from the perspective of dynamic semiosis, the ever-present field of existential liminality is the garden for growing hierarchies of signs that regulate both the present state and feed-forward to the future. On the one hand, there is the experience of always living *forward*—into the future that rapidly becomes the transitory present to move into the past. This feature of developmental inevitability—facing the future—guarantees that liminality has the central place in all psychology. All psychological phenomena are therefore necessarily developmental in their nature.

On the other hand, however, the human psychological organization is set up to eliminate liminality by way of various order-generating devices—categorization, gestalt formation, and construction of meaning hierarchies that operate on the border of the future and the past. Due to their powerful presence, it is possible for psychology to ontologically assume a non-developmental perspective on the world. So, what really is *experience-in-becoming* is easily treated as *experience-as-is*. This has been the necessary myopia of psychology as science since its beginning. The explication of liminality in this volume corrects this epistemological error. In this volume, Stenner introduces liminal affective technologies (LAT) that are on the border of liminality fields.

Liminality can only be described in field-theoretical terms. Liminality fields have uncertain borders—the end of a liminality field and the beginning of a

non-liminal object are not well demarcated. This is exemplified by the notion of borders that Alan Rayner (2017) has elaborated. Any state of liminality (being in-between) seen in irreversible time is the arena for development. As such, it is a step towards the anticipated but not yet formed future.

This specific feature of liminality sets up specific demands for theoretical constructions that are needed for arriving at a general understanding of human lives as approximately organized. The phenomena involved are liminality fields—domains extending in the space of life experiences, being bordered by the present that demarcates future from the past. Field-theoretic applications have entered into psychology from physics over the last century—yet with variable success. The efforts by Kurt Lewin in the 1930s to introduce the field notions together with vector algebra became extinct in a few decades—so by the end of the twentieth century, it had basically vanished. The avalanche of the social normativity of quantification in data derivation and the reliance on averages and prototypes rather than ranges of variation had exiled the thinking in terms of fields, manifolds, and vectors from psychological theorizing. The result is that in 2021 we need to restart the theoretical and methodological constructions that would be adequate to liminality fields.

Theorizing liminality fields leads us to rediscovering of the tradition of *Ganzheitspsychologie* that was developed in Leipzig and other research centers in Germany in the 1910s to around 1950—after which it died out (Diriwächter, 2013). The focus on wholes as organized systems—even if that organization was vague and approximate—was novel for psychology of the twentieth century. The original presenters of that tradition—Felix Krueger and his colleagues—had many phenomenological examples of wholes that function only as such—not being reducible to their elements. Yet they did not develop explanatory conceptual systems of sufficiently abstract kind. This became possible within the semiotic turn in cultural psychology in the twenty-first century. The general principle is that of hierarchical (yet dynamic) organization of sign systems—based on the basic biological notion of the inhibition of the inhibitor that leads to action. This is paired with the notion of signs as extendable (into field-like signs) and constrictable (into point-like signs); the sign regulation of liminality fields takes theoretical forms that maintain the field nature of the experience and simultaneously structure its functions. This is theoretically impossible if the notion of signs is limited to points (categories). Sign hierarchies are constantly being constructed to make sense (=de-liminalize) different parts of the liminality fields. This semiotic organization of liminality fields leads to the concept of *liminal metastability*. According to Stenner, this is apparent when a person goes through a spontaneous liminal experience that sets up an affective generalized structure—a melody of ongoing experience. There is stability in affective non-stability that lingers on in irreversible time—creating an illusion of “being”—while it is a meta-level organizer of becoming.

This volume is a new form of a continuing effort at making sense of the cultural centrality of human living that was rapidly advancing in 2013–2018 in Aalborg at the Niels Bohr Professorship Centre of Cultural Psychology. The series of scholarly volumes that was started then included an internationally representative study of the ideas of complementarity in human psychology (Wagoner et al., 2014; Wagoner and Carriere, 2020) and looking at human bodies in their movement within contexts (Wagoner et al., 2015). The topics of imagination (Wagoner et al., 2017), democracy (Wagoner et al., 2018), and

memory (Wagoner et al., 2020) were also of central relevance in the intellectual innovation during the 5-year period of the Niels Bohr Centre which was a high time of internationalization of the state of affairs in psychology in Denmark. It fulfilled its goal internationally—with the help of the Danish Basic Science Foundation—a substantive series of workshops in Brazil, India, Estonia, and Germany found themselves supported by the Danish forward-oriented view on international proliferation of knowledge. This volume is the first result of the continuation of the international scholarship led by the Centre of Cultural Psychology in Aalborg since the end of the Niels Bohr Centre in 2018. It continues the international integration of ideas in a new way. I hope that readers will understand the topic of both liminality itself and liminality in new idea generation in the social sciences that are constantly under the influence of various societal expectations.

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Introduction

This book presents an innovative theoretical development of the concept of liminality for psychology by Paul Stenner and extensions of it by others in a variety of contexts. According to Stenner (this volume), ‘A liminal experience, in a nutshell, involves a temporary suspension of limits that permits a transition to a new set of limits. For this reason, liminality concerns the emergence of novelty just at the moment in which “something” is in process of becoming’ (p. xx). He distinguishes between liminal experiences that are ‘spontaneous’ from those that are ‘devised’. In a paradoxical way, devised liminal experiences are meant to bring order into the liminality of spontaneous events.

In this volume, Stenner more specifically invites us to consider cultural experiences as a form of liminality: ‘It is there and then at the point of transition between worlds. This is what I mean by the proposition that cultural experience has its source in liminal passage’ (p. x). Cultural experiences open a ‘world within worlds’ and participate in the transformation required of liminal experiences at large. Stenner builds his argument from a psychosocial perspective that is anchored in a process ontology; his theoretical propositions are built in dialogue with anthropologists (van Gennep, Turner) and psychoanalysts (Winnicott), among others.

This original line of reflection intrigues and enriches theorisation in psychology, particularly cultural psychology. It does so, because in its own and original language, it addresses two core issues: the importance of studying *processes over products* and *experience between its personal and social-cultural dimensions*.

The tendency to turn processes into things has been a major stumbling block for psychology since its beginning. It is stimulated by our very use of language, which transforms complex events into circumscribed objects. In contemporary psychology, abstract entities projected into people are used to predict various outcomes, without considering the concrete process by which they are reached. William James (1890/1950) long diagnosed this problem as ‘the psychologist’s fallacy’ (see also Valsiner, 2017). In contradistinction to this, he aimed to build the discipline on the foundation of the fact that ‘consciousness flows’ and more generally a rigorous description of experience in all its varieties:

the immediate fact which psychology ... has to study is also the most general fact. It is the fact that in each of us ... some kind of consciousness is always going on. There is a stream, a succession of states, or waves, or fields, ... of knowledge, of feeling, of desire,

of deliberation, etc., that constantly pass and repass, and that constitute our inner life. The existence of this stream is the primal fact, the nature and origin of it form the essential problem, of our science (James, 1890/1950, p. 15).

The concept of liminality is centred on phenomena in movement and change, passing from one relatively stable state to another—using James' (1890/1950) metaphor, the emphasis is on the flight of birds between the branches of trees rather than their perching there. However, liminality goes beyond James by articulating how such experiences are situated within social and cultural life and have consequences for both individuals and society. Spaces of liminality are informal sites of play, innovation and creativity that can transform ordered structures and formal hierarchies. In short, in any society, both structured spaces and liminal spaces (charactered by 'anti-structure'—Turner, 1969) are necessary and complementary.

Sociology and anthropology have also traditionally tended to concentrate on how ordered social structures shape or constrain individual behaviour and thought. The founder of the concept of liminality, Arnold van Gennep, was in fact an unwavering critic of Durkheim's structuralist approach and in particular his understanding of ritual as simply an expression of the social order (Thomassen, 2016). In contrast, van Gennep (1909/2010) and later Victor Turner (1969) emphasised the transformative nature of ritual and its experiential qualities—how it not only integrates but also distinguishes the individual in society. The concept thus provides an avenue for integrating, rather than separating (as Durkheim did), psychology and sociology. This is precisely the analytic focus of cultural psychology: to explore the mutual constitute of persons and social-cultural worlds, treating each as dialectically intertwined with the other (Shweder, 1991; Valsiner, 2014).

....

This volume grew out an event—Innovations in Psychology lecture series (formerly the 'Niels Bohr Lectures in Cultural Psychology')—hosted by the Centre for Cultural Psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark. Each year, a rising star in psychology who is developing a genuinely original theoretical approach (in this case, Paul Stenner) is invited to share their perspective with the international audience in attendance. This is followed by a series of commentators, who engage with, probe, test and extend many aspects of keynote's propositions, both on a theoretical and an empirical plane.

At a theoretical level, Stenner's approach to liminality has invited authors to further explore theoretical issues from a sociocultural psychological perspective (Cabra, this volume), in the social psychological approach of social representations (Schlieve & Tutenges), but also psychoanalysis (Zittoun, this volume) and philosophy and semiotics (Innis).

Paul Stenner's proposition has great heuristic power, as it stimulated reflection on people's transformation in space and time. Some authors have thus examined spatial and geographical mobility, as in tourism (Schlieve & Tutenges) and pilgrimage (Beckstead). Others have approached transformation in time, as development in the course of life, whether in children (Cabra), adults (Zittoun) or older people at the end of their life (Morgan, Suschinsky and Barclay).

One of the problems of complex theories is that they often seem too remote from concrete problems. Paul Stenner has done a remarkable work of clarification of his model, which invites people to use it to reflect on concrete interventions. Hence, the specific emphasis on cultural experience enables us to show when and under which conditions transformations take place. Several chapters explore different uses made of devised liminal techniques' uses and their transformative effect on people's lives: pilgrimage, from which people expect to be changed (Beckstead); maintenance art (Morgan, Duschinsky and Barclay) and art therapy (Roessler et al.); and even consultation in medical practice (Bank & Huniche).

Examined from such a perspective, one may of course wonder whether cultural experiences in which people engage hoping to come back unchanged can ever be so, whether tourism (Schlieve & Tutenges), translation or film watching (Zittoun), or simply playing (Cabra).

Finally, examining Paul Stenner's proposition on cultural experience as liminal transformations under the double angle of theoretical investigation and empirical evidence, the authors of this volume raise questions about the model: Can we always define the threshold of a liminal experience (Innis)? How can we account for the changes triggered by cultural experiences beyond the liminal experience (Zittoun)? And how can we also identify and valorise what needs to remain the same in the person engaged in a cultural experience (Cabra)? Generously, Paul Stenner has accepted to examine these questions and engage with them in the last chapter of the volume, reaching new depths and offering new insights on liminal experiencing.

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Part I
Innovations in Psychology Lecture

Chapter 1

Theorising Liminality between Art and Life: *The Liminal Sources of Cultural Experience*



Paul Stenner

In this chapter I will take advantage of the opportunity for an unapologetic work of theoretical psychology. In recent years I have been concerned with the concept of liminality. A liminal experience, in a nutshell, involves a temporary suspension of limits that permits a transition to a new set of limits. For this reason, liminality concerns the emergence of novelty just at the moment in which ‘something’ is in the process of becoming. Here, more specifically, I want to help theorise the notion of *cultural experience* by bringing more clearly to light the distinctively liminal sources of cultural experience.

Preamble

This is not ... a book, or liminality initially construed as vital experience of a ‘world within a world’ for one that is between worlds

Before I get too abstract, let me begin with a concrete example of some of the phenomena I will be circling around. Recently, in a rare moment of communication as I was driving her to school, my 14-year-old daughter told me of her enthusiasm for a book called ‘This Is Not a Book’. I had been encouraging her to talk about Macbeth since she is ‘doing’ this play at school, but she is expert at resisting my encouragements. I asked why she did not seem to like books and my ears pricked up when she mentioned a book she thought she would like. The book, she murmured, is called ‘This Is Not a Book’. She heard about it after re-discovering a gift she had received

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some years back. This gift was a journal called ‘Wreck This Journal’ which is designed to be ruined. For example, it contains suggestions encouraging its owner to rip the pages, smear it with food and generally mistreat the journal. Written by the same author in a similar spirit, ‘This Is Not a Book’ (Smith, 2009) suggests to the reader things like try to create as many sounds with the book as you can, and hold the book above your head for as long as you can and record your time on the page. It instructs the reader to trust their imagination because it is ‘the source of all true journeys’. It seems clear what Anna was telling me: school spoils books for her; it takes them out of the zone in which they might be enjoyable and lodges them firmly in another zone that kills joy, this killjoy zone being schoolwork. The zone permitting enjoyment, by contrast, is a zone of play, albeit play with an ever-present hint of anxiety and perhaps even dread. She especially enjoyed the play involved in a title like ‘This Is Not a Book’.

All art forms or cultural products require someone to engage with them, of course, and none can dictate the exact experience that is to be had with them. Nevertheless, once produced, they are forms in their own right. In the case we are dealing with, this curious little cultural product announces itself in its very title as something which violates Aristotelian logic by appearing as two mutually exclusive things—both a book and not a book. It shares with other artworks this feature of being, not just a world of its own and in its own right, but also a curiously doubled and ambiguous world that we might call a *world within a world* (Stenner, 2017a: 152).¹ It is as if two worlds that are usually kept separate as an ‘either/or’ are combined as ‘both/and’. Or rather, they are combined as a *both* ‘both/and’ and ‘neither nor’:

This is a book	This is not a book
This book <i>is</i> not a book	
This not a book <i>is</i> a book	
This book <i>is not</i> a book	
This not a book <i>is not</i> a not a book	

This ‘doubled’ feature of what I am calling a ‘world within a world’ is typical of any art, which to function as art must somehow fold back on and re-enter itself, thereby creating a distinction between itself and something like reality (a distinction within which the artwork somehow exists in a zone where ‘the accent of reality has been withdrawn’ [Schütz, 1945: 554]). But this feature is not just typical of art in

¹ This ‘doubled’ feature is in some respects shared by all art forms and by games and play. Whether we are dealing with a painting or a theatrical performance or a game of netball, these forms somehow separate themselves off from what thenceforth can be considered reality, suspending it, re-entering it and doubling it within the confines of a boundary (a frame, a stage curtain, a referee’s whistle). Following Bateson (2000), each operates as if it were a doubling machine, splitting the world into two and creating a ‘finite province of meaning’ (Schutz, 1945) characterised by this doubled nature (Stenner, 2017a, 2017b).

general, but also of play and games.² Even the play of a very small child must somehow imply a distinction between itself and something that might subsequently be called reality. The play must create and communicate that distinction as part of its process of unfolding in a zone for which the usual limits of reality are suspended. Here too we find a connection with religion, which often involves the creation of a particular zone in which we are licensed to seriously entertain things like angels and demons, titans and reincarnations, parting seas and previsions of the future. Each of these worlds within worlds (Schütz lists dream, play, theatre, painting, humour, religion and science) can be contrasted, albeit roughly, with pivotal or canonical *worlds of daily life*. Liminality theory encourages us to attend to the importance of these ‘worlds within worlds’, and indeed to recognise that human beings are what Proust (2000: 610) calls ‘amphibious creatures’ who are plunged simultaneously into both sides of the distinction.

To return to my anecdote, Anna’s unexpected desire for ‘This Is Not a Book’ has nothing to do with any acquaintance with Rene Magritte’s famous painting, because I can assure you that she is nearly as disinterested in art galleries as she is in books. Rather, she enjoyed the paradoxical play involved in the title. But more than this, both of the conflicting propositions in the paradox of a book that is not a book are strictly necessary if we are to account for Anna’s enjoyment. To put it crudely, she can enjoy that she is showing an interest in a book, as demanded by her school and by her parents (‘this is a book’). And yet, this ‘book’ does not invite her to read it, but to mistreat it, destroy it and have fun with it (‘this is not a book’). It is a book which holds the reality of its ‘bookness’ in suspense by removing the usual limits applicable to books. Furthermore, the book somehow recognises Anna, and communicates to her that it knows her predicament and that an enjoyable way out of that predicament can be found. ‘This Is Not a Book’ seems to speak to her directly, and

²In the context of a Niels Bohr lecture, it is irresistible to note here Bohr’s complementary waves and particles, both of which are necessary for a full description of atomic level phenomena. It is quite likely that Bohr took the concept from William James who had used it some 30 years earlier in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), and with some overlap (Bohr was interested in questions of consciousness). James uses complementarity to describe a patient of Pierre Janet with ‘hysterical anaesthesia’. Awake, her skin was insensitive except for a strip which she could feel where she wore a gold bracelet. Under hypnosis, the reverse applied: it was only the strip that was anaesthetic. These are thus complementary experiences in the sense that both cannot occur together: the strip is either anaesthetic (when in trance) or felt (when awake) and clearly cannot be both at once. And yet a full description of the case must take account of both facts. By way of his distinction between the ‘transitive’ (in process) and ‘substantive’ (actualised), James also related complementarity to thought (thought ‘in flight’ as it were, and thought ‘perched’). If thought/experience is transitive and in process it cannot simultaneously also be a substantive ‘product’, although, for a full description, it is indeed both (but never at the same moment). James never quite resolved the problem of how to square his thesis of continuity (consciousness as a stream) with his account that conscious experience must come in ‘drops’ (or not come at all since there can be no half drop). Bohr’s problem was comparable, since it inherited Einstein’s problem of light being both a wave (with continuity) and yet a corpuscle or particle (a discrete ‘quantum’ or packet which either comes as a whole or does not come at all). It was this very problem that was taken by Whitehead (who both loved James’ thought and had an enthusiasm for theoretical physics) and resolved by way of his ‘actual occasion’ concept (for a simplified version of which see Stenner, 2008).

seems to offer a way of getting her out of a hotspot³ in which she feels she must read but cannot read. As a world within a world, ‘This Is Not a Book’ seems to invite an experience in which the book oscillates, as it were, between book as medium and book as form or message. One moment the book is a medium hosting the form of writing, and hence it IS a book, the next moment, the medium becomes the message, and the book appears as a brute object to be torn or used as a door stop, and hence it is NOT a book.

In the terminology I will be using today, ‘this is not a book’ is a liminal entity, an object that can be considered a ‘technology’ to the extent that it affords transition between states through the suspension of limits. We cannot even truly call it an object since, as I’ll explore, such objects also oscillate between subject and object. It is less an object than a ‘between-world’ medium. It certainly could not exist without a reader, but that reader cannot be any reader. We have seen, for example, that the reader must also be a non-reader. But there is something more about this particular reader, about my daughter Anna, that is also ‘between worlds’ in a sense that complements the ‘world within a world’ that is this quasi-object. To simplify it greatly, at 14, she is no longer a little girl but not yet a young woman. She is going through a liminal experience if by this we mean, precisely, that she is existing in an as-yet indeterminate condition whose present is defined by the fact that it is no longer what it was, but not yet what it will be. A liminal experience is an experience in the process of *becoming*. We might say that it is an experience that is happening but has not yet happened. This, in fact, is what the word experience really means: it is a ‘going through’, a *passage*.⁴

I am suggesting that ‘This Is Not a Book’, as a curious ‘world within a world’, is particularly suited to people who are themselves experiencing a phase of passage or transition ‘between worlds’. When we are between worlds, then and there we find, or we run up against, the use and meaning of these curious things—like ‘this is not a book’—that is a world within a world. The reason for this is that when we are in passage, they can help to get us through. Of course, you do not have to be going through a liminal experience to get something out of this kind of cultural object, but I will argue that the vital source of cultural experience is indeed to be found *then and there*, in a phase of liminal passage: in a becoming. But a liminal passage, if it is indeed a becoming (a transformation), is a delicate and ambivalent thing. What Anna enjoys then and there is also a certain freedom or licence to destroy, deface, ruin, spoil and have done with this non-book. It is important that this destruction

³The concept of a ‘liminal hotspot’ has been theoretically elaborated in Greco & Stenner, 2017 and Stenner et al. (2017) and further developed and applied to a range of situations (Motzkau & Clinch, 2017; Kofoed & Stenner, 2017; Enciso Dominguez et al., 2017; Scott Georgsen & Thomassen, 2017; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017; Szakolczai, 2017a, 2017b; and Nissen & Solgaard Sorensen, 2017).

⁴Dewey (1934/2005: 50) writes in this context of having *an* experience, and this is core to his notion of art as something which ‘in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience’. His discussion of the artwork as an ‘expressive object’ (85–109) is an influence on the notion of a ‘world within a world’ that I have articulated in this chapter.

both is playful and yet has a quite serious overtone of anxiety and dread to it. The book somehow allows what might otherwise easily be a scary and unpleasant experience to be tolerated within a positive frame, a little like a fairground ride can convert sheer terror into exhilaration. It helps to create a supportive framework within which delicate, ambivalent and ambiguous feelings can be entertained in a positive and encouraging manner. And with the book, somehow one is also not alone, but accompanied by the one giving you this licence, even if nobody is there. And in this positively licenced destruction there is, surely, above all, a sense of *life*. A vitality of desire. A sense of touching upon the essentials that make life worth living ('vital subjectivity' [Stenner, 2017b]). A liminal experience, in short, is an experience of *a world within a world* that happens *between worlds*: a world within and between worlds.

What have psychologists got to say about this kind of thing? On the surface of things, very little, it seems, but there are precious exceptions, usually beyond the 'mainstream'. Tania Zittoun, for example, is a rare psychologist who asks the question: 'How can we comprehend what young people *do* with books, movies and songs?' (Zittoun, 2006, p. 33). These cultural elements, she continues, 'enable humans to extend their intelligence and memory through time and space'. She writes of young people using songs, movies and so on as 'symbolic resources' which can help them, for example, to reposition, re-signify and reimagine themselves, particularly during what she calls life transitions. She follows Winnicott in calling the experiences that are mediated by these cultural forms 'cultural experiences'. I want to help further theorise this notion of *cultural experience* by bringing more clearly to light its distinctively liminal sources. In fact, we have done this together in a recent analysis of the movie *Inception*, but that is for another time. Tania's work is part of the recent development of cultural psychology, and so there are other contemporaries (see Valsiner, 2014, for an overview) but also other important precursors, not least Vygotsky and Spinoza. On the matter of precursors, from my perspective as a social psychologist, G.H. Mead is particularly worth noting as a thinker of the liminal, even if he never used the l-word. At the core of Mead's thought is the importance of ascribing real existence to experiences of transition during which one world or system passes over into another. His concept of emergence⁵ concerns situations in which something new enters a world, the advent of

⁵Although emergence has a contemporary resonance, it was much discussed in the early part of the twentieth century and was core to the 'emergence' of process thought. A key point of reference for the theory of emergence was George Henry Lewes, the lover of George Eliot, who was the first to use the term in his 1875 book 'Problems of Life and Mind'. Spinoza—the great philosopher of immanence—is a key factor here, since Lewes wrote enthusiastically about Spinoza whilst George Eliot translated Spinoza's ethics. If mind does not come from on-high as a transcendent, it must be explained as an emergent from within nature, and hence part of nature. Henri Bergson's 'creative evolution' from 1907 was another important landmark, no less Spinozist. Samuel Alexander's Gifford Lectures (published in 1920) presented space and time as an environment out of which *emerged* matter, life and mind. These ideas were synthesised in C. Lloyd Morgan's 1927 book 'Emergent Evolution'. In the roaring 1920s, then emergence was all the rage amongst academics, and Mead (1932/1980, p. 23) was well versed in all of this (especially the work of Bergson and

which changes that world. Mead wants to ascribe reality both to the novelty of this event of emergence and to the process of adjustment whereby the changed system comes to terms with it. In fact, Mead expresses this reality with his core definition of sociality:

The social nature of the present arises out of its emergence. I am referring to the process of adjustment that emergence involves The world has become a different world because of the advent, but to identify sociality with this result is to identify it with system merely. It is rather the stage betwixt and between the old system and the new that I am referring to. If emergence is a feature of reality this phase of adjustment, which comes between the ordered universe before the emergent event has arisen and that after it has come to terms with the newcomer, must be a feature also of reality (Mead, 1932/1980, p. 47).

A liminal experience is precisely this reality ‘betwixt and between’ the world, system or ordered universe *as it was* (before the arising of the emergent event) and the world, system or ordered universe *as it will be* (after it has ‘adjusted’). Mead thus draws our attention to the phase of transformation *as it is happening* and that means *before any new order has yet settled*. This *phase of transition as it is gone through* is, for Mead, not merely to be considered a feature of reality, but is the *very seat of reality*, and the very crux of sociality (defined as ‘the capacity of being several things at once’). The reality of the liminal is there when the limits that had defined the prior order are suspended and no longer apply, and when the limits that will define the order to come have not yet taken their place.⁶

Introduction

Over the years I have participated in developing a critical and transdisciplinary approach (Stenner, 2014, 2015) to social psychology that is ‘psychosocial’ and ‘processual’ (Brown & Stenner, 2009; Stenner, 2017a). I will briefly explain both terms. The term processual points to an ontology according to which ultimate reality is composed of events or occurrences⁷ rather than irreducible substances: an

Whitehead) when he defined emergence as ‘the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed’. Emergence, for Mead, is thus more than a vague ‘wholism’ which asserts that new properties come into being as a function of interacting ‘levels’ (see note 6 on Whitehead’s atomistic alternative to wholism). It is a concept primarily designed to grasp how *novelty* enters into the real processes that constitute the world we are part of.

⁶For empirical applications of Mead’s thought to liminal occasions see Stenner et al. (2019), where we apply it to the notion of ‘ADHD identities’ and see Andreouli et al. (2019), where it is applied to the phenomenon of Brexit.

⁷Whitehead (1929) calls these ultimate realities ‘actual occasions’ (sometimes ‘actual entities’). From this perspective, James’ famous stream of consciousness is in fact punctuated in so far as it is composed of an unfolding series of actual occasions of experience, each deriving from its predecessor and giving rise to the next as it perishes (see Stenner, 2011a, 2011b). James himself

entity's being is constituted by its relational becoming. The latter stance is principally inspired by Alfred North Whitehead's⁸ philosophy whereby 'the actual world is a process' (Whitehead, 1929, p. 22). Comparable process thinking can be found in the work of Bergson, Mead, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Langer, Turner, Deleuze, Serres, Luhmann, Stengers and many others. It has been slowly trickling into psychology for more than a century, and has strong connections with systems theory.⁹ As I tried to outline in my recent book *Liminality and Experience*, transition, becoming, passage and emergence acquire huge importance within process thought: liminality becomes what Jaan Valsiner calls a cultural universal,¹⁰ or primary concept (see also Stenner & Weber, 2018).

acknowledges this with his notion of *pulses* of experience which together give rise to the impression of flowing continuity. At a level of operation parasitical upon the conscious stream, and lending them its shape, are the actual occasions of communication which, when suitably connected and concatenated, form the ongoing streams of communication that make complex human social life possible. These communicative events presuppose symbolic mediation, and each event or actual occasion is a synthetic unity of message, information and understanding (Brown & Stenner, 2009, Chap. 4). The point is that it is these events or occasions that are the fundamental realities of and for the system. These events are the microgenetic (see Brown, 2012, for this account of microgenesis) atoms of the universe out of which wholes are formed, and since they are pulses of transmission or transition, we are dealing with something more like a 'holism' (a continuity full of voids, gaps, leaps, transitions) than a 'wholism'. In the account which I have sketched, communicative and conscious events are thoroughly coupled to the extent that symbolic meaning is crucial to both, but both also presuppose the vital events proper to organic systems and the energetic events proper to physical systems (Stenner, 2005, Stenner, 2011a, 2011b, 2017a, 2017b).

⁸Over the last decade or so I have made efforts to apply Whiteheadian ideas within empirical social psychology, including applications to methodology (Stenner, 2009a, 2009b, 2012), theory (Stenner, 2007, 2008; Stenner 2011a, b; Stenner, 2017a, 2017b; Brown & Stenner, 2009) and substantive topics like human rights (Stenner, 2013), standards and values (Stenner, 2016), experiences of gardens (Stenner, Church and Bhatti, 2012) and issues within the health system (Stenner & Moreno, 2013; Greco & Stenner, 2017).

⁹Process ontology is closely associated not merely with philosophy, but with metaphysics, particularly that of Bergson and Whitehead. By the mid twentieth century, metaphysics had become deeply unfashionable and virtually everybody agreed that it had died. Actually, the generalist baton of metaphysics, that had been knocked out of the hands of philosophers, was taken up by scientists in the form of general structuralism and systems theory. Philosophically minded systems theorists often acknowledge Whitehead as a direct and fundamental influence (see Luhmann, 1995, for example).

¹⁰Something is universal if it belongs to the experience of all of us (Mead, 2015: 185) and if it never fails of exemplification (Whitehead, 1929: 4). I must confess to feeling very happy when Jaan Valsiner (2018) cited my own work as part of his articulation of liminality as one of the three 'universal principles of the human psyche'. But my feelings were mixed with a disturbing sense of vertigo that is well captured by some words uttered by Stephen Dedalus towards the beginning of Joyce's *Ulysses* (p. 37): 'I fear those big words, Stephen said, which make us so unhappy'. This chapter is an effort to harmonise those mixed feelings by presenting my 'take' on liminality as a transdisciplinary concept which may well have something like ontological reach (see Stenner, 2017a, 2017b). Whether this concept of liminality can indeed function as a leading concept/general assumption/utmost abstraction/universal is for others to decide. Here I want to note that Whitehead instructively reverses the misunderstanding that universals should explain concrete things and insists instead that the real job is 'to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the

Process thinking aims for general applicability and applies to all aspects of nature. The term psychosocial points not just to a specific focal research interest in social psychology, but also to a rejection of fundamental dualism and a concern with the mutual constitution of the sociocultural and the psychological.¹¹ Although I cannot address it fully here (see Stenner, 2017a, pp. 6–14), my own approach begins with an acknowledgement of the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the psychological and the social: the psychological both *must* and yet ultimately *cannot* be separated from, and indeed connected to, the social. On the one hand, the psychic and the social are inseparable since, as Mead proved, we can become self-conscious (and have ‘selves’) only by taking the perspective or attitude of another towards ourselves. On the other hand, the psychic and the social are destined to pass each other by because our minds presuppose the activities of our nervous systems, and, for all our empathy, the nervous systems of two individuals do not directly connect. Even though I might say I can feel your pain, the pain I feel is not in fact yours: your experience remains your own, lodged to your own unique standpoint within the world, and so something of it must remain enigmatic and inaccessible to me.¹² This paradox of the psychosocial means that sociality and selfhood must leap a chasm hand in hand, and must do so continually. Self emerges from the social process to the extent that the social process gets into the self, but *that is always a limited extent*, fragile and contingent on the acceptance of creative leaps of faith that are culturally mediated and supported (as we shall see, by liminal affective technologies of

more concrete things’ (20). He asserts that it is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, ‘In no way’. Again, the constructive question is: ‘How can concrete fact exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature’. My concern is not to wield universals like an abstract General ordering his concrete empirical foot soldiers, but to explore the necessarily imaginative and creative process of moving beyond a given concrete experience of fact in order to extract a pattern that gains us a more synoptic vision of things, and perhaps better purchase on them.

¹¹ In fact, if we integrate process philosophy with contemporary systems theory we encounter a description of the actual world as a hugely complex manifold of interconnected processes. Within this interrelated manifold we can broadly distinguish various different *forms of process*. Social systems like law and politics are forms of process that operate in the medium of communication. These systems presuppose the existence of psychic systems which operate in the medium of consciousness, including perceptions, memories, imagination and so forth. These psychic systems presuppose an organic nervous system whose operative events function within an electrochemical medium. There are forms of process ‘all the way down’, as it were, and each form processes its distinct elements/events/actual occasions within its particular medium. This brief account synthesises Fritz Heider and Niklas Luhmann with Whitehead (see Stenner, 2005).

¹² This makes the relationship between consciousness (typically identified with psychology) and communication (typically identified with the social) paradoxical because despite operating with, or in, a shared medium of ‘meaning’, what is communicated is never something like ‘consciousness’. One conscious event can connect only with another conscious event, just as communication can connect only to more communication. They entail distinct forms of process, which means that they are systems that process different forms. This paradox underlies what Mead called the ‘passion of self-consciousness’.

passage).¹³ The fact that ‘self is social’ thus does not prevent the psyches of individuals from falling out of joint with, and needing to coordinate with, the flows of culturally structured and conflict-ridden social communication in which they have their being. Neither does it prevent people from seeking to change the—ultimately somewhat arbitrary—social processes of society. Indeed both this problem of coordination of individuals with society and this ambivalence towards social order are fundamental to the concept of liminality.¹⁴ *Acceptance of the paradox* of the psychosocial is decisive to understanding this (see Motzkau, 2009), as I hope to show.

This chapter is not an explication of this approach but an application to a topic of some interest to the field of cultural psychology: the nature of ‘cultural experience’.¹⁵ I take the phrase ‘cultural experience’ or better ‘cultural experiencing’ from the psychoanalytical psychologist D. W. Winnicott (another thinker of liminal experience who never used the ‘I’-word). Winnicott puts the emphasis on the word experience and sensibly hesitates to define ‘culture’.¹⁶ He alludes only to a pool of inherited tradition that is the basis for a continual inventiveness that provides a continuity that transcends personal existence.¹⁷ With origins in the myths and rituals of oral traditions, this cultural pool spans several thousands of years. But, as I will discuss,

¹³ These creative leaps are also illuminated by a concept of liminality (see Eisenstadt’s use of liminality to theorise ‘axial age’ phenomena in the emergence of new forms of religion). Beyond the domain of the psychosocial it is not just people who passage through transformative becoming, but nature itself. When human beings first emerged through the biocultural process of hominisation, this was also a liminal passage, as is the first emergence of self-consciousness for an infant. This concern with transitions is fundamental to Mead (2015), for example, whose primary concern was the emergence of a fundamentally social self from out of the stream of animal sociality that he called the ‘conversation of gestures’.

¹⁴ As should become clear below, rites of passage are about occasions during which psychic and social systems become temporarily uncoupled so that they can be subsequently recoupled. Liminal experience is also fundamental to the process of fabulation whereby alternatives to the existing social order are imagined (Stenner, 2018).

¹⁵ For related applications of Winnicott’s account of cultural experience within cultural psychology, see Zittoun (2006) and Glaveanu (2015).

¹⁶ I too will not grapple with the 164 different definitions of culture listed by Kroeber and Kluckhohn back in 1952, which have doubtless multiplied since then (see Jahoda, 2012; Valsiner, 2014).

¹⁷ This transcendence of personal experience is necessary if a distinction is to be drawn between a psychic system (which operates in the medium of conscious events) and a social system (that operates in the medium of communicative events). Those familiar with the work of Niklas Luhmann will find resonance here with Luhmann’s argument that art functions to address the paradox of the mutual separation of consciousness and communication, working at their interface by integrating their two forms of meaning. On the one hand, art makes perception available for communication while, on the other, by participating in communication via perception, it generates ‘intensities of experience that remain incommunicable as such’ (Luhmann, 2000: 48). Developing my thesis that affect and emotion operate at the interstices of organic, psychic and social systems (Stenner, 2004, 2005), this chapter argues that cultural experience is concerned both with the differentiation and the structural coupling of conscious experience and communicative processes (the paradox of the psychosocial).

Winnicott is not, for the most part, interested in elite cultural products.¹⁸ He finds, for example, a direct continuity between cultural experience and the play of very young children, and he is interested in ‘creativity’¹⁹ as a universal, and not just as an exceptional, talent. For now, however, it is important just to note that Winnicott does not ask *what* is cultural experience but instead poses the much better question: *Where* is cultural experience?²⁰

This question concerning the location of cultural experience is a definite improvement on the more static ‘what’ question since it encourages us to think of cultural experience, not as something that just ‘is’, but as something that *happens*, and therefore as something that happens *somewhere*. He starts his essay on the location of cultural experience, for example, with a line from the poet Tagore, which reads: ‘On the seashore of endless worlds, children play’. But in the reading of Winnicott that I will provide in a later section, we come to realise that he realised that even this ‘where’ question could be much better put. The happening of cultural experience certainly requires a place or location, but as a process of experiencing it is equally certainly not reducible to the spatial dimension, nor indeed merely to the fact that it ‘takes time’. Reading Winnicott through the lens of liminality, I will propose that the question of the where and the when of cultural experience can receive a quite specific answer: cultural experience pertains to circumstances of passage or becoming. It is there and then at the point of transition between worlds. This is what I mean by the proposition that cultural experience has its source in liminal passage.

To make this argument I expand upon the concept of liminality developed in *Liminality and Experience* (Stenner, 2017a; Greco & Stenner, 2017). This in turn builds upon three key steps in liminality scholarship which I cannot deal with here: first, the initial articulation of the concept of the liminal within the anthropology of Arnold van Gennep (1909); second, its rediscovery, celebration, popularisation and

¹⁸ Winnicott (1971/2005: 142) was more interested in what people *do* with cultural products: ‘What, for instance, are we doing when we are listening to a Beethoven symphony or making a pilgrimage to a picture gallery or reading *Troilus and Cressida* in bed, or playing tennis? What is a child doing when sitting on the floor playing with toys ... What is a group of teenagers doing participating in a pop session?’

¹⁹ Creativity should surely be included amongst any list of universals within cultural psychology. Whitehead (1929: 21) is rather emphatic about this: ‘Creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact’. In making this claim we should not mix up the concept of creativity with the word, which was barely used before the 1930s. Interestingly, a strong case could be made for Whitehead having introduced the term ‘creativity’ into the English language.

²⁰ A.N. Whitehead proved a century ago that the notion of ‘simple location’ is a fallacy that cannot be presupposed as an ultimate fact for science. Time also needed rethinking since it is equally fallacious to assume the real existence of any given *instant of time*. Points in space and instants in time do not correspond to any basic reality, but are abstractions of the intellect. As Whitehead put it, ‘absolute time is just as much a metaphysical monstrosity as absolute space’ (Whitehead, 1919: 2–8). Systematising Bergson’s philosophy with the rigour of a mathematical physicist, Whitehead concludes that the ultimate fact for scientific knowledge is something more like *perception through a duration* (see Lestienne, 2018). A decade later he would formulate these ultimate facts as ‘actual entities’—‘also termed ‘actual occasions’—that are the final real things of which the world is made up (Whitehead, 1929: 18).

expansion (e.g. into the concepts of liminality and the liminoid, as well as *communitas*²¹ and anti-structure²²) during the 1960s by Victor Turner (e.g. Turner, 1969, 1982); and third, the further extension of the concept within the social sciences, notably by Eisenstadt (1985), Szakolczai (2009), Szakolczai (2017a, 2017b), Thomassen (2014) and also, in a different manner, Alexander (2017). This concept of liminality will enable me to show how Winnicott's ideas can be integrated with anthropological work on rites of passage and brought into resonance with broader sociological work using liminality.

With the help of a concept of cultural experience as liminal experience, Winnicott's broader thesis of transitional phenomena amongst infants will be understood as a kind of inaugural and microscopic rite of passage. As with other rites of passage, those in the process of becoming are guided and supported through a cultural experience of transition which, if all goes well, prepares and enables them to enter a new, more or less stable and liveable, world of daily life (until the next transition, of course). However, these processes are never simply a matter of 'entering' a world that already exists. Rather, to become a part of a world, we must in an important sense *create* that world for ourselves, since to exist for us it must enter our experience. Becoming involves not just a kind of metabolisation of experience, but also its coordination with the manifold of perspectives and forms of communication proper to worlds of shared social reality, since it is this that affords the building of such a new, shared, world (until the next rupture ...).

My claim that cultural experience has its source in passage does not mean that all cultural experience is liminal experience or that all liminal experience is cultural experience. In fact, building on Turner's contrast between staged and unstaged liminality, I will distinguish between spontaneous and devised liminal experiences.

²¹ For Victor Turner (1969) liminal situations create the conditions for an experiential confrontation with what it means to be a human being outside of and beyond a structurally given social position or state. Such moments or episodes tend to be highly affectively charged, and for Turner, they are enormously valuable formative experiences. Liminal experiences can give rise, for example, to a 'sentiment of humankindness'. They can help to generate a sense of equality and of the common purpose of the society taken as a whole (see Stenner & Moreno, 2013). Turner gives the name *communitas* to this rare experience of generic human bonds. As with so many things, this insight was pre-empted in a remarkable way by G.H. Mead. Mead (2015: 218–219) discusses the 'enlarged experience' made possible by the 'actual degradation of the social structure itself' that gives rise to an experience of 'universal community' and arouses a 'flood of emotions' associated with the 'sense of identification of one's self with everyone else in the community'. Mead considers this a classical 'religious technique' and is typical of 'the sort of experience which the neophyte has in conversion'. Everything is here but the 'c' word

²² Victor Turner (1969, 1977, 1982) developed an extended concept of liminality. He recognised that liminal phases involve the temporary and ritual suspension of social structure and observed that most social scientists pay almost exclusive attention to social structure. For Turner, however, this focus ignores the vitally important contribution made to wider society by the formative experiences that occur during these liminal, transitional moments in which social structure is suspended. To mark the importance of liminality he used the phrase anti-structure. Differences of status, gender, family rank and so forth are, for a short but intense time, dedifferentiated into a relatively unstructured limbo (see Stenner & Moreno, 2013).

Spontaneous liminal experience is that which happens to us, rupturing our lives and throwing us into changes we might not have anticipated. Devised liminal experiences, by contrast, are those which we do to ourselves, usually in a rarefied and virtual space/time that is abstracted from daily practical reality and mediated by cultural resources like rituals, myths, songs, novels and movies. Devised liminal experience is experience mediated by ‘dedicated’ cultural forms (I call these liminal affective technologies or media of transition).

Of chief interest, however, is the *relationship* between spontaneous and devised liminal experiences. Devised liminal experiences, put crudely, are a culturally mediated means for processing or metabolising the otherwise raw and wild experiences of spontaneous liminality (that accompany significant ruptures to our routine psychosocial experience and activity), and for coordinating that experience such that a degree of (good enough) attunement can exist between the demands of the social and the capacities of the subject (Greco & Stenner, 2017). Both of these forms of liminality stand in contrast with processes of experience and communication that are sufficiently stable, normative and predictable to be taken for granted as a shared world of practical reality. That is to say, liminal occasions can be contrasted with ‘pivotal’ or, to borrow a term from Bruner (1993), ‘canonical’ circumstances. As transitions between relatively stable positions, liminal occasions of passage, to put it metaphorically, are gaps or cracks or voids in the psycho-sociocultural crust of human forms of life, and these (manifold and varied) openings are the ever-present source of cultural experiencing.

There are two obvious objections to my provisional argument so far about cultural experience having a liminal source in circumstances of passage. I need to get these out of the way before proceeding further. First is the objection that all experience is cultural experience, and hence there is no outside to this category. In one sense this is certainly true. It is a premise of cultural psychology, discursive psychology, social constructionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and practically all traditions outside of mainstream positivism that *all* human existence is culturally mediated and semiotically modified. What Cassirer called ‘symbolic forms’ provide a third link or ‘Zwischenreich’ between human organism and environment that shape and add texture and new degrees of freedom to even the most mundane and routinised human activity, experience and encounter.²³ Accepting this important truth, however, does not require us to assume that our symbolic existence is static, uniform or finished. If we wish to know how cultural forms emerged in the first

²³ Cassirer built upon von Uexküll’s notion of the *Umwelt* according to which each living organism constructs, as it were, its own world. But the conspicuous emergence of high-level symbolism as a constitutive part of human evolution marks a radical step in complexifying and multiplying these worlds because of the degree of *semiotic freedom* (relative autonomy from organic determination) afforded by the symbolic domain (Hoffmeyer, 2010; Von Bertalanffy, 1950). This has long been recognised by critical psychologists (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers, 1995), and was a core aspect of Mead’s theory, presumably unknown by Cassirer, despite the shared concern with symbolism: ‘The organism, then, is in a sense responsible for its environment ... the social environment is endowed with meanings in terms of the process of social activity’ (Mead, 2015: 130).

place, or why new cultural forms are continually arising in dialogue (and often in conflict) with existing tradition, then we need a more nuanced and specific account of cultural experiencing informed by the notion of liminal experience.²⁴

The second objection is more critical. It begins with an apparently empirically grounded understanding of cultural experience as something that is the very opposite of transition or creative becoming. The best known but by no means the only advocate of this view is the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His basic argument is that the actual, if usually hidden, function of works of art and other cultural forms is to define and reinforce class definitions and distinctions in order to fortify interclass boundaries and reproduce the existing status quo. Cultural experience from this perspective is all about establishing and protecting structures, and that is why, for Bourdieu, each and every artistic offering is addressed to and accepted by one class alone. Cultural experience, in short, is about drawing distinctions and fixing them, and the primary function of Shakespeare, George Elliot and the Opera is for the cultivated elite to tell themselves apart from the plebs and chavs they see littering the pubs and football stadiums. And when it is not class that is being sacralised by art it is the nation state or city state announcing its essential superiority and insisting on the status quo. What is Michelangelo's David but the Florentines telling the Sienese where to go? Does not every capital city brandish its art museums like a fleet of battleships? Like Jacques Lacan's phallus, cultural experience fixes identity into the firm shape of patriarchy and empire, the better to turn the screws on the poor and needy. Now, even if I have caricatured it a little, there can be no doubt that this perspective rings true much of the time and must not be ignored. But even so, must we call this 'cultural experience'? Does the fact that a given painting serves as a mere status symbol in a rich person's living room mean that it cannot also be part of

²⁴In much the same way it could be quite correctly argued that all experience is in fact liminal experience: all is flux, indeterminacy, change, transition and becoming, and the question then becomes: How is order possible at all? But this important relativity does not prevent us from distinguishing those forms of process in our lives that are more stable, and that serve to stabilize, from those whose order has been disrupted or suspended or transformed. Indeed, it is relevant to distinguish activities and technologies that are *structuralising* from those that are *liminalising*. Structure (as 'structuration' theorists like Giddens, 1986 have insisted) is a product and not a given. Structure is about enhancing the probability of otherwise improbable connections and hence to 'structuralise' is to amplify our capacity to expect the future. Every social experience to some extent 'escapes' structure (ideals are rarely met in practice), but when we structuralise we either ignore or regularise the stuff that does not fit (see Sally Falk Moore, 1978 for the concept of 'processes of regularisation'). The structuralising tendency is thus convergent, conformal and centripetal (hence 'pivotal'), constraining variability and tightening around a centre (Valsiner, 2018). The liminalising tendency, by contrast, is divergent and centrifugal, dispersing towards a dedifferentiated periphery which is tolerant of deviation. In a forthcoming paper, Andersen and myself discuss in this light a number of 'technologies of potentialisation' that are used in the public sector (Andersen & Stenner, 2020). Potentialisation technologies recover possibilities provisionally excluded by social structures. Something like *potentialisation* is thus a key feature of liminal occasions.

a real cultural experience? A CD can be sharpened up and used to sever the head off a piglet, but that hardly proves that music serves for butchery.²⁵

This Is Not ... What I Was Expecting: Spontaneous and Devised Liminal Experience

I all too rapidly implied a twofold distinction, first between canonical experience and activity and liminal experience and activity, and, second, concentrating on the latter, between spontaneous liminal experience which happens to us and devised liminal experience which we do to ourselves. Let me give an old example which might illustrate these, and, more importantly, also show the connections between them (see Stenner & Zittoun, 2020). In Book 8 of Homer's *Odyssey* we find Odysseus incognito in the palace of king Alcinous. Welcomed by the king as a stranger, Odysseus is listening to the bard Demodocus sing of the fall of Troy. Nobody present yet knows that one of the great lost heroes of the Trojan War, Odysseus himself, is in fact with them in person. Most assume that Odysseus is dead since he never returned home after the battle. In fact, he is seeking homeward passage after many crises, including 7 long years entrapped in Calypso's Cave. But for now he is sitting and he is moved to tears by Demodocus' song:

Odysseus' heart melted and tears poured from his eyes. He wept pitifully as a woman weeps who throws herself on her husband's dying body, fallen in front of his city and people, trying to ward off that evil moment from the city and his own children: watching him gasping for breath in dying, she clings to him and screams aloud, while behind her the enemy beat her back and shoulders with their spears: then she is led into captivity to endure a life of toil and suffering, her cheeks wasted pitifully with grief. He hid the falling tears from all except Alcinous, who, aware because he sat by him, noticed all, and heard him sighing deeply (Keening, 2004).

We must recognise, of course, that this scene is part of Homer's great epic poem that would itself have been sung as a song, and that was composed sometime between 700 and 800 B.C. We must acknowledge, therefore, that we are dealing with a story

²⁵ There is no need to set this tension up as an 'either/or' scenario. We can have our cake and eat it if my thesis is accepted that the source of cultural experience is in liminal passage. Since it involves the temporary suspension of the usual sociocultural limits to experience, liminal experience is inherently paradoxical and ambivalent. It is always on the cusp, as it were, of turning progressive, open, communal, fluid and playful and, on the other hand, turning fascistic, closed, intolerant and conservative. Fascism emerges in liminal times, and its nemesis, communism, shifts all too easily into totalitarianism. Religions too are characterised by this tension, and Bourdieu uncritically inherits from Durkheim a focus on just the authoritative, canonical aspects (sacralised as 'social facts'). Bergson improves on Durkheim, but he too misrecognises the importance of liminality and posits instead two implausibly distinct sources of morality and religion (see Stenner, 2018). Ultimately this issue is a question of ethics. As Whitehead (1933) suggests, a 'Barbarian speaks in terms of power. He dreams of the superman with the mailed fist. He may plaster his lust with sentimental morality of Carlyle's type. But ultimately his final good is conceived as one will imposing itself upon other wills'.

told in the medium of epic poetry, and indeed that this particular scene takes the form of a song within a song. Everything here has the doubled quality of ‘worlds within worlds’ that I noted earlier. It is an elementary artistic fallacy to treat such creations as if they were real (Vygotsky, 1971), but let me transgress and take the content of the song for now at face value. Homer shows us Odysseus’ emotional response to Demodocus’ song. His heart melts and he weeps. Odysseus is *going through* a profound emotional experience, and yet that experience is occasioned by and mediated by the song. His ‘here-and-now’ body, and those around him, meanwhile, remains comfortably seated in a banqueting hall, surrounded by hospitality, although he covers his head with a cloak to conceal his tears. Odysseus, in my terms, is having a *devised liminal experience*. His tears are occasioned and mediated by the cultural ‘technology’, as it were, of the song. But not only that, in occasioning this experience, the song *qua* liminal affective technology allows Odysseus to connect in a new way with important things that have really happened to him in his own life. In this case, the song takes him out of the here-and-now banquet and connects his present with the past of his real (but now passed) experience. It connects him with the heroic but traumatic victory over the Trojans, followed immediately by the tragic dispersal and loss of his comrades, and a 7-year rupture in the fabric of his own life.

I selected this example as a very special case because Demodocus’ song is not any song, but a song that is about *Odysseus’* own adventures. This means that for Odysseus (the character in Homer’s song) the connection that Demodocus’ song makes with his life cannot be missed, since he is both audience and subject matter. But without this hyper-personalised ingredient of doubling, the same contrast between devised cultural experience and spontaneous actual life is used in Homer’s song when Odysseus’ weeping is compared with how ‘a woman weeps who throws herself on her husband’s dying body’. So, I have used this example to distinguish and contrast two intimately related kinds of liminal experience. On the one hand, the cultural experience had by Odysseus in Alcinous’ palace can be described as a *devised* liminal experience because it involves a transition that is enacted virtually and mediated by the cultural form of song. On the other hand, his experience of battle in Troy, of victory followed by disaster, shipwreck and capture (to the extent that we take the liberty of considering these real-life experiences that actually happened to him), can be described as spontaneous liminal experiences involving world-rupture and subsequent transformation. Devised liminal experience is something that happens which we do to ourselves in an environment of rarefied space/time that is abstracted from daily practical reality. Spontaneous liminal experience, by contrast, is embedded in practical reality and follows from what happens to us despite our actions, in the irreversible time of ‘outrageous fortune’. Both forms of liminality presuppose a contrast with forms of experience and activity which are

sufficiently stable and predictable to be taken for granted as a shared canonical world of mundane practical reality.²⁶

This distinction between devised and spontaneous liminality is not intended as some sort of categorical absolute, but—on the contrary—I find it useful because of the contrasts and connections that are opened up by means of it. Indeed, it could be said that liminal affective technologies like song, theatre and ritual actually function at the *turning point* between the spontaneous and the devised (Stenner, in press 2019). Just as Odysseus was able finally to imaginatively connect—by means of the song—to experiences he had really lived through, so the devised liminal experiences we self-generate in a safe space can help us to navigate and manage our experiences of spontaneous liminality. These spontaneous experiences cry out, as it were, for imaginative symbolic expression, precisely because they challenge and transform the taken-for-granted order of daily life. Demodocus' song supplied Odysseus with a new form of symbolism with which to drag, as it were, his liminal experience across a threshold of semantic availability. Homer has his own way of putting this when he sings that it is the work of the gods to spin 'threads of death through the lives of mortal men' [spontaneous liminal experience], and 'all to make a song for those to come' [devised liminal experience].

Liminal Affective Technologies as Cultural and Symbolic Media for Transition: The Aesthetic, the Sacred and the Ludic as Varieties of Liminal Experiencing

What I call liminal affective technologies are the various means that have been devised for nourishing and amplifying imaginative and emotional processes and linking these cultural experiences to actual processes of psychosocial transformation. We noted their peculiar 'doubled' nature as 'worlds within worlds' when

²⁶ Crudely, canonical or pivotal experience forms a process that is more or less regular and predictable. It is not stationary, but it is stable because—from experience to experience, event to event, communication to communication—it circles in a centripetal way around clear and familiar forms, positions and activities. It endures because it recurs. If pivotal experience implies a centripetal dynamic which creates the sense of a centred subjective world, then liminal experience pushes centrifugally towards the edge of that world, opening to an unknown space beyond its limit. If pivotal experience constitutes the recognisable 'stations' or 'positions' in society, then liminal experience concerns those relations that escape (and perhaps transform) the stations, and it concerns the transitions between positions (see Stenner, 2015). Since every *station* available for occupation within a society (complete with social identities stabilised with relevant status, rights and duties) presupposes a complex social *relation* (soaked in power), so for every normative *position* there is a liminal *transition*. Liminal occasions, in short, are significant *turning points* in the lives of individuals and collectives (Stenner, 2020). These turning points or transitions are occasions during which psychosocial forms of process are suspended or interrupted, or collapse, or go through some sort of transformation or metamorphosis (i.e. allowing some form of *becoming* to take place).

discussing ‘This Is Not a Book’. Song, poetry and literature, for example, can be considered to be liminal affective technologies when they are implicated, in however modest a way, in transforming the worlds of those engaging with them. The examples that we have been considering so far share the feature of being cultural products that we would call ‘art’ or ‘artistic’. The cultural experiencing that they help to create can be called *aesthetic* experiencing. When that aesthetic experiencing is connected to psychosocial transformation or passage it can be considered as a distinctively aesthetic mode of liminal experience. In fact, in considering ‘This Is Not a Book’ and ‘The Odyssey’ as liminal affective technologies, we have been limiting ourselves to cultural technologies which are closely related to writing, and are thus historically circumscribed. Although the Odyssey was a sung poem (*Epos* was the Ancient Greek word for song), Homer is thought to have lived sometime between 700 and 800 BC, which corresponds to the time during which the Greek alphabet was first invented (through a modification of Phoenician letters). Some (Wade-Gery, 1952; Powell, 1991) even suggest that the Greek alphabet was invented specifically to record Homeric poetry. Either way, it seems likely that Homeric poetry is situated in an important (between worlds) zone of transition between an oral culture and a culture profoundly influenced by writing.²⁷

As Herodotus implied, it was the epic poets who gave the gods of the Ancient Greek pantheon their now familiar names, shapes and roles (see Harrison, 1908; Stenner, 2017a). As well as affording new aesthetic techniques, the broader societal transition ushered in by the technology of writing—alongside many other factors—was also implicated in a major change to religion that swept across many civilisations during what Jaspers called the ‘axial age’ (see Eisenstadt, 1982, 1985), including the emergence of the great new book-centred (logocentric [Derrida, 1998]) religions like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Many of these religions developed cultural forms that can also be considered as liminal affective technologies, and the cultural experiencing that these help to create can be called *sacred* experiencing as distinct from aesthetic experiencing. In fact, as we will discuss in more detail below, the concept of the liminal originally sprang from a consideration of ritual as a ‘technology’ for sacred experiencing amongst predominantly preliterate and so-called semi-civilised societies. It is important to keep in mind that ritual as a cultural medium or technology long predated writing and is probably as old as humanity (perhaps even serving as a primary technology mediating the phylogenetic transition of ‘hominisation’ [see Girard, 1987]). Ritual as a liminal affective technology of the sacred also, therefore, long

²⁷ And hence a culture that could spawn a Socrates/Plato double act (i.e. a written philosophy which articulates a spoken wisdom) and could simultaneously invent theatre, which is also based on the liminal condition of a written script acted by speaking players (the author/actor polarity) which in turn affords an actor/observer polarity (a polarity materially instantiated in a stage for the actors and a theatron for the observers or spectators). In a relatively short space of time, Ancient Greece thus saw the emergence of three remarkable new, and fundamentally interrelated, cultural technologies that would have enormous impact on the subsequent emergence of European modernity: philosophy, theatre and, of course, democracy.

predated other cultural technologies like the theatre,²⁸ the novel and the fine arts. Nevertheless, each of these later cultural technologies can be considered to be present within ritual in seed-like form, awaiting their moment of release and individuation, as it were.²⁹ In this sense, considered in relation to the historical sociogenesis of cultural experience, ritual can be considered the matrix of those technologies that are specialised in generating devised liminal experience. Although I will not deal with it here, a third type of liminal experience is the *ludic* variety which is produced through play, games and sports when they function as liminal affective technologies. These too were (and often still are) a core part of the ritualistic repertoire and, like the arts, are often tightly enmeshed within the sensibility of the sacred, which clings to them even today (see Stenner, 2017b).³⁰

Ritual shares with art and with play the curious quality of being a 'world within a world' with a 'reflexive' form (of re-entry) that has doubled back on itself.³¹ Like

²⁸ I prefer to use the terminology 'devised' and 'spontaneous' rather than follow Turner (e.g. 1982) in distinguishing 'staged' from 'unstaged' liminal experience. We must be careful about the use of the word 'stage' because a stage is in fact a component of theatre, which is another quite specific type of liminal affective technology for devising another kind of cultural experience. Rituals existed long before theatre was invented in Ancient Greece, and hence long before people had the concept of a stage that separates a group of actors from a group of spectators gathered at an observable distance from the stage. The stage, as a component in a technology, affords a 'distance' which expresses a new difference between actor and spectator and hence a new *aesthetic* mode of reflection upon experience that, in a ritual context, is typically *sacred* in nature. In fact, a premise of many rituals is that *all must participate* and that those participating do not view themselves as lightly 'performing' for the pleasure of others, but as truly encountering and exposing themselves to the divine, in whatever manifestation it takes. Participants in a ritual are not stage actors, and to suggest so is effectively to profanate the sacred. It is paradoxical that Mead got taken up into dramaturgical sociology since he was always very careful about his use of words like 'role': 'the latter phrase is a little unfortunate because it suggests an actor's attitude which is actually more sophisticated than that which is involved in our own experience' (Mead, 2015: 161).

²⁹ For a series of books addressing the liminal dimensions of theatre and the novel from a historical and sociological perspective, see Szakolczai (2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

³⁰ This argument is developed more fully in Stenner (2017b). For a discussion of the liminal aspects of games and gambling see Thomassen (2014). The link between games, playing and culture was systematically addressed by Johan Huizinga (1938) who is considered the father of cultural history. Mead (2015) also considered play and then games to be crucial for the emergence of self during childhood and this insight is embedded in Lev Vygotsky's famous notion of the zone of proximal development. The link between sacred liminal experience and ludic liminal experience is clear in the history of the Olympic Games, but also in so-called games of chance (Caillois, 2001), the outcomes of which often serve as portals through which the divine will can be discerned by one suitably trained.

³¹ The notion of re-entry was formalised in Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form* (1969) and is drawn upon heavily by Luhmann (e.g. 1995). It appears with a particular application in Mead in the guise of 'reflexiveness' or 'the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself' and is used to explain how mind arises in the social process 'only when that process as a whole enters into ... the experience of any one of the given individuals involved in that process' (Mead, 2015: 134). Via 'mind', in other words, society re-enters itself. In Whitehead (1929) it is built into his theory of feelings whereby feeling feels feeling only to be felt in turn by another feeling in a ladder of increasing complexity of 'actual occasion'. Variants can be found in many other thinkers, notably

a song, or a novel or a game, a ritual is a self-created cultural form which we use on ourselves in order to produce distinct emotional experiences through the evocation of a double which is nevertheless simultaneously bracketed out or truncated or abbreviated.³² In fact, as I just noted, rituals often deploy elements of song, dance, painting, sculpture, mask wearing and so on in order to artfully summon and orchestrate unusual and intense experiences. In Ancient Greek, the word for ritual was *dromenon* meaning a ‘thing done’, but the ‘thing done’ in ritual is curiously disconnected from what might normally be considered as ordinary practical (canonical/pivotal) activity. Unlike the building of a house or the tilling of a field or the making of a pair of boots, these rites lack direct relevance to the preservation of the physical organism of those acting, and sometimes may even put it at risk. In the famous *Gol* ritual practiced on Pentecost Island, young initiates dive head first from a specially constructed tall tower in a flight that would kill them but for vines tied to their ankles. Young men from the Satere-Mawe people of Amazonian Brazil, to give another example, participate in an initiation ritual that involves dancing whilst wearing a pair of carefully constructed gloves infested with bullet ants. It is clear

including Bartlett’s (1932) notion of ‘turning around upon an experience’ (see Brown & Reavey, 2015).

³² Ritual, like play, operates with actions which are ‘abbreviated’ or ‘truncated’ in the sense that, compared to what is called ‘reality’, they are not followed through to their full completion. But they acquire a new completion within the abbreviated space of ritual or play. This allows for their ‘canalisation’, as it were, into ‘gestures’ which can become ‘signs’ which—if you will excuse the leap—can ultimately form the medium for thinking (see Mead, 2015 on the genesis of the significant symbol from the gesture). With origins in Bergson (1998), this notion of ‘canalisation’ serves as a corrective to the container metaphor of inside/outside which dominates accounts of spatiality and of psychology. Canalisation gives a positive content to limitation since it suggests focus and selectivity and hence a deepening of possibilities inherent in a less focussed totality. A living organism, for example, is a canalisation of the concrete totality in which it is embedded and from which it abstracts itself, and that canalisation creates possibilities of activity which could never occur in an assemblage of non-living events such as a pebble. Life should not be thought of as existing ‘in’ its non-living environment but as being an abstraction *from* that environment. Likewise, consciousness is a limitation and hence an abstraction from concrete totality, and yet through canalising the possibilities of that totality in ways peculiar to itself, consciousness must be seen as a positive addition to that totality, even if it ultimately sustains itself only in relation to its unconscious background. Consciousness, from this perspective, would not be ‘in’ the brain, but an abstraction *from* the brain (made possible by a conversation of gestures). It is no less real and no less active for being an abstracted limitation, rather its enhanced canalisation provides possibilities that are in many respects deepened, heightened and intensified compared to those faced by an organism incapable of consciousness. The same trope of canalisation would apply to language with respect to consciousness (as Brown & Stenner, 2009, show, language deals just with language and forms its own canalised system). In this way of thinking, what counts as a system or organism and what counts as its environment are inherently relative and contingent upon activities of canalisation. The human body *as* complex canalisation, for example, is ultimately part of, in the sense of continuous with, the larger field of nature. Our bodies are continually giving up and taking in molecules from what we call its ‘environment’, and what enables us to speak of an environment is the fact that what we call our body is a highly coordinated functioning of its billions of molecules. Ultimately, however, a clear-cut distinction is not possible, and it must be acknowledged that our bodies are in this sense merely one highly significant *region* of a total structure (Whitehead, 1929).

that these self-generated ‘devised’ experiences are precisely haunted by their evocation of a spontaneous or ‘raw’ experience that would be considerably more dangerous were it not canalised into the relative safety of a contained and regularly repeated devised experience of ritual (and thus distinguished as liminal from canonical experience). These rituals generate intense and emotionally heightened experiences which are ‘at the limit’, as it were, of our ordinary workaday experience. But though they are intense and dangerous, these experiences nevertheless unfold in a curious *world within a world* that is cut loose and held in suspense from ordinary spatio-temporal reality, much like the play of a child, or that other type of play that is performed in a theatre (see Turner, 1982). As we shall see in the next section, with rites of passage, the link between these ‘worlds within worlds’ and the status of being between worlds (i.e. their status in creating a *world within and between worlds*) was made patent by the father of the liminal: Arnold van Gennep.

This Is Not ... a Space: A *Wavering* between Worlds Experienced as the Liminal Sacred

Liminality is much discussed these days, but nearly always it is assumed to be a spatial phenomenon.³³ The phrase ‘liminal space’ is very commonly used, as if liminality were reducible to the space of a border, or a membrane, or a door, or a crossroads, or a meeting point, or an airport, or a beach or some other place or structure at the edge or ‘in between’ structures. The assumption is that this space is somehow itself ‘liminal’. This is all very well, and—when skilfully handled—there can be much value in the concept of liminal space (certainly the word derives from the Ancient Roman *limes* which were fortifications marking the outer limits of the empire), but it remains a fortunate simplification. When liminality is grasped as liminal space it has already been contained, ordered, tamed and simplified, and attention is directed away from other liminal phenomena (not just ‘temporal’ *process* but also liminal personae, liminal (quasi)objects, liminal sociality or ‘communitas’, liminal affectivity, liminal technologies, etc.).

There is nothing inherently liminal about thresholds, borders, frontiers, margins and so forth. What may or may not be described as liminal must include the

³³ This taming by spatialisation occurs in the very long process of species evolution, the long process of cultural evolution and the less long process of individual development, all intertwined. It was Bergson who most comprehensively theorised the spatialisation of phenomena that are inherently temporal. Out of the flux of a throbbing world in constant process of becoming, the human intellect extracts limited segments which show up according to the logic of solid bodies and which permit a degree of purchase on a more predictable future. Partly this is a matter of learning and individual development, but also we inherit spatialising tendencies as part of our animality. Since the human creature evolved from other mammals it can be inferred, to talk in Kantian terms for a moment, that categories that are a priori for any given individual person are a posteriori for the species. But our concepts of liminal space owe most to the fortunate simplifications attributable to cultural expressions, for example the notion of the sacred.

experience of passage or movement across such a threshold, and its management. Van Gennep, who coined the term 'liminal', makes this clear himself when he points out (he was writing in 1909, see p. 15) that except 'in the few countries where a passport is still in use, a person in these days may pass freely from one civilised region to another'. In the UK today we can even wander in and out of churches and graveyards chatting and taking photos without raising an eyebrow or skipping a heartbeat. But for most of human history, such crossings were accompanied by various formalities, including magico-religious rites, and indeed no activity could be completely free of the sacred. In his chapter entitled 'the territorial passage' Van Gennep cites Trumbull's account of General Grant's visit to Egypt during the late 1870s. Upon entering Asyut territory General Grant was obliged to step over a flow of blood between the severed head of bull that had just been sacrificed and the rest of its still quivering body. One can imagine General Grant wavering for a moment before stepping across the flow of this bloody Rubicon. As Van Gennep (1909, p. 15) states:

... it is this magico-religious aspect of crossing frontiers that interests us. To see it operating fully, we must seek out types of civilization in which the magico-religious encompassed what today is within the secular domain.

But when addressing this magico-religious aspect of liminality, it is unwise to repeat the modern gesture of simply dismissing it as arbitrary, pre-scientific superstition. Amongst other things, the magico-religious aspect of liminality is a specific (and often flawed) way of marking the real *importance* of a passage, crossing or transition, and of facilitating that passage. The sacred, as I have suggested, is one specific, widely important and historically ancient modality of 'cultural experience'. Registering and managing the *importance* of passage become relevant whenever 'the transition from one state to another is a serious step which could not be accomplished without special precautions'³⁴ (Van Gennep, 1909, p. 184). A 'space' or a threshold, in sum, is not itself 'liminal'. It is meaningless without some concept of passage, and since passage takes time, it is unthinkable without what we inadequately call 'time'. If, as I have already noted, liminality concerns a 'world within and between worlds' (i.e. the medium of a world within a world that finds its use between worlds), then we must recognise the temporal present of a world which is no longer what it was and not yet what it will be. Since, in such circumstances, the canonical normative present of the immediate past is now suspended, and that of the immediate future is not yet in place, liminal experience concerns a curious 'no-where' zone in which the 'now-here' is, as it were, a relatively contingent, formless, subjunctive experience of *potentiality*. As Van Gennep puts it, a person may find themselves:

³⁴ Relevant to the tight kinship of sacred and aesthetic forms of cultural experience is Van Gennep's (1909, p. 1) statement that rites of passage are 'derived from a particular feeling and a particular frame of mind'. It is that embodied and embedded feeling that I am trying to identify with the concept of liminality as experience that I propose is at the heart of sacred, aesthetic and ludic forms of cultural experience.

'in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation which I have designated a transition' (Van Gennep, 1909, p. 18).

Van Gennep's book *The Rites of Passage* was devoted to the problem of demonstrating that this idea of transition is embodied and expressed in all of the ceremonies which accompany passage from one position, state, station or 'world' to another.³⁵ The book is a *tour de force* that assembles practically all of the then available anthropological and historical data in multiple languages (see Thomassen, 2014). Van Gennep's contribution was twofold. First, it was to recognise the extent to which the thresholds and transitions at the joints between worlds are the occasion for the ceremonials he called rites of passage. Second, it was to recognise that these ceremonials have a distinctive pattern suited to this fact. What he identified as the 'pattern of the rites of passage' is a serially ordered combination of three kinds of ritual ceremony, found all over the world and across history: rites of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation. Van Gennep never used the word liminality, but he used the word liminal as another name for transition rites. Together, the rites of passage ceremonialise and symbolise an experience of 'going through' whereby people leave one world behind as they enter a new one. This business of leaving and entering worlds is not simply to move across space from place A to place B, as if 'world' were a simple external reality, but the process of (a system/environment unity) really *becoming* something different.³⁶

Rites of separation might typically include an act of cutting or of veiling. The cutting of a widow's hair or a circumcision as part of an initiation rite, for example, symbolises a separation from married status in the first case, or from the state of childhood in the second. The story of General Grant provides another example in which leaving a territory is marked by the symbolic separation of a bull's head from its body. Rites of incorporation, by contrast, might include an act of binding, as when a married couple literally 'tie the knot' by binding their wrists together, or when a funeral ends with a shared feast. The liminal or transition rites sit between preliminary separation from the old and postliminal incorporation into the new. They often symbolise movement as when a married couple are carried across a threshold or the body of the deceased is borne aloft by pall-bearers or a new leader is raised upon a throne or an initiate is required to go through a physical challenge. In so doing, liminal rites also typically isolate and maintain the passengers (those passing) in an ambiguous, ambivalent and paradoxical 'intermediate position', held, as it were, somewhere 'between heaven and earth' or 'suspended between life and true death' or belonging neither 'to the sacred nor to the profane world; or, if he does belong to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other' (Van Gennep, 1909, p. 186).

³⁵ 'Life itself means to separate and be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross: the thresholds of summer and winter, of a season or a year, of a month or night; the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity and old age; the threshold of death and that of the afterlife – for those who believe in it' (Van Gennep, 1909: 189-90).

³⁶ This becoming may be reversible or irreversible.

We have noted that the rituals of the rites of passage ceremonialise and symbolise an experience of 'going through' whereby people leave one world behind as they enter a new one. But why should such passages necessitate all this ceremonial fuss? Why is passage so important? What is at stake in this mysterious 'becoming'? I have stressed that Van Gennep's proximal use of the word liminal is to refer to a type of ritual (the middle phase of a rite of passage). In introducing his book, for instance, he writes that 'I have tried to assemble here all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another' (p. 10).³⁷ Note here, however, that Van Gennep implies the idea of a passage or a transition as something more than a rite, indeed as something that the rite 'accompanies'. Indeed, if a ritual is a devised thing, a cultural thing done, a *dromenon*, then, as I have stressed, it is a thing enacted just at those turning points, thresholds, transitions and ruptures in the physico-bio-psycho-social fabric where actual transformations are happening. They are enacted just there where babies are born, where people die, where puberty ensues, where women fall pregnant, where people are appointed to new roles, where celestial movements produce the natural movements of the seasons, months and days, etc. According to Van Gennep (1909, p. 13), the 'function' of rites of passage is to 'reduce the harmful effects' of disturbances to the life of society caused by actual changes of condition amongst its members.

Approaching this issue as a social psychologist informed by Mead, Cassirer, Schütz, Langer, Vygotsky and other thinkers of symbolically mediated process, it should be clear that the 'disturbances' implied by Van Gennep are related to the fact that the various canonical or pivotal worlds of daily life that have been collectively constructed by human beings are just that: enormously complex ongoingly co-enacted symbolically mediated conflict-ridden historically contingent material-semiotic physico-bio-psycho-socio-cultural *constructions* (that must be recurrently re-constructed). That we may take the 'natural attitude' towards these social systems does not mean that their reality is in fact simple and 'out-there', or that we can easily create them, change them and move between them smoothly at will. Furthermore, to be part of (participant within) a human world of ordinary daily life or indeed of any sphere of more or less coordinated human social activity is to already be what Mead calls a 'self'. The self is not a given but a complex emergent involving a highly sophisticated matrix of mutual recognition. If to be a self is to 'call the recognition of others and the recognition of ourselves in the others' then we

³⁷ Unfortunately Van Gennep never elaborates theoretically on what he means by 'world'. As just seen, he sometimes uses more specific words like 'situation' or 'social world', and sometimes more general terms like 'cosmic world' or 'universe'. Nevertheless his notion of 'world' implies a coherent unity that is distinct from another world with coherent unity. One age group such as a group of children may have a coherent unity that is different from an age group of young adults, for example. An event of transition from the world of children to the world of adults would be accompanied by rites of passage. Or the world of the married may have a coherent unity that is different from that of the unmarried, and passage between them will again be ritualised: 'For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined' (Van Gennep, 1909: 3).

cannot ‘realise ourselves except in so far as we can recognise the other in his relationship to us’ (194). Without going into the basics of Mead’s theory, this matrix of mutual recognition is the basis for how human beings can coordinate in order to participate in the shared social acts that make up the ongoing practical reality of any social order (of any field, sphere, circle, world or universe, of any network, system or nexus).

In short, because social forms of process are tightly coupled with the subjectivities of the social actors who must ongoingly enact them in a coordinated fashion, any transition in the social process (e.g. between distinct social systems or regions therein) requires a corresponding shift in the subjectivities of all involved. Without losing some sense of continuity, those in transition face a past—including habits proper to the habitat of a now redundant flow of practices—from which their subjectivity must extricate itself, while facing a future they have not yet learned to inhabit and are not yet ‘invested’ in: ‘the past exerts its inertia just at the moment when the future challenges our adaptability’ (Greco & Stenner, 2017: 160, see also Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017). We cannot realise ourselves in a world that is not yet, nor in a world that is no longer, but—carefully managed—we can draw much else from the well of that experience of potentialisation (Andersen & Stenner, 2020). Liminal occasions are occasions in which the structural coupling of psyche and social must, to some extent, decouple in order to recouple such that a new self can emerge and be recognised by others. The liminal media of transition facilitate this process.

The rites of passage are humanity’s primary collective solution to this problem. Taken together, they provide a symbolic medium for transition and its management. These cultural media are enacted, as we have seen, at the ‘joints’ or significant junctures of the social fabric, and they are typically overseen by specialists (masters or mistresses of ceremony) with experience at guiding people through the ritual process. But if their function is to reduce the ‘harmful effects’ inevitably at play at such junctures, then it is also to *induce* a certain experience of transformative disturbance in the first place. This confluence of *devised* liminal experience (which we do to ourselves in a virtual or as it were *suspended* state of reality provided by a liminal affective technology) with *spontaneous*³⁸ liminal experience (which *happens to us*) is nowhere more starkly exhibited than in the juxtaposition of real birth and death with the countless symbolic births, deaths and resurrections of sacred and aesthetic cultural experience. ‘The transition from one state to another’, Van Gennep (1909, p. 183) observes, ‘is literally equivalent to giving up the old life and “turning over a new leaf”’.

³⁸ Figures like Karl Jaspers, Eisenstadt and Szukalski refer to social and individual situations of crisis and radical change as *liminal situations*. These are not cultural performances but, to use a crude distinction, things that happen ‘for real’. Such events as military conflicts, political and economic meltdowns and natural disasters can mark a turning point between a previous world whose normative structures have more or less collapsed and a new world yet to be constructed. Spontaneous liminal experiences involve transformation *of* a world.

This Is Not ... me: Winnicott and the Initial Emergence of a World and a Self

Cultural experience has not found its true place in the theory used by analysts in their work and in their thinking (Winnicott, 1971/2005: xv).

We now turn to D. W. Winnicott as a *thinker of liminality* (even if he did not use the 'I'-word). I will examine in some depth his essay from 1967 entitled 'the location of cultural experience', but I also draw upon the texts that surround it, especially the core essay on transitional objects and phenomena (Winnicott, 2005). Apart from cultural experience, these essays deal with the becoming of the very distinction between self and world and self and other, and confront us with the need to explain the emergence of the self, rather than to 'start' with it.³⁹ I find the title of his essay disarming in its simplicity. In asking after the location of cultural experience, Winnicott is asking something like: Where does cultural experience happen? Winnicott's answer is that cultural experience happens in the 'play area'. But this does not really answer the question concerning location; it simply swaps one object (cultural experience) with another (play) and posits an admittedly very interesting commonality between them. Whatever cultural experience is, Winnicott finds its origins in play, such that both have the same location.

But where is the play area? Here, Winnicott precisely does not mean a simple location in what we call external physical space, as when we say: the play area is in the park, just in front of the café, or cultural experience is to be had in the art gallery at the top of Trafalgar Square. But neither does he mean a location in what we call inner psychic reality, as when we say: she is in a world of her own, off with the fairies. So, if play, and by extension, cultural experience, is neither inside nor outside, where is it? This distinction between outer and inner reality is not sufficient and its achievement (however precarious) must be explained rather than taken for granted.⁴⁰ Furthermore, if we call outer reality 'location 1' and inner reality 'location 2', we need to be aware that these exist in a relation of mutual presupposition such that the achievement of the first space is simultaneously the achievement of the second. To put it differently, the establishment during infancy of what Winnicott calls a 'unit self' (or sometimes an *objective subject*) which can be its own inner world is simultaneously the creation of the object or objectivity in the sense of finding externality itself.⁴¹ But this affirmation of the construction of externality is far from being an

³⁹ Winnicott shows that the self is itself the *effect* of experience, and hence—although this is not Winnicott's term—is better named a *superject* than a *subject* (see Whitehead, 1929). Mead (2015: 182) too is keenly aware of this issue: 'The self is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, but it is, so to speak, an eddy in the social current and so still a part of the current'. Mead is also concerned with the simultaneous emergence of objects, subjects and sense of time.

⁴⁰ Using my own terminology introduced above, this would be the achievement of pivotal experience.

⁴¹ To continue our 'world' theme, we could adapt Heidegger and express this achieved unity with the phrase being-in-a-world. I modify Heidegger's phrase being-in-the-world precisely to empha-

idealistic denial of objective existence: it is a matter of the acceptance of the independent existence of the object, that is to say, 'its property of having been there all the time' (2005: 119).

This type of theorising requires, of course, that we accept the degree of perspectivism that is required for us to take the perspective of the infant (and in turn to recognise that the infant must likewise come to take a perspective to become a self). A rigorous perspectivism is essential to any adequate grasp of these issues, and eventually perspectives can be integrated into a more or less stable social structure of mutual recognition (the basis of a shared world, and hence of 'pivotal' experience). From the perspective of the adult observer who is already a 'unit self' (who is already living consciously in a world whose circle is bigger than that of the infant), it is obvious that the object was there all the time, and indeed that, *qua* object, it is something different from a person. But Winnicott is inviting us to take the perspective of the infant and to have the imagination to witness, as if through their experience, something astonishing: the emergence of the first possession. To experience something as an external object is to have gone through an experience that might be called, for simplicity's sake, a 'this is not me' experience (see Stenner, 2017a, Chap. 3). Readers familiar with Winnicott will know that he calls this first not-me *possession* a 'transitional object'. Furthermore, he considers the employment of a transitional object to be the first experience of play and the child's first use of a symbol. Winnicott is clearly packing a lot into this curious 'place' where both cultural experience and play are located, and where both are traceable to phenomena of transition (and hence to our theme of liminality).

Having identified the 'inner' and 'outer' perspectives as achievements, Winnicott emphasises the need to expand our usual statement of human nature (which he perceives to be restricted to an ontology that posits only the existence of an inner world and an outer world) and to insist upon the reality of a crucial 'third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore' (Winnicott, 2005: 3). As he puts it, 'For a long time my mind remained in a state of not-knowing, this state crystallising into my formulation of the transitional phenomena' (2005:129). Much like Mead who, as we saw, insisted upon the reality of the 'betwixt and between' (of emergent sociability), Winnicott posits and affirms the reality of 'third area' which is 'an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott, 2005, p. 3). This fits neatly the paradoxical formula by which something is liminal if it is *both* both/and *and* neither/nor (Kofoed & Stenner, 2017). Winnicott's intermediate area of experiencing is both internal and external, since it contains the potential for both (Winnicott [2005: 72] also calls this area a 'potential space'), whilst at the

sise the contingency that emerges when it is affirmed that what we call the environment is always the creation of a system that has come into being by having differentiated itself from its surroundings.

same time it is neither internal nor external, since it pertains to a phase before this distinction has arisen in experience.⁴²

Winnicott is examining a quite specific situation in which a qualitative and irreversible *change* in experiencing is occurring, a change that leads to an increased complexity of experiencing, a complexity that gives rise in experience to an inner as distinct from an outer and to a me as distinct from a you. He is talking about the infant's *first* use of a symbol, their *first* experience of an object and their *first* experience of play, and each of these related firsts (necessarily temporal) participates in *expanding the world* of the infant beyond its prior limits. More concretely, he is interested in a phase in the life of an infant (usually between 4 and 12 months old) during which some entity—the corner of a blanket, a bundle of wool or even a mannerism—acquires vital importance such that they become anxious, or distressed, or cannot sleep without this ‘transitional object’. If the transitional object is the infant's first possession then this is because this first possession is *both* a material object—a bit of cloth perhaps—and a symbol. If it becomes a symbol, this is because it is a ‘subjective object’ and hence it is *both* a part of the infant *and* an external object (it can oscillate between the two), or rather it is *neither* a part of the infant *nor* the kind of fully external object experience-able by a preformed objective subject.⁴³ It would therefore be wrong to assert that it symbolises, say, the infant's own thumb or the mother's breast. Equally important to its symbolism (for the infant) is that *it is not* the thumb or the breast. It is *indeterminate* in the sense that its distinctive character is its ‘formlessness’ (47). It is by reason of this formlessness that the transitional object can serve as a ‘symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother)’ (130).⁴⁴ Only something (relatively) formless can become a medium which

⁴²And yet, understood in this way, it seems clear that *each and every* experience must be, to some degree, a liminal experience, since, by definition, anything we call an experience involves the relation of a subject or system to an object or environment, and neither can be separated. There is no experience to which subject and object do not both contribute. This is not a trivial problem, and in some sense the universality of liminality must be granted. Each and every experience is a unity of data (the given) and creata (what is made of it), and hence each involves a little leap of faith.

⁴³A common misconception is that the transitional object is a teddy bear or some toy. Of course it may be, but this can miss the significance of the object being *indeterminate* (i.e. ‘formless’) and that this must be so *for the infant*. It is not the object, but its use *by a concrete infant* that matters. The corner of a blanket, or a bundle of wool, affords being indeterminate (a formless medium) as to whether it is internal to the infant (like their thumb) or an external object (like a teddy bear). The corner of a blanket can be handy like a thumb (it might find its way into the mouth like, or along with, a thumb) whilst also holding the potential to be an uncannily alien externality. This indeterminate, formless character is what affords or lures the infant to their first ‘not-me’ experience.

⁴⁴Again, it is important to insist that if the transitional object symbolises the state of the union of baby and their primary carer, then it does so *for the baby*: it is the infant's perspective that matters here, and this perspective can only be imagined. Furthermore, we must always affirm the paradox whereby the transition object can symbolise this union *only to the extent that the union is first disrupted or ruptured*. Winnicott's intermediate zone is thus a ‘separation that is not a separation but a form of union’ (132).

'takes on' form.⁴⁵ As with any symbol, but perhaps more than most, the transitional object marks *importance*. But the importance it marks and captures for the infant is that of this *transition* through which distance, time and otherness are for the first time encountered and, as it were, managed.⁴⁶ Winnicott (5) writes, with winning simplicity, that it 'goes on being important'. It is the first possession, born necessarily of loss.

I return again to Winnicott's question: Where is this experience of the first symbol located? It is here that Winnicott first acknowledges that this location is not just a place in space, but that time is needed if we are to understand it. I have already stressed this temporal complexification in my use of the notion of transition as passage, which indicates this inseparability of space and time.⁴⁷ Winnicott (2005: 130) does the same when he describes this point as 'the place in space and time where and when the mother is in transition from being (in the baby's mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived'. The transitional object thus symbolises a paradoxical union: a primordial union now consigned to the past, but that continues to provide the backdrop for two now separate things, baby and primary caregiver. But what is crucial is that the object becomes this symbol '*at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness*' (130). This notion of a space-time of initiation might just as well be called a liminal *occasion*. A liminal occasion is not a space, nor a time, but a zone of confluence in which place, time, people and things form a unique concrescence in which a passage occurs. It is a world within and between worlds. This is schematised in Fig. 1:

⁴⁵ Fritz Heider's first publication from 1925 was on the media of perception and posited that things become perceptible to us only when 'printed' into a medium: How do certain things in the experienced world (acting as media) inform us about other things? We perceive the weather outside thanks to the light and the pane of glass, and we perceive the wind direction through the weather-vane (Heider 1958: 26). For Heider, a medium must be composed of multiple elements that are loosely coupled so that they can take on the form of something else. Luhmann (2000: 104) develops this into a medium/form distinction and points out that medium and form are not fixed: the more dirty a window becomes, the more it shows up as an object in its own right. A stone, for example, might be a form because of its tightly connected molecules, but a stone can also be a medium for painting on.

⁴⁶ Being on the cusp of management or handling or controlling matters here. As noted earlier with respect to 'This Is Not a Book', the transition object must easily oscillate between medium and form and hence play on the boundary between one thing and another (is it part of my body or something from outside?). Since the transition object is, for this reason, also something close, this indeterminacy includes the boundary between what we do to, or with, ourselves and what happens to us (a boundary that I have signalled as crucial to liminal experience). In this respect it is notable that both Winnicott and Mead fasten onto the unique feature of the human vocalisation as being something that we both produce ourselves and yet also hear (just as another would) as if from the outside. Humming or cooing to ourselves is thus indeterminate as to self/other and this quality can easily 'capture' us (see Pajaczkowska, 2008). For Mead, this gives the vocal gesture a crucial place in his theory of transition to significant symbol use amongst human beings.

⁴⁷ It cannot just happen in space, because a) it takes time and b) the timing has to be right. And it will not just happen in time unless the actual ingredients necessary for the occasion are there together. It happens either now-here, or no-where.

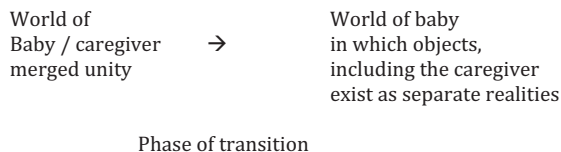


Fig. 1 Schematic representation of Winnicott's argument about transition

So the location of the first symbol, the place where play happens and, by extension, where cultural experience first happens and might, if we are fortunate, continue to happen, is not a place but a *passage*: it occurs during passage or perhaps it *is* passage. A passage, as I have stressed, is a phase of becoming during which a new world is emerging from an old world but has not yet consolidated into something pivotal and normative and so is as-yet in process of transition. The particular passage that Winnicott is circling around is of great importance and interest to psychology because it is the scene of what I would like to describe as a threefold emergence (or an emergence with three dimensions). There is, we might say, the emergence of space, the emergence of time and the emergence of intersubjective sociality.⁴⁸ All three dimensions or perspectives must necessarily arise together if they are to supply the existential coordinates for human (co)existence (Zittoun, 2006). All three are tied up with the emergence of symbolism that can be powerfully simplified or condensed in the guise of, or into the form of, the transition object (the first symbolic medium of transition):

- With respect to space, the transition object 'spatialises' (for the infant) in so far as it functions as something that can be both *here* and *there*. In other words, it functions as something teetering on the brink of existing as an externality located 'there', as that which is beyond me 'here'. It 'takes place'.
- With respect to time, the transition object 'temporalises' (or, better, *affords a possibility for the infant* to temporalise) in so far as it functions as something that can be both *here* (in the sense of *now*) and *gone* (no longer here). In other words, as something teetering on the cusp of existing in the past (of having existed) and perhaps of returning in the future (of coming back) to what can thenceforth be experienced as the now of a present. It 'takes time'.
- With respect to intersubjectivity, the transition object 'socialises' and 'en-selves' in so far as it functions as something that can be both *me* and *you*. In other words, as something teetering on the cusp of existing as a part of the infant's own body and as part of the body of the mother/caregiver, and indeed as an independent body recognisable in its own right as a 'you' beyond 'me', or a 'you' from which perspective 'I' can show up as a 'person' (an attribution which, as Heider pointed out, requires the notion of agency).

⁴⁸ And hence what Gillespie [2004] calls the 'architecture of intersubjectivity'.

The basic feature of a symbol is the liminal feature of fusing something observable or physical (which can serve as a concrete sensory medium) with what we call its *meaning* (Cassirer, 1922: 5; translated in Bayer, 2001: 15).⁴⁹ The etymology of the Greek word symbol literally means a fusing together to create wholeness, since it combines the prefix ‘syn’ (meaning together) with ‘bole’ (meaning a throwing or casting). If a piece of material favoured by a child becomes a symbol then this means that it is fused with a meaning *for* that child. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere, that meaning directly concerns the re-creation of (lost) wholeness since essentially what it ‘means’ is something like the integration of here and there, now and gone, self and other. As noted, if we are talking about a situation involving a breastfeeding mother/infant dyad, the transition object is precisely not just a symbol of the mother’s breast, but also of *not being* the mother’s breast and hence of mediating that self/other difference; of being something that *can be* present and then gone and then return; and of something that can be here and then there and then here again.

Enough is in place to propose that Winnicott is here dealing with what, from an ontogenetic perspective, is the first rite of passage. Seen in this way, it is not accidental that Winnicott uses the word *initiation* to describe the infant’s passage from a world that is thoroughly merged with the caregiver to a world in which they are (more) separate (*‘at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness’*). The bare conditions for something like a ‘rite’ are in place in two senses. First, a rite is a social matter, and we are indeed dealing here with a social matter and not merely with a process of individual maturation. I have stressed a perspectivism whereby when Winnicott says the ‘mother is in transition from being ... merged in with the infant’, he must add in brackets *‘(in the baby’s mind)’*. But, as much developmental psychology has shown, and as surely should go without saying, the caregiver is really there too within this passage, and has a rather crucial role and perspective. It could not happen without her (or them). Even if they are fused ‘in the baby’s mind’, the baby cannot do what it does without her choreographing, as it were, the experience of passage. Indeed, we should insist that it is not the infant alone that goes through this passage, but the infant and caregiver together. To use my terminology, the caregiver is responsible for *devising* or staging the infant’s passage though this originary liminal transformation.

Second, we have in embryonic form the ‘doubled’ character of a world within a world. Winnicott is at pains to emphasise that the passage can be blocked or troubled if the caregiver does not take a quite particular attitude towards the whole paradoxical business of this indeterminate transitional phenomenon. This attitude on the part of the caregiver—which is a constitutive part of the process of passage—is, for Winnicott, one of play and tolerance. The caregiver *plays along* with it in the sense

⁴⁹ It is notable that in a different context Cassirer proposed the emergence of symbolic forms as a kind of ‘third’ or ‘intermediary’ realm. Building upon von Uexküll’s notion of *umwelt* he described a ‘third link which may be described as the symbolic system, an intermediary world, a ‘Zwischenreich’, which stands between spirit and reality’ (Cassirer, 1930; translated in Schilpp, 1949: 874).

that ‘it is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated’ (2005: 3). Of this passage ‘we agree never to make the challenge to the baby: did you create this object, or did you find it conveniently lying around?’ (2005: 130). There is, between mother and infant, *play* with the sense of whether the object is something inner or outer, mine or yours, here or gone, *devised* or *spontaneous*, and this play licences a certain tolerance of its indeterminate, unsettled nature.

It is not just that the baby is *held*. Winnicott, for example, describes how a mother initially creates for their infant the *illusion* that her breast or bottle is part of the baby. She places the breast there and then just as it is desired, giving the baby the illusion of having magically created it and providing an experience of desire magically satisfied, as it were (a devised liminal experience). Once she has given sufficient opportunity for illusion, the task during weaning becomes one of gradual disillusionment, but during the transition the ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox at play in the situation are tolerated and even enjoyed. As with a mistress of ceremonies conducting an initiation ceremony, the caregiver balances two things. On the one hand, she helps to create a fluid and playful zone that is exempt from the reality principle that is operative beyond this zone (a zone in which any canonical reality is held in suspense), and to guide what happens within this unusual place beyond place and time beyond time. On the other hand, this magical world of illusion must not be so perfect and complete that it is impossible for any ‘reality’ to get through, as it were. If the growing child is to experience spontaneous liminality beyond the devised, and to integrate and synthesise the two into a viable self, the orchestration and staging of the process must, as it were, contain cracks. To be ‘good enough’, we might say, is precisely *not to be too good*. In short, the infant must be allowed the illusion that she creates what exists—that reality is her fabulation and her fabulation is reality. But also the *acceptance of the paradox*—that is proper to the occasioning of the liminal phase—must be gradually withdrawn if a unit self (with its objects and others) is to crystallise out on the ‘other side’ of the passage. The same paradox under different circumstances might be sheer madness.

As we noted with ‘This Is Not a Book’, behind or within this play, of course, is something deadly serious, since we are dealing after all with a baby coming to tolerate increasing distance from a caregiver who constitutes the vital core of their world, and on whom they fundamentally depend. We can well imagine that threats to the continuity of the nascent ‘ego structure’ (the inner reality that affords an outer reality and an attribution of personhood) in process of formation might be experienced, under certain circumstances, as what Winnicott calls ‘unthinkable anxiety’ (2005: 131). The play that Winnicott describes is for this reason both affectively charged and thoroughly ambivalent in an affective sense, being capable of volatile fluctuations from the heights of pure joy to the depths of sheer terror (see Stenner & Moreno, 2013, and Greco & Stenner, 2017, on the ambivalence of ‘liminal affectivity’). The object/symbol that is the transitional object can be considered in this light, not just as a key tool, device or prop in the shared management of this volatile, paradoxical and ambivalent liminal passage of psychosocial birth, but as an *Ur* cultural

product sharing a direct genealogical link through teddy bears and footballs to artworks via the sacred objects of religious ritual. These too are quasi-objects (Serres, 1982) which, when appropriately handled, serve to facilitate or occasion liminal experiences of passage. The transition object is a liminal entity. It is the first *world within a world* and, as such, it functions in the first (ontogenetically speaking) of the *between worlds* transitions. It is, in short, a world within and between worlds.

The Liminal Sources of Cultural Experience

I hope that it has become more clear what it means to be writing about the liminal sources of cultural experiencing. It is no accident that what Tania Zittoun (2006) calls ‘cultural resources’ appear to become particularly relevant during times of biographical transition and rupture. I have tried to bring out the sense in which these cultural resources so often have the peculiar ‘doubled’ form of worlds within worlds and why these liminal entities have their source in the becomings at play in passage between worlds. I have tried to capture this in the notion of worlds within and between worlds. I have suggested that when we grasp the liminal nature of cultural experience we gain insight into the perhaps unexpected relationship between play, religion and art, a relationship that is clarified by the notion of ludic, sacred and aesthetic types of liminal affective technology.

It seems that there are two distinguishable liminal sources of cultural experience. The first concerns the ontogenetic development that each individual human being must go through if they are to become adults. I have stressed that this is never entirely an individual phenomenon, but intimately shared within family circles. This primordial ontogenetic sociality is traceable to the well-known phylogenetic fact of the maximally vulnerable nature of the ‘unfinished’ human infant. From this ontogenetic perspective the river of cultural experience is fed from the liminal source of the transitional phenomena described by Winnicott, including the forms of play that flow from it and around it. In this ontogenetic sense, experiences mediated by cultural forms such as ritual, theatre, music, painting and games can be said to have an experiential source in play (which is a more universal medium, despite itself taking manifold culturally specific forms). To quote Winnicott (2005: 17), the transitional phenomena ‘start each human being off with what will always be important to them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged’. I am stressing that this ‘area of experience’ is liminal and that it is common to what is (can be) created in play, in ritual and in art.⁵⁰ Certainly Winnicott makes several hints to the effect

⁵⁰ Victor Turner (1982) drew attention to just this continuity when he described the arts as *liminoid*. In the case of theatre, this continuity of ritual and art is directly traceable in a historical sense since there is strong evidence that Ancient Greek theatre emerged through a modification of Dionysian rites by way of the Dithyramb (Harrison, 1913). This is not to deny the differences between ritual and art, which are themselves interesting. For example, I suggest that the point of emergence of theatre from ritual be understood as the emergence—as if from a matrix of ritual—of a strictly

that playing leads on to cultural experience, serving as its ‘foundation’ (2005: 143). For example, this ‘area’ constitutes the greater part of infant experience and ‘throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living’ (Winnicott, 2005: 19). An infant’s transitional object will be gradually ‘decathected’ as ‘cultural interests develop’, and hence—although it ‘goes on being important’—we should expect an individual, throughout their biography, to engage with increasingly more complicated transition objects as they develop (movies, novels, spiritual practices, philosophies). Furthermore, just as a child’s play rapidly becomes a thoroughly collective matter, so our preferred liminal entities become the (often unconscious) basis for our social bonding. What, after all, is the body of work of Vygotsky if not a quasi-object—comparable in this respect to the Buddha and Liverpool FC—holding together the field of cultural psychology as a shared ‘common experience’?⁵¹

The second source concerns sociogenesis and the fact that any psychogenetic transformations associated with ontogeny are also embedded and unfold within the forms provided by the *longue durée* passage of human sociocultural ‘evolution’. From this perspective we must recognise, for example, that what we call ‘theatre’ is a specific cultural form that emerged in a specific place (Athens) at a specific time (sixth century BC), and that, as noted, it was connected to other societal novelties including the political form of Athenian democracy and epistemic form of Greek philosophy. The ontogenesis of any individual during this epoch (which did not last very long and indeed theatre was only properly resuscitated in Europe with the end of so-called medieval times) unfolds in a context for which the world of theatre is already a reality. But equally, the ontogenesis of any individual before this date, or from another part of the world, unfolds in a context untouched, as it were, by theatricalised reality (Szakolczai, 2013). From this sociogenetic perspective (or rather *perspectives* since the world is quite vast and multiple), we can nevertheless observe that the cultural form of ritual predates theatre and, indeed, can be considered one of its significant sources. I have also speculated that ritual (being common to many animals) may have been a factor in the evolutionary transition, the output of which was humanity. Either way, any answer to the question of the sources of cultural experience must clearly take both ontogenetic and sociogenetic perspectives into consideration, and cannot ignore phylogenesis. Ritual—on a sociogenetic plane—is no less a *source* of cultural experience than play is, on an ontogenetic plane.

aesthetic form of cultural experience from the form of the sacred (Stenner, 2017a, 2017b). But without losing sight of this distinction, the continuity proper to both aesthetic and sacred cultural experience continues with other art forms, to which, for all their autonomy, a feel of the sacred continues to cling. With respect to the novel, for example, I suggest we should take it very seriously when a novelist like Thomas Mann (1999, p. 728) argues that his book *The Magic Mountain* is ‘a variant on the shrine of the initiatory rites’. As I discuss at length in a paper with Monica Greco (Stenner and Greco, 2018), lest this be misunderstood Mann does not mean that his novel is *about* initiatory rites but that it *is* a variant on initiatory rites.

⁵¹ Winnicott (2005: 133) is also clear that transitional phenomena are core to the question of ‘*what life itself is about*’ and hence for life to feel real and to be worth living (i.e. to what I have called *vital subjectivity*).

Naturally, phylo-, socio- and ontogenetic facts exist simultaneously in the now of each and every microgenetic actual occasion.

Postscript: This Is Not ... Judy Garland

The book 'My Judy Garland Life' is a memoir, perhaps a novel, certainly a 'cultural element', written by Susie Boyt (2009). It is autobiographical, but its main feature is the way in which Boyt's own life story is merged with that of the singer, actor and dancer Judy Garland. The real-life premise is that Judy Garland featured centrally in her life because Boyt adored Judy (who died 5 months after Boyt was born) as a hero. She developed a lasting and slightly obsessive interest in Garland that dates back to her early childhood when she first watched the *Wizard of Oz* in the cinema with her mother. Boyt uses the book to explore the dynamics of this lifelong love of a star she never met in person, but who 'has been a central part of my development as a person, as real as meat, as tears' (Boyt, 2009, p. 2). Boyt describes in particular how she turns to Judy Garland when things are difficult in her life. The emotional power of Garland's performances carried inspirational lessons that got her through tough spots and crises.⁵² In Tania Zittoun's (2006) terms, Judy Garland has served as a symbolic resource for making sense of these ruptures and turning them into a more positive life transition.

Since Susie Boyt is a direct descendent of Sigmund Freud, we can surely risk taking her book as a wonderfully well-observed auto-ethnography rich with data. We should therefore take note when she states that when 'Judy performs, every moment in life becomes a rite of passage' (Boyt, 2009: 7). We find a vivid description of devised liminal experience when she writes: 'Garland's performances leave us in a state of crisis, but it's a good crisis, like falling in love or having your stitches removed' (9). She describes the effect of listening to Garland sing as 'a familiar unravelling' (11): her 'voice undoes people' (9) and everything 'stands on its head',⁵³ everything 'is celebration or mourning' (7). On the other hand, we see that

⁵² Again, the use of a movie as a symbolic resource during a life transition has an evident parallel with Van Gennep's discovery of the widespread use of specific rituals to manage the life transformations involved in situations of marriage, initiation, pregnancy, birth, death and so on. So when I aim to bring to light the distinctively liminal sources of cultural experience, one clear aspect of this is recognition of a degree of continuity between ritual and art as cultural elements mediating passage, and affording becoming.

⁵³ It is impossible to complete a paper on cultural experience and liminality without mentioning Bakhtin's (1964/1985) great masterwork *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin is another great thinker of liminality who never uses the 'I'-word. Bakhtin shows how the birth of the French novel in the hands of Rabelais was a desacralising reaction (on behalf of folk culture of the marketplace) against the ossification of liminal experience in the form of the medieval church and its authorities (73). Bakhtin shows how Rabelais aimed to destroy the official picture of events in an explosion of renaissance laughter. Here too writing was key to the societal transformation at stake (the rise of the use of written French and a rebellion against stiff church Latin [457]). Bakhtin's carnivalesque

the power of this experience comes from its evoking and mixing with spontaneous liminal experiences from Boyt's own life: 'When I begin to listen to Judy Garland there is no joy or wound from the story of my life that isn't with me. Great flashes of past experience dazzle and dismay, the good and the bad at the same time, in great layers. It is an unstable moment, one that cannot be too often indulged' (11). In this way, there is a kind of meeting of two worlds, whereby the world of the young Susie Boyt is somehow enriched and illuminated through intimate juxtaposition with a world at the centre of which is Judy Garland. Garland, as it were, introduces Boyt to new experiences, new possibilities, new details, new feelings, in short, a whole new glamorous and tragic world of ambivalence that is not her own, and yet it also fundamentally *is* her own world, because 'something at the heart of Judy Garland connects directly to something at the heart of me' (2).

Now, since Boyt never met the real Judy Garland, it would be tempting to call this whole relationship, this whole so-called world of Judy Garland, an imaginary world, or a 'fantasy' of intimacy (1). If by this we mean that the juxtaposition of these worlds stimulated Boyt's imagination, including her imaginings about Judy Garland as a real person, then this is certainly accurate. But we must be careful to recognise that Judy Garland's films and records are in fact real, and that Judy Garland really made them and, as it were, *put herself into them*.⁵⁴ They are real cultural products that Boyt really listened to and watched. She did not somehow imagine Garland singing: she listened to the recording, and she became enraptured by following the rise and the fall of Garland's voice and hearing the lyrics and the music. Boyt might have imagined what Judy Garland was like as a person, but did not just imagine her music; she followed its unfolding duration and she locked her own temporality or duration into its real unfolding. She did not imagine the film: she followed it closely and let it capture her being through her eyes and her ears. So there is not here a real world and a world that is purely imagined. There really are

is nothing if not the liminal drama of the 'simultaneous death of the old world and the birth of the new' (463). His descriptions of the festive liberation of laughter and the body are classically liminal, including note of the 'temporary suspension of the entire official system' such that for 'a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom' (89).

⁵⁴In response to a reporter who in 1968 asked how she would like to be remembered by people, Garland replied, 'I would like them to know that I have been in love with them all my life' (Boyt, 2009: 10). This is no throw-away comment, but illustrates Garland's intense involvement with her (imagined?) audience. Boyt puts this poignantly when she writes, 'Judy Garland lived out her days at the apex of excitement in such a maelstrom of lurching highs and bitter lows that by the end of her life she was circling the world, impossible, penniless, looking anywhere for a foothold or some moorings yet still running audiences with her consummate performing skills, right up to the last' (Boyt, 2009: 13). There is a fashion today to dismiss such claims as a romantic image of the devoted but penniless and self-destructive artist, but this 'image' recurs so often that it is unwise not to take it seriously as a real psychosocial phenomenon. In my view, it is a phenomenon symmetrical to that described in Boyt's work, and equally explicable by way of the distinction between devised (in this case the production of art) and spontaneous (in this case the experiences necessary for the production of the art) liminal experience.

two worlds that come together in a mutual enrichment, via the mediation of the canalised cultural products, the films and the music, for instance.

Of course we would be silly to mistake Judy Garland's records and films for the woman herself. But, equally, when she made these art objects, there can be no doubt that she put a lot of herself into them. In a sense, she very carefully and artfully created an expressive world that could be encountered by others. That is why any individual art object, whether a song, a movie, a painting, a play and perhaps even an academic essay like this one, is well understood as a kind of world in and of itself. A world within a world. Also, the artworks of Judy Garland taken as a whole, as with any artist, have a notable consistency and coherence—a discernable feel that is expressed quite directly by the notion of a 'world'. The world of Judy Garland is different from that of John Wayne, just as the world created by the movie *The Wizard of Oz* is different from *That's Entertainment!* And at a further level of generality, the totality that is art as such is its own distinctive world, different to that of law or academia or sport. I want to say something more about this concept of 'worlds',⁵⁵ but I must stop now, or else what began as a bite-size paper will soon become a book. And, after all, this is not a book.

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⁵⁵ Georg Simmel makes a number of interesting observations about the notion of 'world'. For Simmel (2015: 22) 'world means the connectedness of all possible givens that become a continuum via any absolutely valid principle'. First, this would mean that a world is composed of 'all possible givens' but is not just the sum of all these real things. It is not just this thing and that thing and this other thing. The word 'world' also expresses a togetherness of many things that unifies them into a coherent form. The form is a kind of formula through which the many particular things are apprehended. Second, note that Simmel writes 'all possible givens'. A world implies an entire range of contents, only a tiny portion of which are accessible to us and hence 'known'. But the unknowns and possibles are just as much a part of a world as the knowns, if they share in its consistency and connectedness. There are many things in a given room we are occupying that we do not know, and many more in the city outside, but those unknowns are all part of this same world. The formula, we might say, attaches the unknowns to the knowns so that they are apprehended as part of the same world. Third, Simmel writes that the givens become a continuum via *any absolutely valid principle*. The form or formula that ties the particulars together into a definite unity must be a specifiable principle that never fails of exemplification amongst the particular things. A world is that which is capable of drawing material into its overall compass, and hence of lending form to the world's 'stuff'. None of this implies the existence of just one world. As Simmel suggests, those who insist that there is just one world, the *real* world, are likely to mean the *actuality form* of their ordinary practical reality, or 'the locus of our practical interest' in which the practical necessities of life tend to dominate (i.e. a canonical or pivotal world of 'daily life').

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Part II

Commentaries and Extensions

Chapter 2

From Liminalities to Limbo: Thinking through Semiotic Elaboration



Tania Zittoun

The very idea of liminality involves some form of transformation, or transformative experiences (Stenner, 2017). Cultural experiences, which can be seen as specific forms of liminal experiences, may thus be studied and understood as one type of transformative experiences. Why these have such transformative power can be partly explained by their origin both in sociogenesis and ontogenesis (Stenner, 2021): historically, they are an offspring of rituals, as collective transformative events, attached to specific cultural systems (Stenner, 2017). In the life of every single person, following Winnicott, liminal experiences can be seen as growing out of the experience of every child to be first unified, and then progressively separated from a parent; liminal experiences grow from the experience of being in the zone, in between, in a transitional space from which possibilities may emerge—a potential space (Stenner, 2021; Zittoun & Stenner, 2020). Hence, it seems that such psychosocial, genetic reading provides an explanation for *why* cultural experiences are transformative, or where their power comes from; but another question, which I wish to address, is *how* do cultural experiences have such transformative power.

Liminality in Winnicott: A Psyche and Semiotic Elaboration

Donald W. Winnicott, an independent British psychoanalyst—inspired by both Freud and Klein—described cultural experiences as an area where inner psychic life and the social world meet, where things from the world can be invested with affects and contents unique and personal. Children's fingers, objects and sounds could have this symbolic function (D. W. Winnicott, 1968a, 1968b, 1968c, 1969). Squiggles, apparently random drawings that Winnicott would do in turn with some of his patients and then that would be interpreted, have the same value: some lines drawn on a paper, for all to see, can then become the receptacle for dreamlike ideas; also, when these squiggles get transformed, their affective content can progressively be

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worked through in dialogue (D. W. Winnicott, 1996). Finally, Winnicott saw the appreciation of classical music, churchgoing or science writing as equivalent phenomena, this time only demanding to invest an object which is part of a “tradition”, or a complex symbolic system now mastered, with one’s affective life and concerns (D. W. Winnicott, 1968c, 1991). Interestingly, thus, Winnicott seems to consider the *how* of the transformative power of cultural experience as something taking place in the binding of affects with a symbolic or semiotic function, which can take many modes (usual objects with their material affordances, proprioceptive qualities, and cultural values, of various semiotic modes - lines on paper, sounds, notes, etc.). Hence, if we follow Winnicott, liminal spaces and experiences work, it seems, because these can be the place, or the receptacle, of semiotic transformations, of semiotic elaboration.

To assume that semiotic processes taking place within a liminal experience have prolongations beyond that experience demands to make the hypothesis of a mind, or a psyche, or a psychic apparatus that endures: if what happens in the bounded space of a liminal experience changes the person, it is because what happens as liminal experience is both very unique to that type of space and deeply connected to the rest of the psychic life of the person; hence, what happens there can have consequences with long-term roots and future implications.

There are various ways to describe and explain this deeper and enduring nature of a psyche transformed by semiotic processes, and lately, cultural semiotic psychology has made efforts in that direction (Neuman, 2014; Salvatore, 2016; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2010; Valsiner, 1998, 2007; Zittoun, 2004). However, authors who have excelled in this, because they addressed head-on the work of affects and the transformation of experience, are psychoanalysts. Here, I would like to draw on some of their insights to contribute to explaining *how* cultural experiences work as liminal, transformative experiences, and also why they at times do not work.

Arrival: A Liminal Experience to Reflect on Semiosis

Before going further, I wish to introduce a film that will enable us to reflect upon the transformative nature of cultural, liminal experiences through semiotic elaboration. In effect, if dream and play have been seen as the royal road to the unconscious (Freud, 2001a; Klein, 1975), cultural experiences may themselves become the royal road to uncover the dynamics of transformation in human experience (Stenner & Zittoun, 2020; Vygotsky, 1971). Rather than considering films as illustrating psychological types, personalities or complexes (Billsberry et al., 2012; Niemiec & Wedding, 2008), films can also reveal interesting insights about processes of thinking (Stenner & Zittoun, 2020; Tisseron, 2003; Zittoun, 2013). In that sense, art can be used as a means to know not only about the psyche of artists or viewers, but also about the psyche itself; art can have “a psychology” (Vygotsky, 1971).

The movie *Arrival* (Villeneuve, 2016) describes the arrival, on earth, of a group of unknown gigantic flying objects; these vertically float a few metres above the

surface of earth, and there is one in each continent. The film follows a US team recruited by the army to make contact with the spaceship and its inhabitants. The main characters are a linguist, Louise Banks, and a physicist, Ian Donnelly; their mission is to establish communication with the inhabitants of the spaceship—strange brownish octopus-like giant beings that the scientists will call “heptapods”, floating in a milky liquid—and to decode enough of their language so as to be able to have a dialogue about their intention on earth.

The aesthetic of the film is quite peculiar, with its majestic and strange black, oblong objects floating above the landscape of Montana (USA), a blue-grey image, and a very powerful soundtrack—very long, complex cord harmonics, spacey, progressively amplifying, and filling the soundscape—composed by [Jóhann Jóhannsson](#)—which compels the viewer to enter into a disquieting universe. The film has three main intermeshed lines of narration: at a collective level, as these spaceships have landed all around earth, international powers, closely connected by videoconference, have to jointly decide whether these aliens are friendly or hostile, in which case they should be bombed, and a generalised war with uncertain outcomes could ensue. Second, there is the actual encounter between Banks, Donnelly and the inhabitants of the spaceship, and the core task the scientists have to solve: decode the language these use, a strange series of circular ideograms. Third, we learn about Louise Banks’ personal life; more interestingly, as she starts to learn to decode the circular language, it transforms her dreams and fantasies. In what follows, I will focus on the two second lines of the action—the first one is a typical science fiction scenario, and is actually solved through the two others.

The actual encounters between the scientists and the heptapods constitute the core liminal experiences of the movie. The liminal experience is, for the viewer, at the same time represented and semiotically guided. What is represented is indeed explicitly liminal, with a sequence of separation, liminality and reintegration (Turner, 1967; Van Gennep, 1981). Every day, Banks and Donnelly have to quit the base camp that they share with an international team; isolated, they go through a long series of thresholds; they pass disinfection tents, put orange security costumes on, and are vaccinated and monitored; after passing long corridors of tents, they are put on a pickup, and brought under the spaceship; from there, they are elevated on a mechanical platform within the oblong spaceship; at some point, they have to jump up, with a leap of faith, and here they are delivered from gravity, entering a strange, large, low-ceiling, naked anthracite room in the spaceship. This is where the actual liminal experience occurs: in front of them, from wall to wall, is a translucent window or perhaps a screen, filled with this milky liquid that becomes troubled when the heptapods move. Eventually, Banks becomes brave enough to take away her spacesuit; the first time, in her immaculate white T-shirt, she touches the window. One of the heptapods touches it from the other side with its star-shaped end of tentacle, and draws, or rather projects, black ink into a circular ideogram. This is all accompanied by strange deep-water, cracking whale-like sounds. Visits will be reiterated; each encounter consists of such brief exchanges, Banks writing words on a white pad and saying them aloud, and the heptapods writing their circular ideograms. After 2 h, the visitors have to leave, return to base camp, pass through

decontamination and disinfection thresholds, and go back to their normal offices, where they start to analyse the pictograms. A first observation is thus that the encounter between the scientists and the heptapods is staged like a liminal, cultural experience: there are thresholds; rules of the socially shared reality are partly suspended (gravity fails, Banks does not obey security orders); the meeting takes place in an indefinite, intermediary space: it is neither the heptapods' space (they need to be kept in their milky water, behind their screen) nor the scientists'. The actual encounter, which occurs through the window, is a mixture of each world; scientists deal with their anxiety and fears, their expertise is not very useful, only Banks' intuitions seem to matter; and whatever happens there is both, in Winnicott's terms, found and created. The liminal nature of the experience is also reinforced through other semiotic modes: the soundtrack, already evoked, with its deep vibration and strangely enveloping masses of harmonics, is physically moving and generates a disquieting experience; the colours, first a blue-green nature, are replaced by the dark anthracite and white universe of the spaceship, only punctuated by the orange suits; finally, in terms of spatial composition, the openness of the landscape and the overcharged technical base camp both strongly contrast with the purity of the rectangular space of the encounter within the spaceship. Hence, all these semiotic indications, afforded by the cinematographic choices (Bradford Young ASC: *Arrival*, 2016), concur to create an experience of a distinct, suspended, quality.

The third level is even more interesting. As Banks begins to decode the circular language, she starts to have flashbacks of her life with her now deceased daughter, who, as we will progressively learn, grew up happily, but soon developed a rare illness and died as a teenager. Her dreams change quality, and soon she dreams of the sounds of the heptapods. She also starts to have vivid irruptions of dreams, or memory flashbacks, during her waking life. At some point, she explains the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: language organises our minds, and learning a new language shapes our thinking and feeling in a new way. As her mastery of the circular language increases and as the overall political situation becomes tenser, she has more and more of these flashes; some, it seems progressively, are of the future. Eventually, we start to understand that the mastery of the circular language liberates Banks' mind from linear time; it now wanders through past and future. Her explorations of the past shape the future, and her glimpses into the future guide and enable her present actions. By her capacity to travel through time, she recomposes the beam of time, linking future to past and back. Hence (and here comes two spoilers!), it is an imaginary meeting in the future with the Chinese general that gives her the sentence that enables Banks to convince him, in the present, to stop a planned attack, and we also realise that her memories of her dead child are actually a foresight of the life of the child she will have with Donnelly.

Why is this important at all? The idea that language shapes our mind is of course at the core of the hypothesis of cultural psychology, key in Vygotsky's reflection on the relation between thinking and language (Vygotsky, 1986), and of his project of a cultural psychology of higher, semiotically mediated, psychic functions (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018). Hence, if language had a circular constitution,

then perhaps our mind would function less linearly or causally. This idea also deeply resonates with psychoanalytical explorations: as we know from the analysis of dreams, some layers of our unconscious life are given to us in symbolic forms—yet through objects, cultural artefacts and language games from the cultural system we inhabit (Devereux, 1979; Freud, 2001a; Obeyesekere, 1990). Perhaps the “unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 1973, p. 28); but more definitely, semiotic means are the condition to capture, and make thinkable, the movement of our thoughts and affects (Bion, 1977b; Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011; Zittoun, 2011). Consequently, the semiotic systems and elements that we master shape and transform our thoughts and affects.

In other words, what the film suggests is that the encounter and mastery of a new semiotic system, even within a liminal space, can actually and durably transform the structure of psyche itself. Rather than being trapped into a past-to-present-to-future experience, as we mostly are, it may liberate our mind and enable us to explore imagined futures, coming back to our present and reading of the past, in looping and proleptic movements (Cole, 2007; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). These may open up new occasions for learning from experience and for development. Hence, even liminal experiences, because they occur through specific semiotic mediation which itself functions within a system that actually enables the psyche, can durably reconfigure the psyche, or the mind, and this reconfiguration still lasts when the person exits the liminal experience and goes back to the normal daily affairs.

Semiosis and the Periphery of Consciousness

Cultural experiences can affect our mind beyond the contained duration of a liminal encounter. Of course, this may be due to the fact that we do have only one mind, and that we remain the same person, whether we buy bread or we watch a movie. Here, I want however to argue something more: There is a frequent claim in psychology and common sense to hold that people should “distinguish dream from reality”, or that fiction and engagement with reality rely on different psychological functions—and thus daydreaming is seen as contrasting to reasoning. What the present reflexion suggests is that such strong separation does not hold: some forms of processes normally attributed to imagination or daydream already and always take place in our daily life. We can be fully engaged in solving an equation, or be fully lost in a novel; but this does not mean that we do not reflect when we read the novel, and that we do not daydream when we solve an equation.

Rather than opposing modes of thinking, it is possible to rather claim that there is a continuum of psychological functions (Freud, 1959, 2001a; Green, 2005; Stenner & Zittoun, 2020; Valsiner, 2001). We can of course clearly disengage from the present activity—our mind can wander as we cook an omelette or walk in the street; this is what we have called imagination (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). However, even when we are thinking about the omelette we cook, we may have sudden associations to previous omelettes, or the intuition to add an unexpected spice may come

to mind. It does not come from nowhere: at the surface of our deliberate thinking, some diffuse filaments of thoughts always take place, as there is always water in suspension above the surface of the sea (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018). Research on daydreaming has convincingly shown that we do constantly daydream at the periphery of our consciousness, or that there is always some space for disengagement from reality (Singer, 2014). Of course, some contemporary fields consider daydreaming as waste of time and energy, a negative mind-wandering against which we should train our mind (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Stawarczyk et al., 2012). However, other trends show that daydreaming may also be what lies behind creativity (Bruner, 1979; McMillan et al., 2013; D. G. Singer & Singer, 1992), and be associated to what makes life worth living (D. W. Winnicott, 1990; Zittoun & Cabra, 2020).

Let us explore a bit more what psychoanalysis can bring to it. Indeed, most psychoanalysts would admit that daydreaming demands, like dreaming and imagination, a form of mobilisation of traces of experiences, and their transformation into something new. It is also this type of semiotic understanding of mind that makes such an approach compatible with a sociocultural psychology (Neuman, 2014; Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011; Zittoun, 2011, 2015). To remain within the British independent tradition, after Winnicott, let us turn to British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (Bion, 1977b). In his reading of this work, Antonino Ferro reminds us that

whereas Freud used the term ‘dreamwork’ to mean that otherwise incomprehensible unconscious material was transformed into dreams and that the dreamwork had to be undone in order to make the incomprehensible dream comprehensible again (Freud, 1933), Bion thinks that conscious material has to be subjected to dreamwork to render it suitable for storing away and for thought (Ferro, 2002, p. 598).

For Bion, through night dreams and daydreaming, signs or semiotic forms are attached to our experiences, and thus give them a form that starts to be thinkable. He thus formulated a theory of thinking in which the alpha or α -function plays a key function:

Alpha-function operates on the sense impressions, whatever they are, and the emotions, whatever they are, of which the patient is aware. In so far as alpha-function is successful alpha elements are produced and these elements are suited to storage and the requirements of dream thoughts. If alpha function is disturbed, and therefore inoperative, the sense impressions of which the patient is aware and the emotions which he is experiencing remain unchanged. I shall call them beta-elements. In contrast with the alpha-elements the beta-elements are not felt to be phenomena, but things in themselves. The emotions likewise are objects of sense (Bion, 1977a, p. 6).

Based on such reading, contemporary authors further explored the idea of daily dreams, or reverie, in Bion’s words. Antonino Ferro calls “waking dream thought” our constant activity of dreaming, including during our daily life, by which our α -function constantly and normally takes place. The α -function turns β -elements, the sense impressions and emotions, into “proto-visual elements of thought” (Ferro, 2002, p. 598), something that may come to mind, and is used for this material which is specific to every person:

If the α -element (that is, the mode by which each psyche creates pictograms on the basis of sensory inputs) is extremely subjective – as if the α -function would operate through the eye of a painter who turns what he perceives in images –, the sequence of α -elements produced as a chain to form the waking dream thought is even more so (Ferro, 2014:59, my translation).

These forms can be of any semiotic mode—“alpha-elements comprise visual images, auditory patterns and olfactory patterns” (Bion, 1977a, p. 26); they can thus be visual, as when one suddenly recalls the face of a friend or “sees” a falling rock, or when a melody comes to mind that formulates one’s current feeling (Zittoun & Cabra, 2020). The psychoanalytical dialogue is one that aims to turn the patient’s β -elements into α -elements; the patient (or analysant)’s daydreaming capacities can be supported by and through the analyst’s capacity of daydreaming, or their α -function (Bion, 1977b; Ferro, 2014; Ogden, 2005).¹ Liminal and cultural experiences—when we go to the cinema or the art gallery—are equally transformative, because we are put in a state of trusting reception, during which we accept to be moved, in a secure space (Kuhn, 2013; Tisseron, 2003, 2013; Zittoun, 2013). During these experiences, we are exposed to semiotic forms that may awake traces of past experiences, and we can use these new semiotic forms as alpha-elements to capture some of our non-elaborated beta-experiences, or they simply may feed into our daydreaming chain.

Once semiotised (or “alphabetised”, writes Ferro), the game of daydreaming can start to transform these contents through chains of thoughts, by association, displacement and condensation (Freud, 2001b; D. G. Singer & Singer, 1992; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016), into something else—we can thus let a panic simply develop and turn into a beta-experience by pursuing increasingly worrying associations (a creaky door awakes old fears, association connects it to some news about prison escape, etc.), or progressively make sense of a daily encounter and learn from that experience, as when the enigmatic smile of a friend reminds us of some expression in the face of a parent, or when reflecting on why a cultural experience moved us or on the conduct of a character in a film which awoke a very old feeling of shame (Tisseron, 2003, 2013).

Theorising daydreaming in terms of semiotic elaboration, or alpha-function, is thus a way to account for *how* cultural liminal experiences work. Daydreaming is in effect one way to describe the fluidity of affective and lived experiences and semiotic traces which are likely to bind and transform. Such reading enables us to understand the constructive role of daydreaming, and also its variable intensity. Daydream may simply run in the background; it may be cultivated by signs available at the periphery of our consciousness (Valsiner, 2019); it may make irruption into flashes when heavily emotionally loaded, or be deliberately guided, as when we imagine a complex scenario (J. L. Singer, 2014), and it can be deliberately cultivated and guided when we engage in cultural experiences. Thus, daydreaming is a function of

¹ The British tradition, more than classical Freudian analysis, considers that the analyst can support the analysant’s damaged daydreaming (α -function) capacity by dreaming with/for them; the analysant will eventually internalise the α -function of the analyst.

our psyche that endures; it works both within liminal cultural experiences, during which we are fully receptive to these transformations, and beyond the thresholds of cultural experiences, when the elaboration continues its silent work.

In *Arrival*, the psychologically sound proposition is thus that a circular ideographic language, even acquired within a liminal space, is likely to reorganise experience in a circular way, and thus to render more fluid the person's ability to move across past happy and sad experiences, and possible futures and alternative presents, using cues from one to infuse and guide the other. In that respect, it is also interesting to note that the movie's drama turns around two competing interpretations of the core ideogram brought by the heptapods: some of the international powers, such as China, read it as "we bring weapon"; Banks, on her side, interprets the same ideogram as "we bring tool". Beyond the allusions to international escalation, the misunderstanding is itself interesting: Is a sign or a cultural experience that reshapes mind and gives access to the multilayer and multi-temporality of human life a tool, or a weapon? Is it a means for growth, or destruction? In any case, this temporal fluidity is simply an extreme of what cultural psychology and psychoanalysis have taught us about the temporal layering and fluidity of our mind, which may be catalysed by cultural experiences (Green, 2005; Tisseron, 2013; Zittoun, 2006). The more fantastic nature of the film suggests that this circularity not only reorganises traces of past experiences into new understandings, but that such semiotic reorganisation actually can generate future experiences then to be lived.

And Yet: Undreamt Dreams—What Escapes Semiosis

Approaching liminal experiences and their transformative power in terms of the α -function enables us to start accounting for *how* they work. In addition, it also brings us to see that sometimes they do *not* work: Sometimes, a cultural experience turns into anxiety and nightmares, sometimes we are haunted by ideas and sometimes flashbacks feel like they possess us. Psychoanalytical work on alpha-function indeed questions the limits of our capacity to be changed, or transformed, or the failure of liminal experiences. In effect, not all emotional sensory experiences are transformed from affective perspective experiences into usable alpha-elements:

Beta-elements are not amenable to use in dream thoughts but are suited for use in projective identification. They are influential in producing acting out. They are objects that can be evacuated or used for a kind of thinking that depends on manipulation of what are felt to be things in themselves as if to substitute such manipulation for words or ideas. (...). Beta-elements are stored but differ from alpha-elements in that they are not so much memories as undigested facts, whereas the alpha-elements have been digested by alpha-function and thus made available for thought (Bion, 1977a, pp. 6–7).

These "undigested facts" are usually of strong emotional value, and are connected to childhood-related affects, or infantile experiences: the fear of being abandoned, eaten up, rejected or humiliated. That they cannot be thought through and need to be displaced can lead to their projection upon other people (who may thus feel such

attacks), or to somatisation, or to acting out—and in the worst case, to what seems to be psychotic experience (Ferro, 2014; Ogden, 2005). It is such undigested experiences that have interested contemporary psychoanalysts inspired by Bion.

Thomas H. Ogden thus explains, “If a person is incapable of transforming raw sense impressions into unconscious elements of experience that can be linked, he cannot generate unconscious dream-thoughts and consequently cannot dream (either in sleep or in unconscious waking life)” (Ogden, 2004, p. 859). Ogden describes two types of trouble of dreaming: in night terrors, people are exposed to brutal beta-experiences; they wake up in state of terror, without having the awareness of having dreamt, and so they can go back to dreaming. In nightmares, people wake up scared, and know they had a bad dream; they may however be scared of falling back to sleep, out of fear of meeting the same, or an even worse, dream. In a nightmare, beta-elements start to be put into elements coming to mind, even though they cannot be fully “digested”, that is, not elaborated enough to become experiences from which the person can learn. A similar distinction can be done in our waking daydream, where some contents are not elaborated at all, while others are simply not yet fully digested. Hence the demand made to the analyst may be to help dreaming such contents:

Some patients who consult an analyst might be thought of as suffering from (metaphorical) night terrors. Without being aware of it, they are seeking help in dreaming their undreamt and undreamable experience. The undreamt dreams of such patients persist unchanged as split-off pockets (or broad sectors) of psychosis (Bion, 1962/1977a) or as aspects of the personality in which experience is foreclosed from psychological elaboration. (...) Other patients who consult an analyst might be thought of as individuals suffering from (metaphorical) nightmares, that is, from dreams that are so frightening that they interrupt the psychological work entailed in dreaming both while asleep and in unconscious waking dreaming. Frost’s (1928/[(1995)]) phrase ‘interrupted cry’ from his poem ‘Acquainted with the night’ seems particularly apt in describing a nightmare. The patient awaking from a nightmare has reached the limits of his capacity for dreaming on his own. He needs the mind of another person—‘one acquainted with the night’—to help him dream the yet to be dreamt aspect of his nightmare (Ogden, 2004, p. 861).

Without going further in the description of psychological difficulties and therapeutic work, it is important to see the implications of such clinical insights for our reflection. Daydreaming, as the elaboration of our lived experience, may occur all the time, and it is especially enhanced within cultural experiences, or through novel semiotic forms. This brings a further complication.

If liminal experiences have a transformative power thanks to the semiotic elaboration they support and guide, after having awakened various affective contents in the person, then it is also possible that this process comes to a halt: the cultural experience may indeed wake up experiences which are too raw, emotionally too intense—these are undreamable beta-elements. It is hence these elements that can turn the vision of a horror movie into a real nightmare, rather than a controlled (and therefore enjoyable) fear, or that can bring people to “freeze” in front of an art piece: these touch something which is not yet thinkable, and may never become so (Tisseron, 2013; Zajde, 2005). Hence, if liminal experiences are in principle transformative, they can also be blocked by the non-elaborable, either through emotional

saturation, as in liminal hotspots (Stenner et al., 2017), or because of cleaved contents (Ogden, 2004). When this is the case, then experiences are less liminal, than limbic.

There may be limits to our capacity to dream and therefore enjoy cultural experiences. However, this shall not be seen as a definite obstacle, and may be itself an occasion for development. In effect, if we follow Bion's intuition that people tend to grow, and that even non-elaborated contents in daydream are occasions to learn, then one may precisely examine why and how a cultural experience does not work, a reflection that may be conducted alone or, better, within a trusting relationship. It is the reason why Tisseron advises parents to talk through the images that shock their children, so as to elaborate such contents, rather than leaving them raw—which may be conducive of violence (Tisseron, 2000), or why analysts like Ferro (2014) are quite attentive to the cultural experiences mentioned by his patients; this is also why many people simply like to discuss movies seen with others.

What are the implications of this for our reading of *Arrival*? If we admit that beta-elements are residues of experience too charged to be semiotically elaborated and that these are likely to come back to the person as flashbacks or in nightmares, then we can think that Banks' flashes of her daughter are of a traumatic nature. Indeed, we first see her and her daughter in happy events and loving embrace; later, the flashbacks show the little girl ill in the hospital, slowly dying. One may thus believe that accessing a fluid semiotic code in a liminal space renders more accessible traumatic, non-elaborated grieving experiences. Now, as the movie goes further, it suggests that the story of the relationship has not yet happened, and is ahead of Banks—she will engage in a relationship with Donnelly, they will have a daughter and eventually he will leave her when she tells us that they had their daughter knowing that she would die. This of course changes the meaning of these flashbacks, which literally become undreamed dreams, because they are the dreams of an (as-yet) unlived life. Hence, even the fantastic features of that surprising film have some psychological soundness: these are about experiences which are the most difficult to process and digest—the loss of a child—and yet it suggests that, through proper semiotic elaboration, even this can be worked through, and elaborated, in such a way that, were it to be relived, it would thus be.

To Conclude: Undreamed Dreams, Unlived Lives, Living Creatively

Liminal, cultural experiences are no less alive or important than our everyday lives. On the contrary, they can be much more, and they can do much more. Examining the origins of cultural experiences shows their societal and historical importance and the anchorage in the very beginning of each of our lives. Understanding better how they work helps us to better grasp how much they can durably transform our psyche, and with it, our lives as a whole.

In this chapter, I drew on a psychoanalytical approach to mind and its semiotic constitution; such an approach puts to the fore the importance of daydreaming, our capacity to constantly catch and transform our raw emotional and perceptual experiences into a thinkable form, and the dynamics by which these now alphabetised experiences can further be transformed and elaborated. In some ways, cultural liminal experiences can here play a key role: first, they offer the space for transformation—a liminal experience, in which we willingly enter in a state of reverie, and let our minds and unthought experiences shimmer close to the surface, to be found by the semiotic forms and languages offered by the cultural experience. Second, precisely, the semiotic forms offered by the cultural elements do not stay purely external, and disappear when we close the book, or leave the screening room; these elements, which have temporarily touched our lived experiences and accompanied our flow of living during the liminal duration, have also left traces and can become part of ourselves. Perhaps we do internalise them and they become imprinted (like when we “reconstruct” or translate a sign in our mind (Valsiner, 2006)), or perhaps it is simply the movement that they initiated that continues to animate our psyche (like when a stone thrown in the water triggers distant waves), or the pattern they proposed that somehow becomes for us a new pattern of organising experience (as when we internalise a melody or a dialogical movement (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015)). Potent cultural experiences can thus not only support the dynamics of imagination through past, potential futures and alternative presents; they can also generate radically new ways of engaging and learning from these dynamics.

However, once we admit that cultural experiences have potentially such deep prolongations, we also have to consider further complications, as revealed by psychoanalysts, these careful observers of our minds and their mishaps (Bion, 1977b; Freud, 1911, 1963; D. W. Winnicott, 1994). The psyche is deeply rooted in our bodies, and affects raised by our lives follow complex paths; experiences may very well and often remain unelaborated, locally or more globally, and when unelaborated, these can impede our capacity to engage in new experiences, and our capacity to digest them, if not our very capacity to daydream. Liminal experiences can thus become transformative, or maintain us in the limbo of our becoming, facing not only undreamed dreams (Ogden, 2004) but also unlived lives (Phillips, 2013). Paradoxically, understanding the complexities of our mind also enables us to see their powerful developmental dynamics: Bion, Winnicott and many others reminded us again and again that liminal experiences—at the therapist, at the concert or in our daily daydreams—are often and always the occasion to learn from experiences, and turn living into an exciting experience—that of seeing every morning that tree in front of our window as new again. And at the end, like these nightmarish formless beings from outer space facing a young linguist in *Arrival* (Villeneuve, 2016), undreamed dreams may just wait for us until we are ready to dialogue with them, and to open ourselves up to imagine and live what is yet to come.

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Chapter 3

On/at the Edges of Liminality: Analytical Extensions Betwixt and between Thresholds



Robert E. Innis

An Analytical Prelude

Near the end of Paul Stenner's and Steven Brown's book, *Psychology Without Foundations: History, Philosophy, and Psychology* (2009), we find the following statement: "'psychology' can never be pinned and mounted like a butterfly" (p. 211). Of course, this is the same for my discipline "philosophy." Is this not also, looked at philosophically, perhaps the same for "liminality?" The analytical platform developed by Stenner in his rich and provocative paper, "Theorising liminality between art and life," is based upon his (2017) *Liminality and Experience: A Transdisciplinary Approach to the Psychosocial*. Relying creatively on Alfred Schütz and William James, he locates liminality in the variety of types of occasions in which individuals and cultures *undergo* or *effect* felt transitions between, and interruptions of, their "worlds," "finite provinces of meaning," or "multiple realities" in which they live. As we pass, or are carried, from and into these different finite provinces of meaning—science, art, religion, and so forth—we experience not just a contrast between their *felt* senses or tones but also their differences from the "canonical" world of pragmatic everydayness in which we are anchored. They become "worlds within worlds."

The conceptual core of Stenner's analytical platform is found in a fundamental distinction between two forms of liminal, or threshold crossing, experiences: spontaneous and devised.

Spontaneous liminal experience is that which *happens* to us, *rupturing* our lives and throwing us into changes we might not have *anticipated*. Devised liminal experiences, by contrast, are those which we *do* to ourselves, *usually* in a *rarefied* and *virtual* space/time that is abstracted from daily practical reality and *mediated* by cultural resources like rituals,

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myths, songs, novels and movies. Devised liminal experience is experience mediated by ‘dedicated’ cultural forms (I call these liminal affective technologies or media of transition) ... Both forms of liminality presuppose a *contrast* with forms of experience and activity which are sufficiently *stable* and *predictable* to be taken for granted as a shared *canonical* world of *mundane* practical reality. (6–9; *my italics*)

Stenner, both in his paper (Stenner 2021; this volume) and in *Liminality and Experience*, gives many examples of experiences of the liminal where these contrasts occur in the gaps, cracks, and voids in the “psycho-social-cultural crust of human forms of life, and these (manifold and varied) openings are the ever-present source of cultural experiences” (7). Paradigmatic from a philosophically informed semiotic point of view is the heuristic point of the linking of ritual with art and play.

Ritual shares with art and with play the curious quality of being a ‘world within a world’ with a ‘reflexive’ form (of re-entry) that has doubled back on itself. Like a song, or a novel or a game, a ritual is a self-created cultural form which we use on ourselves in order to produce distinct emotional experiences through the evocation of a double which is nevertheless simultaneously bracketed out or truncated or abbreviated. (xxx)

My aim here is to bring forward, with no polemical intent, some further exemplifications, extensions, and modifications of these illuminating concepts. I will be concerned principally with the ultimacy or range of the distinction between spontaneous/devised liminal experiences. I do so without diminishing its analytical value. Where, existentially and conceptually, do we “arrive” at the liminal dimension of experience and where do we find ourselves when we have “arrived,” even if we do not, or cannot, stay there for long? Where are the experiential “edges” of the frames of liminal experiences? How “fuzzy” are they? Robert Musil, the great Austrian novelist, once remarked in *The Man Without Qualities* that “to pass freely through open doors, it is necessary to respect the fact that they have solid frames” (1930/1995, 10).

But how “open” are the doors of liminal experiences and how “solid” are their frames? What is the nature of their openness, both experientially and conceptually? Are there in fact multiple overlapping “paradigmatic locations” of liminality, each foregrounding or highlighting features in such a way that perhaps we should think that an analysis of liminality and liminal experiences involves a cluster of concepts and experiences linked by Wittgensteinian “family resemblances?”

Stenner notes, without elaborating, that John Dewey’s pragmatist analysis of experience in *Art as Experience* (88–110) indicates a deep affinity between Dewey’s notion of a consummatory experience and a liminal experience mediated by an expressive object that gives us access to a “world within a world” (see Innis, 2016; Innis, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). Dewey had also argued that in normal experience things and objects of all kinds appear against, and make us definitely conscious of, a “qualitative background” that gives a “sense of something that lies beyond” (1934, 197), a sense that we are never wholly free of and indeed cannot fully be put into words (Scharfstein, 1993; Innis, 2008, 2018). The various fields, or frames, of the flux of experience can be broadened, growing, as James put it, by its edges. But, Dewey writes, “however broad the field, it is still felt as not the whole; the margins shade into that indefinite expanse beyond which imagination calls the universe.

This sense of the including whole implicit in ordinary experiences is rendered intense within the frame of a painting or poem” (1934, 198) or the self-created cultural forms of ritual.

What exactly is made present or rendered intense in such an experience? In what senses is liminal experience, undergone or effected in a transition from one universe of meaning to another, the becoming aware of such an “including whole” or “indefinite expanse?” How far can we take the notion of a frame? What “content” does it frame?

Let us now turn to some examples.

St. Teresa’s Ecstatic Body

Consider Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s famous group sculpture “The Ecstasy of St. Teresa” (1647–1652) in the Cornaro Chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. This is, or could be taken to be, a *devised* “liminal affective technology” of the first order, directed to us as a symbolically pregnant *presentational form* of a liminal experience of rupture, not just rapture, rooted in what Whitehead called the “withness of the body.” It is a “realization” in living stone of the “slippage” between, or even blending of, physically erotic and spiritual worlds. Teresa is presented by Bernini as an “ec-static body,” “out of itself” and “somewhere else,” defined by a “somatic tone” of immeasurable intensity, generating and informing waves of undulating stone.



Teresa recounts in her autobiography, in rather unremarkable, yet physically vivid, “subliminal” prose, the putatively undergone *spontaneous* liminal experience, yet lasting several days, that underlies Bernini’s symbolically pregnant configuration.

Beside me on the left appeared an angel in bodily form ... He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest ranks of angels, who seem to be all on fire ... In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one’s soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the *body* has *some* share in it – even a *considerable* share. (Teresa of Avila, 1988; cited in Sartwell, 2004, 78; my italics)

The reaction of the “good monk” who showed the statues to Stendahl during his time in Rome rightly grasps what Susanne Langer (1953, 1967; Innis, 2009) called the core “idea” presented in the “kinetic volume” of the sculptural complex, which, we must remember, is located in a place of ritual, which it putatively supports or is supported by. Stendhal writes, with supreme irony, in his *Roman Journal*: “Our good monk, thinking we did not understand it, explained to the group of us. ‘È un gran peccato ... that these statues can easily convey the idea of a profane love’” (Stendhal, 1957, 132). Sinful or not, Bernini’s statues are a *staging*, embodied in a presentational form, of an experience of a certain kind with its consequent form of feeling as made visible in and on Teresa’s body. Our good monk was left distinctively uneasy. Something here, the making visible of a supercharged tactual space, was too close for comfort (Langer, 1953, 90).

What about the effect upon us? Does our encounter with this liminal affective technology leave *us* dynamically hovering “betwixt and between” two states that are not totally distinct but affectively, actionally, and conceptually bleed into one another? Our lives are not *ruptured* by reading St. Teresa’s laconic account of rupture. She was a supreme instance of the everydayness of pots and pans. Yet, Bernini’s statues, along with Teresa’s account, make manifest, in ways her words alone never could, the sacred and profane *doubleness*, of the “betwixt and betweenness” of a world within a world, in a presentation of Teresa’s *eventful* or *climactic* ecstasy. Still, Teresa’s experience, so dramatically presented in Bernini’s sculpture, was not a *conversion* experience involving a change of life or transitioning to another finite province of meaning in which she had never been. She already lived in both simultaneously, with no attempt to think of reconciling their multiple levels. She was practicing the “presence of God” in all things—or thought she was.

Further, it is an important question whether or to what degree Teresa’s seemingly spontaneous liminal experience recounted in her text is in the last analysis itself self-induced or even unintentionally devised, arising, paradoxically, from the “canonical” and “pivotal” *practices and habits* that are defined by the funded indwelt backgrounds of her life in the convent with its customary “staging” of the day’s “mundane” order. Is there perhaps a connection here with Foucault’s and

Hadot's (1995) analyses of "spiritual exercises" as forms of "affective liminal technologies?" These are *frames of practices* whose intended or expected outcomes are not so much *emergent liminal experiences* as the progressive, transitional, yet stabilizing and supporting of a *novel self* as a new and perpetually achievable habitual locus of feelings, actions, and concepts or the recognition of the inability to become one. Perhaps some frames of practices manifest a permanent liminal "betwixt and betweenness" that must be constantly refreshed. Teresa tells us in her autobiography that as a matter of fact her "vision" went on for days while she went about her other activities. And for us having experienced Bernini's sculpture we are, after the first interruptive encounter, also located "betwixt and between" worlds and left to wonder or muse about their dynamic interpretation in the powerful image of a transfigured physicality caught up in a world beyond the physical yet inseparable from it. The sculptural image is a liminal affective technology of the first order, although the world into which as embodied beings we are drawn is permeated by a profound ambiguity with fuzzy edges.

Philip Larkin's Inbetweenness

Another example of the betwixt and betweenness of liminality is exemplified in Philip Larkin's (1955) religiously unsettling poem, "Church Going," which begins laconically, indeed prosaically: "Once I am sure there's nothing going on/I step inside, letting the door thud shut." Going into the church is crossing a threshold, a physical threshold, to be sure, separating the mundane from the non-mundane. In this case, however, it is "another church," taking its place in the nonbeliever Larkin's *practice* of "churchgoing," a practice that is itself "going away." Why did he stop, then, since "the place was not worth stopping for?" He has no answer, he claims: "Yet stop I did: in fact I often do/and always end much at a loss like this/Wondering what to look for." What was he looking for? What do we look for in the liminal space of a church—or temple, shrine, or mosque? Indeed, affirming that superstition, like belief, must die, Larkin wonders what will be left when even *disbelief* has gone. This physical, undistinguished, space, while nonetheless officially a *liminal* space, built for rituals of joining and separation and memorials of them, is filled with "a tense musty unignorable silence"—a persistent "unignorable" *resistance*.

But what then is the point of such visits? Larkin answers: "It pleases me to stand in silence here." Something is made present in that space. Larkin is made present to himself—finds himself made present. The empty church becomes for Larkin a focusing lens, a mediating liminal affective technology that clarifies and raises his sense of existing in a complex, historically laden, meaning field. "A serious house on serious earth it is, /In whose blent air all our compulsions meet, /Are recognized, and robed as destinies." *Blent air*: the church is an affect-laden locus of fused, even contradictory, longings, rememberings, wonderings, and doubtings. It occasions not the *transition* between this world and another but the realization that our existence itself is "blent." With its intertwining of cultural forms and their embedded

meanings, the church functions as a permanent, never obsolescent, *lure* for anyone, as Larkin writes, forever “surprising/A hunger in himself to be more serious,” a place to “grow wise in” and to die. Larkin’s poem does not just frame a liminal experience but is a record—a verbal icon or living image—of a quiet *practice of liminality*. Are we not, once again, betwixt and between spontaneous and devised liminal experiences?

An Emersonian Gloss

In his essay “Self-Reliance,” which can be taken as a kind of gloss on Larkin’s poem, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: “I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching. How far off, how cool, how chaste the persons look, begirt each one with a precinct or sanctuary! So let us always sit” (Emerson, 1992, 145). Larkin, however, is walking around. Nevertheless, he is in a precinct or sanctuary, a liminal space, an “elsewhere” in which he cannot “coolly” dwell—for multiple reasons. Larkin is “begirt” with the affective and conceptual resonances of discarded belief that nevertheless lead him to “churchgoing” rather than “going to church?” As to Emerson, what does he propose that one do in this “begirt sitting” before the sermon begins, that is, before the discursive sermonic elaboration of dogmas? One prays, he says, that is, performs in silent sitting a ritual action. And what is prayer in this Emersonian conception? “Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view” (147). Prayer is the *seeking* of such a point of view. Emerson’s silent church, like Larkin’s, is the physical and imaginative *frame* of the *inner scene* of an open prayer ritual with a paradoxically ambiguous addressee—oneself. Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and Larkin’s “Church Going” are themselves, in their different rhetorical modes, self-initiatory ritual practices. The physical church with its blent air is a stage for their inner rituals of thought. Larkin with his cold and ambiguously indifferent atheism remarks that it is a *habit*, a repeated ritual, to visit empty churches, but in the process of doing so he notes the funded objects, embodiments of affect-laden memories of practices and doctrines, that fill its empty space and make up its “atmosphere” (see Böhme, 2017a, 2017b; Innis, 2020).

Emersonian sitting, taking place in the *affectively charged* and contemplative imagination of “begirt sitters” in the “atmosphere” of an unadorned New England Unitarian meeting house, is also an authentic ritual, just as Larkin’s “churchgoing” is. The linguistic ambiguity of the poem’s title is essential to the poem’s force. Larkin’s poem, filled with *liminal thoughts*, is indeed itself an Emersonian prayer, a ritual contemplation of the facts of life—but it is a contemplation, effected or *initiated*—virtually in the poem and by us reading it—by opening a door or walking around in silence. It is a silence that is permeated by ambivalence and suppressed longing (cf Shusaku Endo’s great novels, *Silence* (2015) and *Deep River* (1995) which are profound explorations of liminal existence).

Life in a convent, visiting empty churches, and sitting in silence contemplating the facts of life from the highest viewpoint are cultural practices meant to lead to, or induce, or maintain specific kinds of experiences, although they need not necessarily “shock” us by effecting an abrupt transition from the world of everydayness to a liminal dimension. Cultural phenomena, considered as objectified forms of semiotic or signifying practices, make up what Umberto Eco in his *A Theory of Semiotics* metaphorically called “Swedish Stall Bars,” that is, supporting structures by means of which we are enabled to perform, indeed invent, different movements and exercises. They function like Polanyi’s fields of *indwelt* subsidiaries upon which we rely to give sense to the world. Polanyi writes:

All thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body. Hence, thinking is not only necessarily intentional, as Brentano has taught: it is also fraught with the roots it embodies. It has a from-to structure. (Polanyi 1966, x; see also Polanyi 1958)

We are attached to and supported by these *indwelt* semiotic stall bars in different ways and at different levels. Liminal experiences can arise in multiple, nondramatic, ways and indeed often occur *within* universes of meaning and not just *between* them. The bars in their full semiotic reality, however, are not uniform in function or type or relative placement but make possible different semiotic movements or *gestures* or *positions* that have individual and collective effects. The effects of these gestures or positions are found not just in their prospective stable outcomes but in the *feel* of our experiences of the *transitions* between movements or positions such as when we are, so to speak, “hanging in the air” after having “lifted off” (the “floor” or “platform” whether horizontal or vertical) but not yet “landed” in a stable position that we can “hold.” Stenner is right to follow James and Whitehead that in life as well as in nature, albeit with different rates of change, there are ultimately no permanently stable positions or platforms supporting or enabling our access to liminal experiences—or experiences of the liminal—whether at the lower thresholds where sentience emerges and ascends in the rhythmic, and at times chaotic, evolving creative advance of nature, or at the upper thresholds where experience goes over into processes of symbolic transformations that give rise to the human world of cultural forms “fraught” with their roots. Stenner and Brown rightly point out that “physical worlds of energy, biological worlds of vitality, psychic worlds of ‘personality’ and cultural worlds of communication co-exist with each and every occasion of human existence” (2009, 210).

These semiotic support bars make up the operative or enabling “thresholds” of sense and of sensemaking that coalesce into the open fields of semiotic actions and sign configurations that create multiple, often conflicting finite semiotic *orders*, the multiple universes or provinces of meaning—or worlds—in which we live. Heidegger called such a world a *Bewandtnisganzheit*, a *referential totality* of existential involvements or assignments. The edges of any such referential totality, as experienced, are not fixed. James was right to claim that they grow by their edges, bleeding into one another as we find ourselves, as Dewey put it, in diverse and overlapping “problematic situations” with different distinctive felt qualities or what

Gernot Böhme called “atmospheres” (Böhme, 2017a, 2017b; Innis, 2020). This “edginess” is a defining feature of liminal experiences. It sets their “tone.”

The Tones of Liminal Thresholds

The notion of a *tone* or distinctive *qualé* or *quality* of experience developed by Peirce is a powerful category for analyzing or determining the nature of liminality and liminal experience, around whose conceptual edges I have been analytically moving. John Dewey considered Peirce’s theory of *quality*, which Peirce linked to affectivity and feeling, to be his most important philosophical discovery (Dewey, 1935; Innis, 2012a, 2012b; Innis, 2016, 2019a, 2019b). He placed it at the center of his pragmatist aesthetics along with James’s theme-field-margin schema. As to feeling, or affectivity or the sense of “being affected,” Peirce writes, it is “simply a quality of immediate consciousness” (1931–1958, Vol1.307). Indeed, Peirce wrote, “of whatever is in the mind in any mode of consciousness there is necessarily an immediate consciousness and consequently a feeling” (CP 1.310). This is the “tone.” Feelings, however, are intentional, bound to a distinctive quality of their “objects”: “the colour of magenta, the odor of attar, the sound of a railway whistle, the taste of quinine, the quality of emotion upon contemplating a fine mathematical demonstration, the quality of feeling of love, etc.” (CP 1.304). These are experiences of the sort we have all had. But the range is startling, as illustrated by the open nature of the “etc.” Is there, one could ask, a specific unified *feeling* or tone of liminality?

The roots of liminality, Stenner argues, are found not so much in discursively accessible contents but in the felt movement between these various universes or finite provinces of meaning, worlds, existentially problematic situations, and so forth. Such a movement involves, as Stenner writes in his opening paragraph, “a temporary suspension of limits that permits a transition to a new set of limits.” But, the question remains, what type of thing is such a “limit?” *Where* in the multileveled psychic continuum is the shock located? *How* do we become aware that we are *within* the at times fateful transitions to new sets of limits or that we are now within *new confines* to which, in *various ways*, we are adjusting and coming to terms, or find ourselves not being able to do so or refuse to do so? What are those ways? Stenner is certainly right at times to foreground, following Schütz who follows James, a sense of “shock”—or at least of “resistance” or “new connection” or “feel”—that makes us aware of “it.” But the “surprise” interruption may be the felt culmination of a slow realization and acceptance that we are in “another place” or have “moved on” from one form of life to another and not necessarily an “event.” Such new confines, and transitions between them, can be found to have a grip on us even if we have had no grip on them.

Problems multiply when the shocks or felt senses of transitions are shared and the links between the sociocultural and psychological are lit up in processes of *relational becoming* with catastrophically negative consequences. Such are the collective slowly dawning experiences undergone in death camps or in the dreadful

experiences of unanchored migratory wandering. I propose, as a heuristic device, to distinguish three principal forms of limits or thresholds of liminal experience that must be considered alongside of Stenner's worlds, finite provinces of meaning, and so forth: (a) affective or "toned" thresholds where we pass from one form of "disposedness" to another, what Heidegger called *Befindlichkeit*; (b) thresholds of action where we pass from one life-determining pattern of behavior or action to another, as in self-sacrificial or existentially perilous life decisions; and (c) conceptual/symbolic thresholds where we pass from one conceptual framework to another. These thresholds, grounded in deep-seated taking on of habits with different inertial properties, are the "psychic spaces" of felt transitions.

All worlds or finite provinces of meaning are structured, in different degrees, by these intertwined thresholds. Different liminal experiences and passages to different worlds are marked by the presence of differently "toned" felt differences. They also can, and often do, conflict with one another in our lived experience, carrying different existential "weight" or "vital import." Teresa was not moved *out* of one place to another. She was moved *in* the place she already dwelt in it, the permanent "betwixt and betweenness" of the Catholic framework that made up the cultural matrix of her life practices and determined her feelings and actions. Larkin's "betwixt and betweenness" were altogether different. He was not inclined, as Emerson was, to consider the cosmos as a Neoplatonic theophany or, as C.S. Peirce proposed, the "poem of God" or a great argument. We can continue to live with systems of affects that are unsettlingly in radical disagreement with our action patterns, conceptual schemes, and our languages of self-description, and the same goes for the conflicts between the other frames. The very felt *tone* or distinctive *quality* of our lives and the occasions of experience that make it up can be discordant, the discordance itself being an index of certain kind of liminality—perhaps best characterized, at the limit, as "existential perplexity," in which one has no place to "come to a stand" but still must, in some sense, bet one's life on finding one or learning to live without.

Extending this notion, we can see why Peirce would assert that "every operation of the mind, however complex, has its absolutely simple feeling, the emotion of the *tout ensemble*" (CP 1.311)—even if we cannot always put a name on it or clearly distinguish it from others. The emotion of the *tout ensemble* manifests *quale* consciousness, including the complex melodic feel of our life's liminal transitions in the serving process. As Peirce put it:

The *quale*-consciousness is not confined to simple sensations. There is a peculiar *quale* to purple, though it be only a mixture of red and blue. There is a distinctive *quale* to every combination of sensations so far as it is really synthesized—a distinctive *quale* to this moment as it is to me—a distinctive *quale* to every day and every week—a peculiar *quale* to my whole consciousness (CP 6.223).

On this conception, what Peirce calls "the course of life" (CP 1.419)—and its *transitional ruptures*—would have its distinctive quality, an important, indeed indispensable, aspect of thinking about oneself and calling oneself to mind in self-appropriating recollection (see Innis, 2019c, 2019d).

Social and cultural psychology, as well as a broad-based philosophy of culture, subject to analysis the lived collective psychic realization of the *felt significant effects* of cultural forms, what Peirce called their “interpretants.” These forms, what Stenner calls “affective mediational technologies” as well as “liminal affective technologies,” give rise to cultural experiences with distinctive lived qualities on the intertwined affective, actional, and ideational levels. As partner disciplines, cultural psychology and philosophy aim to uncover the variations of these “technologies” and the contents of the multiplicity of occasions of experiencing elicited or created by them. While these forms are all mediational devices in their most fundamental senses, they follow diverse material logics and different rhetorical strategies. They inform the ineluctable *universal* transitional character of our lives manifested in what William James called the “infinite iridescences of consciousness” and their irreducible *thisnesses*.

Our lives of deep participation in Whitehead’s creative advance into novelty are “played out” within and by means of the potencies of what we can call nature natur-ing. What Peirce called our “binding time together” (CP 1.377) engenders the incessant emergence of sign configurations that make up the cultural dimensions of *nature natured*. We are bound to time and we are bound to and in need of these mediations. They propel, but only partially control and steer, the self-assembling and self-integrating processes that make up the field of consciousness and the evolving unities of selfhood. These unities are “punctuated,” individually and collectively, by creative ruptures or marked differences of varying intensity, scope, and nature that determine the resultant forms of life stemming from them (see Jones, 1998; Henning, 2005).

What James called the “free water of consciousness” with its eddies and currents and Peirce “the bottomless lake of consciousness” with its forces acting at different depths are, following Bergson, Whitehead, and Dewey, “funded” in multiple ways, filled with vital resonances of all sorts from the thicknesses of the past. We are conditioned by or subject to what Heidegger portentously called our thrownness into existence. Such thrownness marks the fateful uniqueness of each one of us. It encompasses complexes of dynamic psychic and existential “spaces” in which we find ourselves and in which are located the happenings or dimensions of liminal experience in which we pass from one framework to another as well as move around *within* them.

Liminal Nature

Stenner supplies powerful analytical tools for schematizing “the place” of liminality between art and life and in the process raises fundamental questions about meaning-making quite generally, which he explores with depth and precision and philosophical astuteness. I have tried in my remarks to illustrate some analytical ways of engaging, rotating, and perhaps taking them forward or even in a slightly different direction. The realms of art, ritual, and play, Stenner’s core triad of liminal affective

technologies, are cultural forms that embody, articulate, create, or enact, in different ways, the *symbolic pregnancies* or *vital imports* of things that surround us. They make them present to us and us present to them. They catch us up, stop, or modulate our mere passage through experience in a way analogous to the interruptive power of the lure of beauty, which also binds together art, ritual, and play at their deepest levels. The turn to beauty broadens and grounds the lived contexts of liminal experience. The following passage from Hermann Broch's great novel, *The Death of Virgil*, indicates a universal dimension of how it does so.

Broch writes:

Certainly many instances of earthly *beauty* – a song, the twilight sea, the tone of the lyre, the voice of a boy, a verse, a statue, a column, a garden, a single flower – all possess the *divine* faculty of *making man hearken* unto the innermost and outermost *boundaries* of his existence, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that the lofty art of Orpheus was esteemed to have the power of *diverting* the streams from their beds and *changing* their courses, or *luring* the wild beasts of the forest with tender dominance, of *arresting* the cattle a-browse upon the meadows and *moving them to listen*, caught in the dream and enchanted, the dream-wish of all art: the world *compelled* to listen, *ready to receive* the song and its salvation. (1945, Kindle loc 1884; my emphases)

Liminality, with its roots in what Whitehead would call the lure of beauty, spreads over the whole surface of the world, both natural and cultural. It is met with in *rituals of attention* that can take place in, be provoked by, and transform any context of experience in which we encultured beings live. Are we not close here to Iris Murdoch's deceptively simple remark that a ritual is "an outer framework which both occasions and identifies an inner event" (1970, 16), including, as Broch's text celebrates, the outer framework that is nature itself? The task of cultural psychology, as well as of philosophy, is to study the proliferation and contents of these outer frameworks in which we dwell, interpret, and enact our existence and the affective, actional, and conceptual consequences of our dwelling in, being interrupted by, or breaking out of them, and thereby experiencing ourselves as being *put into play* beyond limits.

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Chapter 4

Moral Holidays: The Cases of Expatriates and Nightlife Tourists



Sanna Schlieuwe and Sébastien Tutenges

“What happens in Sunny Beach stays in Sunny Beach.” These words are often whispered, spoken, or screamed by young Danish tourists on vacation on the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria. The slogan frames the nightlife resort, Sunny Beach, as a place of exception where people can indulge in all sorts of excesses without risking their reputation. In theory, but certainly not in practice, everyone at the resort is in it together and remains tightlipped should fellow travelers be seen going to brothels, getting into fights, using drugs, or drinking till they drop (Tutenges, 2013). Along similar but more subtle lines, Danish expatriates in Delhi often tell each other that “India is different,” a place of adventure, where the unexpected is to be expected and where things operate according to their own foreign logic. When they meet at home, work, or in fancy restaurants, the expatriates share stories of India as a realm of its own, with rules and standards different from those that govern life in the West. Newly arrived expatriates are told that the Indian elites have domestic staff working 12-h shifts seven days a week while getting paid very little for it. They are told, moreover, that they too are expected to hire domestic staff—not on the exact same terms as those set by the Indian elites, but on more generous terms with slightly fewer working hours and slightly higher pay. Such constructions of place enable sojourners to break free from old routines and establish new ones, some of which may go against international labor standards (Schlieuwe, 2019a).

These experiences are not unique to expatriates and tourists from Denmark. As evidenced in the literature review below, there is ample documentation that being away from home—be it as an expatriate, a nightlife tourist, a sex tourist, a romance

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tourist, a casual worker, a soldier, or an international student—can open up moments of moral release where people see themselves in a new light, feel less restrained by ordinary role demands, and do things that they would not normally do. It is therefore understandable that the concept of “liminality” is so widely used in the research on travels, travelers, and sojourning (Andrews & Roberts, 2012). Originating in the ritual theory of Arnold van Gennep (1961), this concept refers to the ambiguous experience of being at a threshold between one state and another—between the old and the new, want and plenty, certainty and uncertainty, and being and nothingness. In Victor Turner’s famous formulation, liminality is “a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day- to-day cultural and social states ... a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen” (1979: 465). Indeed, liminality is a powerful analytical tool for illuminating transitional experiences that occur when people are on the move, away from home, or stuck in transition (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012; Cangia, 2018).

This chapter zeros in on one key facet of liminal situations, namely the temporary modification, inversion, or suspension of conventional moral standards in circumstances deemed exceptional. Borrowing from William James (1995), we refer to this state or process as “moral holidays” (Collins, 2008: 243–245), a concept that we use in combination with the theories of collective representations (Durkheim, 1995) and social representations (Moscovici, 2008). The chapter’s empirical foundation comes from an ethnographic study of Danish expatriates in Delhi (Schlieve, 2019b) and a mixed-methods study of young Danish guides and tourists in Sunny Beach (Tutenges, 2012). The chapter is organized in four parts. First, we review the research literature on sojourners and the moral changes they undergo during their travels or stays away from home. Second, we present the theoretical framework. Third, we apply this framework in an analysis of the moral behaviors of Danish travelers in, respectively, Delhi and Sunny Beach. Finally, we offer some conclusions.¹

Research on Sojourners and their (Im)Morality

The research literature abounds with descriptions of how people change when they are away from home in the liminality of being in distant places among foreign people. For example, studies conducted at “Spring Break” resorts in America find a tendency among young tourists to behave in ways that they would not do at home—at least not on a similar scale. One of the earliest studies of spring breakers thus found that “students engaged in more sexual activity and had more new sexual

¹For those interested, detailed accounts of the methods we used in our studies can be found in our PhD dissertations (Schlieve, 2019b; Tutenges, 2010). Put very briefly, Schlieve collected data using a range of ethnographic methods during 13 months of fieldwork in India among Danish expatriates and their domestic staff. Tutenges collected data with ethnographic methods and survey methods for a total of 3 months in Sunny Beach among Danish tourists and guides.

partners during their holiday than in the previous month. Students were also found to engage in heavy alcohol consumption and some drug abuse” (Josiam et al., 1998: 501). These findings are corroborated by studies conducted on nightlife tourists from elsewhere, including Australia (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003), Britain (Bellis et al., 2003), Canada (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997), New Zealand (Ryan et al., 1996), Germany, and Spain (Hughes et al., 2008). Studies conducted on the Spanish island of Ibiza further suggest that British youth working in Ibiza’s nightlife venues are even more likely than tourists to use illicit drugs and have sex during their stay (Hughes et al., 2004; Hughes & Bellis, 2006). Similarly, research on sex tourism (Ryan & Hall, 2001), romance tourism (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), and educational tourism (Brown, 2009) indicates that these types of tourism also afford a sense of liminality, which enables travelers to act in ways that they would not dare at home where they are under the scrutiny of moralizing agents such as spouses, employers, and family members (Brown & Stephan, 2013). All of this may feel liberating, especially for women, who tend to be under more pressure than men to conform to ideals of moderation, beauty, and lifelong marriage (Thomas, 2005).

Similar tendencies have been found among people who travel as “expatriates,” meaning highly skilled individuals who take up temporary work in countries other than their passport country. For example, studies have found that British expatriates in Dubai who are single tend to be ardent consumers of the local nightlife (Walsh, 2007). Western expatriates in Shanghai are also eager participants in the local nightlife and they occasionally behave as though they are above Chinese law (Foote, 2017). Danish and Finish expatriates in India have been found to engage in corrupt activities at their workplaces (Savinetti, 2015). And during their temporary postings abroad, Swedish expatriate families have a tendency to set aside their learned respect for gender equality and family democracy (Boström et al., 2018).

Much the same goes for soldiers who find themselves in the liminal situation of being posted among faraway peoples in foreign lands. Steven E. Woodworth thus writes in a study of the American Civil War that it “was not exposure to combat, per se, that debauched men, but rather the temptations that came when a young man left, often for the first time, the restraining influences of home and community” (2001: 185). For the soldier, “the opportunity to seek imagined pleasures and practice forbidden vices in the relative anonymity of distant places, large groups, and uniform clothing was more than he cared to resist” (2001: 185). The release from the restraints of home is not simply liberating, but also potentially harmful. Consider the atrocities perpetrated by morally injured soldiers, the child abuse perpetrated by sex tourists, and the alcohol-related deaths among nightlife tourists. Indeed, as Thomas puts it, while “norms of behavior at home may be restrictive they may also be protective” (2005: 581).

Representations

This chapter draws on the theories of collective representations (Durkheim, 1995) and social representations (Moscovici, 1981, 2008). These theories concern the way humans navigate their lives through shared representations of the world they inhabit. Representations may be understood as dynamic systems of norms, values, symbols, and beliefs that characterize a social group. They give group members a sense of community while indicating how they should understand and relate to themselves, other people, and the wider world (Rateau et al., 2011). Serge Moscovici (1981, 2008) argues that, rather than inconsequential abstractions, social representations are influential interpretative frameworks that guide and constrain behavior and common-sense experiences. Shared representations of vacations, for example, will frame the way vacationers think, talk, and make sense of their vacation experiences. Importantly, representations are not fixed. They “exist only as long as social members use them as interpretive devices” (Loseke, 1992: 41). Moreover, they do not dictate, but subtly orient experiences, interpretations, and conduct.

Accordingly, when people travel away from home, no matter how far, they never move into unknown territory. Their travels will be informed by age-old, culture-specific representations of what traveling entails, as depicted in guidebooks, brochures, movies, songs, and personal stories (Gillespie, 2006). In a European context, for example, traveling is closely associated with adventure, freedom, and sex (Littlewood, 2001). These associations are of consequence. They orient public perception and create expectations about how to travel, for example as a tourist (Löffgren, 1999) or expatriate (Schlieve, 2019b). Narratives play a crucial role in the production and dissemination of representations (Smith, 2005). This has to do with the unique capacity of narratives to capture our attention, stir us emotionally, and highlight moral conflicts while offering plotlines that indicate courses of action (Presser & Sandberg, 2015).

Cultural psychologists argue that representations are part of a wider cultural canvas that must be taken into account when studying human experience and action (Wagoner et al., 2013, p. ix). They argue, moreover, that there is a dialogical relationship between individuals and their social, material, and historical circumstances (Schlieve et al., 2018). The human psyche is seen as something both internal and interpersonal, private and shared (Valsiner, 2007). Moral values are likewise understood as both private and shared. They are not static, but evolve during people’s life course as they move through different cultural groups and milieus (Shweder & Much, 1987). Moral orders are thus negotiated in the interaction between people, but they cannot be eclipsed since notions of right and wrong are essential for the way people relate to events in their everyday lives (Brinkmann, 2008: 11). In this perspective, we cannot step completely outside of the moral order in which we live, nor can we scrutinize other people’s moral order from a completely neutral standpoint. Morality is always with us, also in liminal situations. Indeed, there is much to suggest that, once established, our morality has considerable firmness to it. It is not completely fluctuating or flexible (Branco & Valsiner, 2012). According to Valsiner

(2014), collective moral frameworks are internalized on a personal level as affective semiotic regulators that guide the orientation of the individual in subtle ways. Wortmeyer and Branco (2016) explain:

The meanings related to what is moral, immoral and indifferent [...] guide feelings and reflections oriented to the future (what could be, what should be, and what must not be), performing a normative function. These affective oppositional tensions (moral ↔ non-moral) orient our feeling-into-the-world and drive our personal constructions related to the environment and our own psyche. Although staying in the background for most of [the] time of our daily lives, values work to the emergence, maintenance, amplification or attenuation of all relations between the person and the environment. (2016: 452)

Moral values are embodied and constitutive of the way people are. Accordingly, when people do something that they consider morally wrong, they will feel this in their bodies—that is, if they are mindful of what they are doing. Indeed, acts can feel wrong or right in a most acute manner. For example, as people undertake or witness acts of transgression, they may feel sick to the stomach, a rush of heat to the face, or that their hair stands on end. Such bodily reactions are expressions of moral-affective evaluations of what is happening. The reactions can be pleasant or unpleasant as well as discreet or overwhelming, depending on the person and situation.

This brings us to the concept of moral holidays. William James (1995) uses this concept to designate the moral relaxation that comes from believing that a higher force is there to take care of things. He writes that this belief may promote the stance that “we have a right ever and anon to take a moral holiday, to let the world wag in its own way, feeling that its issues are in better hands than ours and are none of our business” (1995: 63). This “don’t-care mood,” as James also calls it, can reduce anxieties and worries about the future. Moral holidays thus comprise an often pleasurable sense of letting go and a diffusion of responsibility both for one’s own and other people’s actions (Bandura, 2016). It is important to add, however, that moral holidays are bodily anchored and take place within specific socio-material practice worlds. Individuals who are in a situation of moral holiday have a visceral sense that they can do things that are normally prohibited. It suddenly feels right to do something that ordinarily feels wrong—and what feels right depends not only on the person who has this feeling, but also on the wider socio-material context in which the feeling emerges.

Micro-sociologist Randall Collins uses the concept of moral holidays in his seminal study on violence. He writes that a moral holiday is:

a free zone in time and space, an occasion and a place where the feeling prevails that everyday restraints are off; individuals feel protected by the crowd, and are encouraged in normally forbidden acts. Often there is an atmosphere of celebration, or at least exhilaration; it is a heady feeling of entering a special reality, separate and extraordinary, where there is little thought for the future and no concern for being called to account (2008: 243).

Situations of moral holiday may give people an impression that everything is permissible and all can do as they please. This impression is an important drive for the loosening of normal restraints, such as restraints on violent behavior (Weenink, 2013). However, situations of moral holiday are marked by their own sort of morality. For example, during the Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans, many revelers

feel that they can indulge in deviance without risking their reputation, but the way they perform deviances is guided by context-specific rules that are upheld by threats of punishment (Redmon, 2001; Fjær & Pedersen, 2015). The festive disorder is ordered along lines of dos and don'ts, such as do drink copiously, but don't drink to the point of getting seriously injured. As David Redmon puts it, during Mardi Gras and other celebrations people find themselves in a symbolic space of leisure, which is "associated with powerful representations that structure public perceptions and provide normative instructions on how to perform playful deviance in these settings" (2001: 27–28). It may be that the path of virtue is narrow, but so is the path of vice (Tutenges, 2010).

Moral Holidays Away from Home

Relocating into prestigious jobs and affluent neighborhoods, Danish expatriates in India travel not only geographically, but also across social and economic strata. They experience a personal boost in their economic and social position while simultaneously encountering the poverty and social inequality present in India. Beggars with leprosy, children in rags, and families living under flyovers are common sights on the streets of Delhi—a reality far removed from everyday life in the affluent welfare society of Denmark, and one that many Danish expatriates initially have a hard time coming to terms with (Schlieve, 2017). Confronting these overt disparities is made all the more complex by the fact that they themselves are now part of the elite, employing full-time domestic staff, often for the first time in their life. For many, the domestic worker becomes a concrete symbol of the "poor other" that they must deal with while living in India. New moral uncertainties emerge continuously in the liminality of their overseas homes. However, there are also many instances where the affective moral framework one might expect would guide expatriates through this new reality seems absent, or is deliberately transgressed, as part of the traveling rite. We will provide examples of this in the following.

First, an example is given on how temporary modification of moral standards can occur in the form of lack of attention. Eya, a young professional, moved to India twice. During her first 6-month sojourn in the country she moved into a shared apartment with two Danish colleagues. They had taken over the apartment from their predecessor expatriate team, and as part of the deal they inherited a part-time maid, who came by 6 days a week to clean and do the dishes. As Eya recalls:

I did not think about it at all (...) No moral reaction whatever. No reflection or anything! We were really busy. Never at home. We seldom met her [the maid] in person. Only if we were sick. She had her own key, so she could come and go. I think that was part of it, that we never met her; and the fact that we had just taken her over from our predecessors. I think you somehow just assume that everything works (...). It was so exciting to get the thing with India going. Starting our project here. We got a lot of friends. We were out a lot. Really busy with a lot of things. (...) I must admit that I am a bit embarrassed about it now.

Out of sight, out of mind seems to be the theme in Eya's recollections. Her focus is on the exciting things that unfolded with the move abroad. In general, a major motivation for Danes moving out to India is to experience "something different." When explaining the reasons behind their decision to relocate, they rank this pursuit of experience higher than the possible effects on their career or job ambitions (see also Suter, 2019). Furthermore, as Eya points out, she had "inherited" (Schliewe, 2019a) her part-time maid from a previous expatriate team. Taking over domestic workers from colleagues or other expatriates creates an immediate feeling of trust in the existing arrangement. For a newcomer, expatriate peers appear more familiar, and thus more trustworthy, than the foreign locals. Moreover "old" expatriates are also perceived as seniors to the setting and thus more familiar with work rules and regulations—even though this is often not the case. The fact that most expatriates in Delhi get their domestic staff from other expatriates means that not only are domestic workers circulated from one generation of expatriates to the next, but also social representations about what being an expatriate employer of domestic staff in India entails are constantly recirculated within the expatriate community.

The geographical move into the liminal space of expatriation triggers alternative interpretations of one's actions. During her second sojourn in India—a year after her first—Eya moved in with her Indian boyfriend. Even though she recalled her reactions and actions in relation to her first maid as having been slightly ignorant, she continued to participate in actions she knew she would not feel comfortable with in other settings. Eya spoke about how she and her boyfriend would often call over the domestic worker of her in-laws, who lived nearby, late in the evenings to do their dishes. While she laughingly noted that it would be "*totally out of place [in Denmark] to ask someone to come by for just 20 minutes of work,*" she felt that it was "allowed" in her current setting in India. The liminal character of her situation opened up to new ways of thinking and relating to other people.

The kinds of dynamics outlined above are illustrative of how expatriates in Delhi consistently neglect what is normal practice in their own countries—as well as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) international labor standards. While it is perhaps not surprising that many Danes have no idea what ILO labor standards entail, the 5-day, 37-h work week is the cornerstone of the Danish labor market and known by heart by all Danish workers. In spite of this, Danes in India consistently employ their domestic staff for 8–10 h a day, 6 days a week, with some contractually obliged to work well in excess of 50 hours. The possibility of employing people only 5 days a week seems completely absent, and if asked about it, Danes are often quick to justify their current practices. For example, when asked whether it was fair for his Indian domestic staff to work 6-day weeks, Anders promptly replied: "*No, they should not, not work Saturdays. No, but maybe it is just me. It gets so dirty on Sundays if there is no cleaning on Saturday, and there's also the issue of [making] the food.*" Having full-time staff (including on Saturdays) is often seen as a part of the "expatriate experience." Anders and his wife Anne had recently changed their contract with their driver to include only one rest day a month—a clear transgression not just of general practices in Denmark, but also, although they were not aware of this, of the ILO standard of work hours and rest time (ILO, 2020). Anders

and Anne simply reasoned that the extra paycheck was fair compensation for any inconvenience to the driver and his family.

Abandonment of prior work standards is made possible by the liminal status of expats and their social representations of life in Delhi. Newcomers look to the practices of the international expatriate community, and adhering to the seniors' experiences is their principal guideline, without questioning whether the representations in circulation are comparable to existing laws and international standards. Accordingly, the international expatriate community becomes the main mediator of what being an expatriate (and employer of domestic workers) in India entails (Schlieve, 2019a). Key representations shared by expatriates in Delhi include: "India as a place where no laws are followed," "Indian domestic workers as different in their working habits to Western workers," and "expatriates as generally more exemplary employers than their local counterparts." All of these are ultimately instructing the Danes that they are in a liminal situation that allows them to behave differently to how they would have behaved in Denmark. All very convenient for a newly arrived expatriate eager to experience a different way of life.

The temporary time frame is central to the experience of expatriate sojourns. Explicitly knowing that one arrives today and leaves tomorrow (Simmel, 1971) symbolically places the individual in a different relationship to their current environment than if they had intended to settle more permanently (Schlieve, 2018; Levitan, 2018). Consider the following quotation from Anne, when she was a year into her family's 4-year stay in India (Schlieve, 2019b, p.13):

We are not going to live like this for the rest of our lives. That is one hundred percent sure. This is how it is right now. Then [after this posting] we will be like we were before, where we might have to clean our own toilets. (...). [Now] you can take it as an experience. Just like when you go on vacation and stay at a very fancy hotel that is more expensive than you normally can afford, knowing that this is a luxury you can only give yourself for a brief period.

So even though 4 years could be considered a long time period in many other situations, the fixed time frame ultimately places Anne in a transient position vis-à-vis her host country, where she ought to enjoy the advantages it gives her. It is not the case that Anne (and her husband) are not morally challenged by many of their experiences in India. They are, and they often have long discussions regarding how best to take care of their staff. But at the same time, on a certain level they still experience themselves as visitors to India, and thus feel themselves to be exempt when it comes to more complicated or long-term responsibilities in relation to Indian society.

All of the aspects discussed above—the temporary move, the fixed time frame, and the turn to representations within the expatriate community—help to set expatriates momentarily free from some of the moral ambiguities of living in India as a privileged, rich, white person. The symbolic realm associated with temporary migration can create an embodied experience of liminality that is deeper than mere verbal justifications, since it can prevent discomfort from emerging in the first place (Valsiner, 2014).

Holidaymakers and expatriates draw on representations of the liminal character of their sojourns. Some of these representations serve as cues to be adventurous and take advantages while being away from home. Such symbolic reorientation of their situation makes it possible to retain a stable moral experience of themselves while engaging in activities that in their home country would most likely cost moral hangovers. Accordingly, expatriates in Delhi may be able to transgress existing norms and values without experiencing themselves as morally changed. Although they happily state that relocating to India involves a welcomed process of learning, none of them wish to change their moral standards. On the contrary: feeling sadness and guilt at the sight of homeless families living under flyovers, for example, is often taken by the expatriates as a sign that they are still “the same” as before, that their moral compass is intact, and that they have not become morally depraved by their journeys (Schlieve, 2017).

Danish youth in Sunny Beach also construct their stay abroad as one of liminality, but the moral changes they undergo tend to have a more explicit, even theatrical, character. Theirs is a “devised liminality” (Stenner, 2017) in the sense that it is purposefully designed to create moments of histrionic release from ordinary norms and rules. Consider the way they relate to the legal drug alcohol. As reported elsewhere (Tutenges, 2012), Danish youth drink much more in Sunny Beach than they do at home. One young tourist, Amalie, gave the following explanation for this: “At home you have your drunken moments. But down here you are like really, really drunk to the point of getting all messed up in your head and all that. You would not be like that at home. There you would be like, ‘Well, I have to go to work tomorrow. I have to go home and get some sleep.’” (2012: 138). In the liminal context of the holiday, to get “messed up” is considered a good thing because it helps overcome the ingrown habits of moderation and self-censorship. Such drinking may have unpleasant side effects, such as hangovers, but the pain of these is outweighed by the histrionic moments of drunken release in the company of good friends. These moments may generate immediate pleasure and are commonly referred to as “fun,” “awesome,” and so forth; however, they may also be of long-term value because they provide material for stories that can be shared later in life. As another tourist, Kathrine, put it, “When I turn 30 years old, I want to be able to think to myself, ‘I don’t regret anything that I did. I tried out all the things that had to be tried out’.” She explained, moreover, that she would like to be able to tell her future kids: “‘Listen, I was part of it, and I have tried it!’ Then they will think, ‘Damn, my mother was really cool when she was young’” (2012: 142). Kathrine was aware, in other words, that her drunken exploits in Sunny Beach formed excellent storytelling material. She took mental notes as well as pictures and videos of the “crazy” things she and her friends “tried out,” knowing that this documentation was important for a number of purposes, including to remember what had happened, build good stories about it, bond with friends through storytelling, boast about daring deeds, and construct an edgy self-identity (Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). Indeed, what happens in places like Sunny Beach rarely “stays” in these places, but tends to have a long and far-flung narrative afterlife.

Buying sexual services is part of the “fun” for some tourists in Sunny Beach. A survey study (Hesse & Tutenges, 2011) conducted among young tourists from Denmark found that nearly half of the male respondents had visited a strip club during their vacation while 12.5% of them had paid for sex. These numbers were significantly lower for female tourists, none of whom had paid for sex while 8.4% reported that they had visited a strip club during their vacation. When asked to explain their purchase of sex, lap dances, and strip shows, many emphasized that they had never done so before and that it had to be “tried out,” at least once in life. In general, the goal was not sexual pleasure, but the long-term satisfaction of having yet another “crazy” story to share with friends. Indeed, part of the reason young tourists drink heavily, purchase sexual services, and commit crime is that they want to build a personal stock of transgressive stories. Nightlife destinations like Sunny Beach facilitate the construction of exactly such stories. These destinations have a powerful reputation of being “Sin Cities,” and this reputation, combined with other factors such as loud music, excited crowds, and ubiquitous alcohol consumption, makes it easier for the individual visitor to take a moral holiday and joyfully participate in the collective effervescence (Tutenges, 2013, 2015).

There is, in other words, an intimate relationship between acts of moral transgression and representations of moral transgression. Transgressions may inspire stories that may inspire transgressions, and so the narrative snowball rolls. This is not to suggest that stories cause people to act in a specific way. Rather, the suggestion is that stories are an important “sense-making cultural form that links actions to cognitive, ethical, and value systems” (Smith, 2005: 18). People draw inspiration from the stories that prevail in their social environments to understand their world, make moral assessments, and decide what to do next (Presser & Sandberg, 2015). Accordingly, when expatriates and tourists exchange stories about the liminality of their current situation, this provides cues and clues for their moral judgments and courses of action. They collaborate in constructing a heady feeling of “moral holiday” where “everyday restraints are off” and “normally forbidden acts” can be enjoyed (Collins, 2008: 243; see also Diken & Laustsen, 2005).

Conclusion

Collective representations of expatriates, tourists, and other sojourners influence people when they are away from home. These representations have a long history. They revolve around relatively stable binary codes that associate home with rigid rules, regulations, roles, and routines, as opposed to the away-from-home, which is associated with the bending or breaking of rules, regulations, roles, and routines (Lévi-Strauss, 1974; see also Osbaldiston, 2012). There is a dialectical relationship between these opposites. Accordingly, the way we understand home will shape the way we understand the not-home, just like our routinized behavior at home will guide our performance of nonroutine away from home. However, the binary codes that surround sojourning do not influence sojourners in any simple or deterministic

way. These codes help sojourners make sense of their situation, but in a much more ambiguous manner than many of the classical structuralists would have it. Binary codes are always open for interpretation and subject to situational modification (Collins, 2004: 25–30). They do not make unequivocal distinctions between good and bad. Home is not unequivocally bad, for example, but being stuck at home forever certainly may generate bad outcomes. Similarly, binary codes do not unequivocally indicate what to do and what not to do. However, when they are evoked in the medium of narratives, they do form powerful suggestions for potential courses of action and ways of being in the world (Smith, 2005: 17). Narratives may be understood as inspirational instruments that influence people in far-reaching yet unpredictable ways, thus contributing “to *making and shaping* the world” (Sandberg, 2016: 4).

Therefore, when expatriates and tourists share stories suggesting that they are in a liminal situation, this may encourage them to take a moral holiday and do things that they would not normally do, such as purchasing sexual services or breaking international labor laws. Hence the classic, self-forgiving lines of reasoning: “it was a holiday and we had to make the most of it,” “I was drunk, so it wasn’t really me,” and so forth. Importantly, to be on a moral holiday is not to be free of all restraints or lose all moral bearings; rather, it is to temporarily loosen or set aside conventional restraints and assume alternative ones. This can enable creative experimentations with new ideas, new behaviors, and new roles, but without necessarily generating fundamental changes in the self-understanding of those involved. In the case of Danish expatriates in India, for example, their embrace of new moral standards while abroad does not mean that they experience themselves as morally changed. They consider their altered morality in India as place specific and temporary, expecting that things will turn back to normal once they return home.

As is the case with liminal situations more broadly, moral holidays are often in the “subjunctive mood” of “maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire” (Turner 1986: 42; O’Grady, 2012). This mood and mode of being is not one-sidedly bad, and it is not something that can be done away with. We humans have a recurrent need to let go of everyday restraints and live differently in our body, mind, and social relationships (Durkheim, 1995). Letting go of everyday restraints always entails some sort of risk, but can also be potentially edifying. It is important for our well-being and allows for social experimentations that may lead to durable changes in the way we live and relate to each other—sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better.

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Chapter 5

On the Way: Pilgrimage and Liminal Experiences



Zachary Beckstead

In the course of our lives, we construct and organize our worlds to provide continuity, stability, and a sense of predictability; yet we also shake up our normal routines and rhythms for the sake of novelty, intrigue, and transformation. As Ernst Boesch (1997), pp. 79–103) frames our situation, we oscillate between longing for home (*heimweh*) and for what is far away (*fernweh*). We are striving for both familiarity and foreignness and our experience is constantly changing and transforming—stability is temporary and always open for change. Given the irreversibility of time (Valsiner, 2014a), human experience is transitory (i.e., in the process of becoming) and we cultivate stability and alternatively find ways to undo this stability. Human movement can achieve both goals; stability is cultivated through recurrent events and activities and instability is achieved by cutting the threads that give continuity to our everyday lives as we seek an adventure (Simmel, 1959/1911). Movement, therefore, whether it is through a visit to the market or the journey to a distant location or through watching a movie, is at the core of our lives. Yet some forms of our movement—geographical or imagined—set up conditions for social and personal transformation (Beckstead, 2012). Pilgrimage exemplifies the dynamics of the *strivingly moving self* (Valsiner, 2004) as human movement towards distant and unknown settings sets up a dialogic encounter of the psyche of the person with complex, multilayered cultural worlds that lead to the transformation of both.

This chapter explores pilgrimage from the lens of liminality. Pilgrimage is a quintessential liminal activity, a *world within and between worlds* (Stenner, this volume, p. 3). As I will discuss in this chapter, pilgrimages entail personal and communal journeys onto and through a culturally organized path leading to an extraordinary place (e.g., a holy shrine, national memorial, sacred river) and then back home. The expectation is that the returning traveler is not the same as when they

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left. This chapter, therefore, explores the transforming experience of pilgrims and the dynamic interplay between the depths of the psyche and the cultural organization of the pilgrimage setting. The first section provides a brief overview of pilgrimage, a complex and historically religious-spiritual phenomena rooted in a movement, place, belief, and transformation (Scriven, 2014). The second section examines Victor Turner's theoretical framework which emphasizes the processual nature of social phenomena and liminality. Next, I bring Turner's ideas into dialogue with Paul Stenner's theory of liminality, which itself influenced Turner, that emphasizes how liminality involves the temporary suspension of limits (Stenner, this volume; Stenner, 2017a). The final section will explore the *pilgrimage path or route* as a culturally organized arena where pilgrimages construct meaning out of social messages encountered *along the way*. How limits, boundaries, and borders are managed and regulated can be understood as key liminal affective devices in pilgrimages—they guide the physical and affective relating of the pilgrim and this emerging feeling feeds forward into their encounters with their environment. Ultimately, my objective is to show how physical movement through the environment is intertwined with psychological transformations and how limits, boundaries, and borders are socially managed and personally negotiated and thus contribute to the affectively charged and transformative experiences of pilgrims.

Overview of Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages are of ancient origin and likely predate the emergence of the world religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Today, pilgrimages are thriving and drawing millions of people to far-flung centers from places like Jerusalem, Mecca, the River Ganges, Lourdes, and Santiago de Compostela to battlefields, New Age settings, shrines marking the loss of a beloved celebrity, and even tourist attractions like Disneyland (Gatewood & Cameron, 2004; Reader, 2007; Rountree, 2006). Pilgrimages are enduring and endearing journeys motivated, in part, by belief and composed of a complex network of places, settings, routes, material goods, social actors occupying various social roles, and cultural, religious, spiritual, and political ideas in dynamic interrelationships (Beckstead, 2012; Scriven, 2014; Turner & Turner, 1978).

While pilgrimages inspire millions of devotees, wanderers, and seekers every year, scholarly interest in pilgrimage has also increased in recent years. Scholars from diverse fields—anthropology, religious studies, tourism, history, geography, and psychology—have brought their respective conceptual tools to illuminate different aspects of pilgrimage (see Scriven, 2014, for an overview of this topic). Human geographers have drawn on theories of space, place, and identity (Gintsburg, 2018, p. 206–208) and mobility studies highlight the motion-centric and embodied nature of pilgrimage with an interest to “... move beyond descriptive accounts by pushing deeper into the interaction between movement, people, and places” (Scriven, 2014, p. 254). Indeed, current research into pilgrimage largely eschews past research that pivoted around a positivistic approach quantifying the number of

pilgrims and assessing the relationship routes in the 1960s, and overarching anthropological theories of pilgrimage (Scriven, 2014, p. 253). Instead, current scholars are more inclined to expand the focus beyond world religions and to interrogate the lived experience of pilgrims and emphasize the corporeal aspects of pilgrimage. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, pilgrimage would seem to be a particularly rich topic for transdisciplinary efforts (Stenner, 2017a, pp. 1–6), and fits cultural psychology's priority to develop theory out of concrete experiences by integrating the *general laws* from *particular and contextual* lived experiences (Valsiner, 2014b).

One of the most challenging aspects of studying pilgrimage begins with any attempt to define pilgrimage. Differentiating pilgrimages from other kinds of journeys (e.g., tourist visits, business trips) is complicated because of the shared elements of these forms of travel. For instance, there are certainly parallels between the person visiting a theme park and devotee of Christianity visiting Lourdes; both individuals have traveled often a great distance and are engaging in a social activity that holds personal and public significance, and both cross into culturally and socially organized spaces and they engage in ritual activities designed to promote moving experiences. Observing the complexity of the phenomenon and range of definitions, Scriven (2014, p. 251) argues that pilgrimages have four interrelated characteristics: movement, place, belief, and transformation. Understanding pilgrimage as comprised of these dynamically interlinked parts allows us to explore pilgrimages within and beyond religious traditions (Gintsburg, 2018) and to focus on the *transforming experience* of the pilgrim mediated through their beliefs, values, and physical movement, and through the cultural organization of the pilgrimage route and center (Beckstead, 2012; Slavin, 2003).

At the heart of pilgrimage is change and transformation, both temporary and enduring. The natural landscape is transformed into a place of symbolic (i.e., religious, cultural, political) value through an event—contact with lives of spiritual figures, heavenly manifestations, or death of a beloved celebrity (Beckstead, 2012). Ordinary places become extraordinary places imbued with a kind of charisma to evoke awe and wonder (Turner & Turner, 1978). People make these often long and challenging journeys because of the desire for some form of transformation—to change from unhealthy to healthy, sinful to saved, or spiritually lost to spiritually settled, for example. Along the way, the pilgrim prepares for and anticipates their arrival at their destination, and their journey entails social interaction, personal reflection, fatigue, and rituals. Far from being simply one chain in the sequence of events, the journey *to* the setting is understood as an end and not simply a means to an end. Pilgrimages involve passages into new worlds—separate and distinct from the ordinary environments in many ways—that facilitate psychosocial transformations. By traveling to a distant place, as noted above, the pilgrim expects to return changed. How do journeys from point A to B and back become momentous events and the context for personal and social transformations? How do beliefs, places, and movement transform our experience and provide the context for more enduring (i.e., ontogenetic) forms of development? Victor Turner's conceptual framework still provides a valuable resource and starting point for understanding how pilgrimages continue to be transformative experiences for those making these journeys today.

Victor Turner and Liminality

Victor Turner's work on pilgrimage is well known today and his contributions to liminality and *communitas* are still discussed and debated widely (Scriven, 2014). Turner was trained in Emile Durkheim's structuralist approach; yet his fieldwork in Zambia revealed to him his educational limitations (Szakolczai, 2009, p. 142). Turner drew heavily on Arnold van Gennep (1909) and his work on *rites of passage* and adopted a processual view of social reality¹ as comprised of structures and states that undergo transitions. By structures, Turner referred to the interrelated arrangement of social institutions and social positions that individuals perform (Turner, 1974a, p. 274). He defined "state" more broadly as pertaining to social statuses (e.g., legal status, profession, rank) or health, psychological, and emotional states that a person might be experiencing at any moment. These states include "any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized" (Turner, 1974a, 1974b, p. 46). However, people are constantly moving and transitioning between social structures and pragmatic activities (i.e., home to work) and states (e.g., health to sickness). Human living, for Turner, alternated between periods of structure and freedom, and states and transition between states (Turner, 1969, p. 97).

Importantly for van Gennep and later Turner, even though life involved a series of movements between different social structures and statuses in our everyday practical realities, some transitions involved a passage from one status to another (e.g., child to adult, student to graduate, or single to married) that was marked through a ceremony or ritual. According to van Gennep, there are three phases in a *rite of passage*: separation, transition, and incorporation. Briefly, separation involves symbolic actions that symbolically detach the individual or group from the community. This separation is followed by the liminal phase where the person is "between and betwixt" *what was* and *what may be*. The culminating phase involves rituals that mark the new state or status of the individual or group and reincorporates them back into the fold of the social order. There are many examples² of rites of passage that

¹Turner's dramaturgical approach is informed by process thought that conceptualizes social organizations, ritual systems, and symbols as dynamic, fluid, and in the process of reformation and reorganization. For Turner, social and cultural systems are constituted by a network of symbols that constantly change over time (Turner, 1974b, p. 54). He continues with a statement that has resonance with many theories in contemporary cultural psychology:

"They [symbols] gain and lose meanings – and meaning in a social context always has volitional and emotional dimensions – as they "travel through" a single rite or work of art, let alone through centuries of performance, and they are aimed at producing effects on the psychological states and behavior of those exposed to them or obliged to use them for their communication with other human beings" (ibid., p. 55)

²One modern example in large-scale societies is the passage of individuals through college, as these individuals are often physically separated from their home community as they leave for college and live with similar transitional others. They are in a liminal period where they take on the temporary identity of "college student" and engage in work that is both serious and playful and therefore quite different from work that they will engage in after leaving college. This is also a period of relative freedom where individuals are free to experiment with future possible career

occur throughout the life course, e.g., birth, transition from childhood to adulthood, and death, and van Gennep drew on cases from a wide range of cultures. Turner's theoretical and empirical work recognizes the processual character of rituals as events that are unfolding in space and time. These are events or happenings that one goes through and through which the person or group is transformed. Turner viewed van Gennep's framework as critical to understanding how both social and psychological changes occur and he saw the unfolding process of rites of passage as fundamental to "... the structure of lived experience" (Szokolczai, 2009, p. 147).

Turner developed, in particular, van Gennep's notion of the transitional period. To further elaborate, Turner understood this phase as the intermediate phase between separation and incorporation where "... few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the proceeding or subsequent profane social structures" (Turner, 1974b, p. 57). This passage from the old to new status and state of being occurs often, though not necessarily, through a passage across space, as the case of pilgrimage illustrates, and through time as an unfolding process. During the liminal phase, the ritual subject³ is separated from these powerful structures governing everyday life and passes through a realm that has few of the characteristics of the previous and upcoming social states. These subjects lose their social status and power, yet they gain a kind of freedom, a "sacred power of the meek, weak, and humble," and they are no longer subjected to the constraints of their social world (ibid, p. 59). This gives the liminal phase its ludic quality and potential for the emergence of a novel reorganization of life. As Turner explains,

Liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic events. The factors of culture are isolated, insofar as it is possible to do this with multivocal symbols (that is, with the aid of symbol-vehicles – sensorily perceptible forms) that are each susceptible not of a single but of many meanings. Then they may be recombined in numerous, often grotesque ways, grotesque because they are arrayed in terms of possible rather than experienced combinations – thus a monster disguise may combine human, animal, and vegetable features in an 'unnatural' way, while the same features may be differently, but equally 'unnaturally' combined in a painting or described in a tale. In other words, in liminality people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar moments (ibid, p. 60)

Turner particularly conceived the liminal phase as crucial to the emergence of novelty and creativity in both social and personal realms. Ritual events transform our ordinary experience of time creating a temporal gap or interval. During this interval, individuals who are undergoing liminal experiences encounter cultural forms that were widely dispersed across many areas of life that are "... now bound, or cathected, in the complex systems of pivotal, multivocal symbols and myths, numinous systems which achieve great conjunctive power" (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 250). As

paths and engage in activities that are typically discouraged. Graduation ceremonies mark the successful culmination of the passage these individuals go through and symbolically transform the individual from "student" to "graduate."

³Turner uses the term *liminar* to refer to ritual subjects (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 249).

logical, temporal, and practical constraints are temporarily removed, individuals encounter this rich web of familiar symbols in new settings or new configurations and imaginatively “play” with these forms by recombining them in novel ways.

The psychological and social facets of liminality are captured in the following passage as Turner argues that liminal experiences entail

... the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, or nation, or an affiliation with some pervasive social category such as class, caste, sex-or age-division. Sociocultural systems drive so steadily towards consistency that human individuals only get off these normative hooks in rare situations in small-scale societies, and not very frequently in large-scale ones. Nevertheless, the exigencies of structuration itself, the process of containing new growth in orderly patterns or schemata, has an Achilles heel. This is the fact that when persons, groups, sets of ideas, etc., move from one level or style of organization or regulation of the interdependence of their parts or elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of “margin” or “limen,” when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun. There is an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in the balance, like the moment when the trembling quarterback with all the “options” sees the very solid future moving menacingly towards him! (Turner, 1974b, p. 75).

This paragraph raises at least two important points. First, as described above, socio-cultural systems are structured and patterned in ways that constrain possibilities and regulate social relationships. Liminality involves removing limits (i.e., “these normative hooks”) that tightly structure human living to a realm of potentiality. However, although Turner contrasts the normatively organized and stable patterns of life with the liminal or anti-structural tendencies, this does not mean that these events and experiences enable absolute freedom since they do not involve “a fantasy-rejection of structural ‘necessities’” (p. 75). Cultural forms are present and critical for the transition through liminal experiences given how they contribute to affectively charged experiences (see below). Second, this movement occurs by passing through temporal boundaries between the past and future, and thus “... liminality is not only *transition* but also *potentiality*, not only ‘going to be’ but also ‘what may be’” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 3). Yet, for sociocultural institutions and worlds driving towards consistency, this gap is dangerous and evokes strong structuralizing tendencies that counteract the freedom engendered by liminal activities (Turner, 1974b, p. 60). Liminal experiences, therefore, may alter the social order or they may serve to further instantiate the social order in which they temporarily upend and bind the subject more tightly to this order.

Pilgrimage as a liminal cultural activity. Turner initially developed his theory of liminality⁴ in the context of rituals that occurred in small-scale, pre-industrialized

⁴Turner makes the distinction between liminal and *liminoid* or *quasi-liminal* phenomena, something that has largely been ignored. To put it succinctly, *liminality* is marked by obligation—there is normative weight for the ritual subject to participate in the ritual activity. In contrast, *quasi-liminal* or *liminoid* reflects nonobligatory activities, and contains elements of leisure. *Liminoid*

societies, in particular with the Ndembu of Zambia (see Turner, 1969), prior to turning his attention to pilgrimage. He viewed pilgrimage as similar to the rituals he explored in small-scale societies and an important liminal experience for ordinary religious believers, in contrast to the adherents who removed themselves to the periphery through monastic life. For Turner, these lengthy and arduous journeys became the means through which individuals could externalize the interior journey made by mystics and communion with the numinous realm. Indeed, as Turner noted, “if mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 7). Pilgrimages also afforded individuals from all ethnic, occupational, and geographic backgrounds to “get off the normative hooks” of society and experience the potentiality of *what may be* that is constrained through social structures or rendered invisible in everyday life (ibid., p. 3). In addition to personal transformation, this movement, symbolic and physical in the case of pilgrimage, away from the structures of everyday life enabled what Turner called *communitas*⁵ or new social relationships free from the regulation of social structures and norms; instead these relationships, albeit fleetingly, are marked by egalitarianism, directness, spontaneity, immediacy, and concreteness (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 250).

While emphasizing the positive and ludic qualities of pilgrimage, he viewed pilgrimage systems as unfolding in a dialectic of openness and constraint. Pilgrimage initially is a spontaneous and free act made by individuals and during this initial flourishing, social interactions are not regulated by normative social structures. However, over time, the social structures tend to overwhelm and “... domesticate the primitive, spontaneous modes of peregrination, with their freedom of *communitas*, into orderly pilgrimage, more susceptible to ecclesiastical control” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 32). Turner, therefore, describes how existential or spontaneous communal experiences are almost inevitably transformed into ordered social systems (normative *communitas*), with attempts to objectively describe and explain the experience (ideological *communitas*) (see Turner, 1969, p. 132, for further elaboration). Yet, Turner also recognized that the experience of the pilgrim oscillated between openness and constraint during the transitional period. Similar to any ritual, the completion of a successful pilgrimage is mediated through following the path others have set (Szakolczai, 2009, p. 149). Drawing on his sociodramatic approach, Turner therefore differentiated staged from unstaged liminality, the former referring to the ways many liminal experiences are socially guided and socially mediated (Turner, 1982). This distinction has been further developed by Stenner with his elaboration of these concepts through his notions of spontaneous and devised liminality, and has significant relevance for understanding the transformational facets of pilgrimages.

phenomena develop from religious rituals and the sacred realm, and exist in the margins or boundaries of central economic and political structures (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 253).

⁵Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address these critiques, please see Coleman, 2002; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; St. John, 2001, for a critique of Turner’s conceptualization of *communitas*.

Spontaneous and Devised Liminal Experiences

Paul Stenner's theory of liminality is multifaceted and critical for understanding how liminal experiences become transformative events. While certainly far from identical, Stenner and Victor Turner's work on liminality have a number of affinities, which is not surprising given that they both draw, in part, from van Gennep's scholarship on *rites of passage* and process thinking (see Stenner, 2017a, pp. 173–191). Thus, for Turner and Stenner, liminality involves the transition between states and status, or in Stenner's terms, worlds of *relative stability* (Stenner, this volume, p. 4). Similar to Turner, Stenner points to the structuralizing tendencies that transform our fluid and changing experience into something more stable and ultimately more controllable and predictable (see Stenner, this volume, footnote 24). Briefly, this structured world is not stationary, but stable since it pivots around familiar routines, social positions, and activities. We can say that living coheres into a rhythm—there is movement, but that movement involves recurring activities and structures. Liminality, on the other hand, pushes against the structuralizing tendencies as limits are suspended; that is, the forms of everyday living that includes social constraints, rules, routines, rhythms, and other patterned activities that anchor our lives and regulate everyday experiences are temporarily removed.

Building on Turner's distinction between staged and unstaged liminality, Stenner makes a distinction between two forms of liminal experiences. The first occurs when something “happens to us” largely outside of our control and manipulations (e.g., natural disaster, war, death of a loved one) that punctures our ordered lives (Stenner, 2017a, p. 15). In these situations, we are thrown into experiences where we become untethered and out of joint from our everyday worlds. In contrast to these spontaneous liminal experiences, Stenner points to the ways that we usher ourselves into liminal situations and experiences. These *devised liminal experiences* are culturally organized and mediated through technologies and social practices—religion, ritual, and play are basic technologies—that are “abstracted from daily practical reality” (this volume, p. 9). Marriage ceremonies, books, plays, haunted houses, museums, etc., for Stenner, are *liminal affective technologies* that facilitate transitions from one state or experience to another by “amplifying imaginative and emotional processes and linking these cultural experiences to actual processes of psychosocial transformation” (Stenner, this volume, p. 10). Liminal devices function, through different means, to detach the person from the current experience, state, or status/position and assist them in the transitory experience or passage to another experience, state, or position/status.

Turner and Stenner both emphasize how liminality is the experience of the interval, the upheaval, and the temporary unraveling of the previously stable system before a new system emerges that gains stability, at least for a finite period. Liminality is the period when “everything hangs in the balance” (p. 19), as Turner phrased it, and there is a period of possibility. What was once certain and firm is now uncertain and malleable; “something might happen to one that alters the very core of one's being” (Szokolczai, 2009, p. 148). By transgressing limits, we

individually or collectively transition into this realm of unbounded potentiality, but this is marked by ambiguity and ambivalence; upheaval, danger, and anxiety accompany these novel, liberating, and potentially expansive experiences. What is clear and amplified in Stenner's theory of liminality is that passing through liminal experiences is a socially guided and culturally mediated process.

By stressing the culturally mediated facets of liminality, Stenner (this volume, pp. 11–12) distinguishes between liminal experience and liminal space, a topic that is relevant to pilgrimage. Stenner argues that most social scientists invoking liminality often refer to liminal space. Two issues emerge from focusing exclusively on liminality in spatial terms. First, this obscures our understanding of an entire range of liminal phenomena from liminal personae, sociality (*communitas*), technologies, etc. Second, it is the experience of passing through borders, boundaries, and thresholds, and the management of this movement that is most critical for understanding liminality. Rituals are one cultural form that structures and guides the movement from ordinary experiencing to sacred experiencing. Other liminal affective technologies, such as books, afford other forms of liminal experiences, including aesthetic experiences (Stenner, 2017a). Liminal spaces are not irrelevant, as I discuss below; however, by understanding liminality in experiential terms we can observe how liminality is a socially guided and culturally mediated process, unfolding in irreversible time. By removing the limits or rules of everyday reality, human experience can be canalized into a space that allows for creative expressions and escalation of affect that are rarely possible in most everyday settings (Stenner, 2017b).

Liminality, Boundaries, and Borders. Liminality can thus be conceptualized as a form of boundary crossing. Indeed, boundaries are critical to liminal activities such as rituals, games, works of art, and musical performances. In each case, a boundary separates the game, musical performance, painting, book, etc. from everyday experience and thereby creates a doubled world (Stenner, this volume, p. 1). In a boxing match, for example, ringing a bell signals that the event has begun. During the interval between the first and subsequent ringing of the bell, a *world within a world* is produced as the norm that prohibits physical violence directed at the other in our everyday worlds is temporarily lifted. This is not to say that there are no rules or conventions—there are “rules of the game” and violation will lead to an ejection of the offender from the match. Yet, the ringing of a bell facilitates a transition; two people in the ring *become* boxers with certain flexibility granted to fight, which would otherwise be prohibited in most social contexts.

Looking deeper into the case of boxing, there is an entire sequence of scripted and dramatized actions that separate the match from everyday experience. The production involves lowering of the houselights, silence before the music is played, the boxers entering from backstage with their entourage, ornate dress, and walk-up song as they make their way to the boxing ring all before the official starts the match by sounding the ring. The transition to the game is elaborated through visual and acoustic signs combined with ritual actions. This unfolding drama both creates a boundary between ordinary and extraordinary (liminal) experience and activity and functions to canalize the affect of the audience and combatants making the event a highly charged affair. Bells, frames, walls, curtains, ritual actions (see below), and

phrases (i.e., “Long ago ...”) are employed and function as technologies that draw people into new realms and set the stage, to use that metaphor, for liminal experiences.

Van Gennep, Turner, and Stenner’s synthesis of their (and others’) work on liminality invites a fresh look at pilgrimage as socially guided and culturally mediated activities. Pilgrimages are transitional experiences where people undergoing significant ruptures in life (e.g., loss of a loved one, declining health), or drawn by the promise of the infinite, can physically and symbolically step beyond the finite social structures and routines of home in an effort to make sense of misfortune, experience the numinous, or find some form of enlightenment. While many limits are suspended that regulate daily practical reality, pilgrimages are a passage that also entails constraint and guidance. We can thus examine pilgrimages as an activity designed and devised to draw people into its fold and transform their experience. The following section examines the liminal features of pilgrimage, paying particular attention to the pilgrimage path as a boundary zone where freedom and constraint coexist in dynamic tension and the passage between these boundaries is managed and regulated. Paths, I argue below, are human products that emerge spontaneously, but then become organized to provide individuals with *general* affective and imaginative guidance through social suggestions. Yet, the pilgrim, although guided by social suggestions, remains the active interpreter and negotiator of meaning.

The Pilgrimage Path: Between the Known and Unknown Worlds

Paths, trails, and streets are spatially liminal features in our environment—they exist *in between* different structures (e.g., buildings), regions, and zones (e.g., home and away). Human-made paths are created through the repeated movement that is goal oriented—pursuing food, water, or shelter, or as a means to reach a distant setting for trade or war with another group. Paths and trails are constructed through the destruction of the existing environment. Through these destructive acts, however, a new route is fashioned that links places together and serves as a conduit for the movement of people, animals, goods, and ideas in complex relationships. As conduits for movement, paths and trails are a kind of “empty space”—they have been cleared and facilitate the filling and marking of space with heterogeneity of activities, signs, and social dramas (Valsiner, 2004). Drawing on C. S. Peirce’s semiotic terminology, paths are layered with the indexical (e.g., footprints, animal dung), iconic (e.g., other animals and human beings engaged in a diverse range of activities), and symbols (e.g., route directions). These sign complexes are the basis for further semiotic processes, including the creation of generalized meanings, as we encounter and construct meaning through these signs (Valsiner, 2007).

Paths and trails afford locomotive movement, but they also acquire spiritual, religious, and cultural significance. Human beings abstract from the tangible signs (i.e., footsteps) that constitute a path and its link with other places to more generalized meanings; hence, a path becomes “*the way*,” typically one that was constructed by a religious figure (e.g., “the way of Christ or Buddha”) or a group (e.g., “the path of pioneers”). Paths are thus enmeshed in myth and stories related to past or mythological events. The physical path and the generalized sign of *the path* are rooted in the past but oriented to the future. Following a path, therefore, is not a simple locomotive activity since moving onto and through a path, as Christopher Tilley argues, “can be claimed to be a paradigmatic cultural act, since it is following the steps inscribed by the others whose steps have worn a conduit for movement which becomes the correct or ‘best way to go’” (Tilley, 1997, p. 30). Pilgrimage thus becomes *the way*⁶ forward through imitating and retracing the steps of those no longer present. Legends, myths, and religious and cultural significance provide the frames of reference for the pilgrims before their movement commences.

Pilgrimage as meaningful movement. Experientially, the journey begins with the pilgrim entering onto a richly layered path on foot, in car, bus, or by some other means. These initial steps are ambivalent since the pilgrim moves towards the *imagined* yet unknown pilgrimage center and away from the familiar setting of home. In many ways, through the very act of moving away from one’s normative constraints, everyday routines are put on pause, and obligations and responsibilities related to home, work, and other institutions are temporarily relaxed for the pursuit of something beyond material gain (Oviedo et al., 2014, p. 441). Pilgrimages are a culturally sanctioned means to decouple oneself from, as noted above, the “normative hooks” of everyday life. This separation from home is often symbolically encoded through the clothes that pilgrims wear; by wearing traditional pilgrim dress, pilgrims differentiate themselves from travelers. In the case of pilgrimages such as the *hajj*, the pilgrims’ dress also functions to homogenize the status of the individuals, downplay social and familial affiliations, and construct a sense of belonging among fellow travelers.

By moving away from home and the routines of practical daily affairs, new bodily rhythms are established and new temporal experiences generated (Slavin, 2003). Pilgrims who travel the Camino de Santiago orient their travel around the course of the sun—waking up early to take advantage of cooler weather and resting during the heat of the day. Furthermore, the pilgrims frequently describe how they find a distinct rhythm as they walk. Away from ordinary concerns, pilgrims only need to concentrate on walking. Still, walking is a multifaceted activity where our experience of walking is infused by our explicit and implicit memories, goals, beliefs, hopes, and anticipations (Boesch, 2012, p. 350). Many pilgrims find that it is through movement that a feeling of stillness emerges. These notions have even become encoded into the social suggestion to be “present” that is encountered in

⁶Of course “the way” is openly defined by different social groups and individuals.

pilgrim guidebooks, and even promoted by spiritual guides who accompany pilgrims on their journey (e.g., Scriven, 2020, p. 256).

Different forms of movement laden with belief, from walking and circumambulation to washing in sacred waters, can be conceptualized as liminal affective technologies "... that facilitate meditative and peaceful states, and spiritual and emotional encounters" (Scriven, 2014, p. 252). The path, and walking its course, can immerse the pilgrim in the unfolding setting and amplify the imaginative capacities. As one pilgrim traveling along Croagh Rock,

You know the path has been trodden, literally and metaphorically, for hundreds of years by people long gone. It's almost like an emotional safety net ... it provides a level of peace and comfort and stability ... So in one it's me connecting up with the generations and, em, getting a sense of community for myself (research participant cited in Scriven, 2020, pp. 267–268).

Pilgrimage as a communal activity. While the social ties to home are loosened, pilgrimages are still highly social and communal occurrences. Pilgrimage paths emerge through the coordinated action of many people and link social groups at different geographical points together in complex networks of relationships. Pilgrims may make their journey alone or in a group, but at different points along the route individuals and small groups converge into larger groups and crowds. Thus, pilgrims form a temporary community as travelers follow the same route, share meals and lodging, and engage in similar ritual activities along the route and at the pilgrimage center. Social norms that constrain and regulate social interaction with those not within the home group are suspended and the boundaries between us < > them are made more permeable and malleable and a feeling of togetherness emerges (Turner & Turner, 1978).

Communitas or the feeling of togetherness and camaraderie does not emerge, if at all,⁷ simply because of the freedom that pilgrims experience. Indeed, this feeling of togetherness and intimacy is not a given, but rather is something that emerges, in part, through the shared journey along the pilgrimage path as pilgrims experience hardships, exchange information, and anticipate their destination together. Scriven (2020) describes how the path mediates the relationship between pilgrims since it is a "connective tissue permeating our movements" (p. 269). Along the path, this communal feeling is created through "glances, passing words of encouragement and hands offering assistance" (ibid.). Likewise, we can observe how liminal technologies are utilized to construct these experiences. Muslim pilgrims journeying to the Shrine of Moulay Abdeslam in Morocco make many efforts to create and maintain a sense of intimacy, for instance through *ziyara* or poems pilgrims construct to celebrate communal rituals at *particular sites along the route* such as drinking from the well of Moulay Abdeslam and driving in the taxi back from the pilgrimage site (Gintsburg, 2018, pp. 218–219). We can view poetry as one liminal affective device

⁷This is in part because many anthropologists have argued that *communitas* is absent in many of the pilgrimages they have observed (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Instead of *communitas*, which presumes an equality between participants, pilgrimages may elicit a shared feeling of *camaraderie*.

that mediates the relationship between pilgrims and facilitates the reconfiguration of affective and social boundaries.

The organization of the pilgrimage route and the approaching pilgrim. We have so far emphasized the initial or relative freedom of pilgrims as they physically and symbolically move away from home and the normative constraints that structure the daily practical reality of home. Yet, becoming a pilgrim requires crossing through tangible and symbolic thresholds that can be highly regulated. Pilgrims making their *hajj*, for example, must first go purify themselves through a ritual bath, trim their nails and hair, and change into simple white garments and sandals. Pilgrims crossing national boundaries are required to use passports through airports or pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago purchase passports that are stamped along the way at the start of the route. Alternatively, we could say that these and similar practices and objects are critical for differentiating practical daily experiences from possible sacred and significant experiences. My point is that there is typically an artifact or activity that pilgrims take to create a sense of the beginning of a passage into a new realm, and yet at least initially the subsequent movement and environment are less rigidly structured (Beckstead, 2012). Victor Turner describes how in the beginning the miles the pilgrim walks are “secular” and there is a high degree of freedom from normative structures of home (Turner & Turner, 1978).

As the pilgrim continues on, however, they begin to encounter a proliferation of symbolic objects in the form of statues, religious buildings, myths, and features of the environment that have been made sacred through symbolic markers or signs. This abundance of symbolic objects constrains the movement of the pilgrim and guides their affective experiencing. This movement through an increasingly transforming space becomes interwoven with the imaginative faculties of the pilgrim. While the meaning of these symbols is not fully consciously grasped, according to Turner and Turner (1978), it is through the very abundance and vibrancy of the sacred symbols that the pilgrim becomes

... increasingly capable of entering in imagination and with sympathy into the culturally defined experiences of the founder and of those persons depicted as standing in some close relationship to him, whether it be of love or hate, loyalty or awe. The trials of the long route will normally have made the pilgrim quite vulnerable to such impressions. Religious images strike him, in these novel circumstances, as perhaps they have never done before (p. 11, italics added).

Turner illustrates how the path is encoded with symbolic objects or social suggestions that, combined with fatigue brought about by the hardships of the route, are “*designed to build up a considerable load of reverent feeling so that the final ingress to the holiest shrine of all will be for the pilgrim a momentous matter*” (p. 23, emphases added). Social guidance is mediated, in part, through the built-up environment and liminal affective technologies (e.g., statues, paintings, sound of bells, incense) that assist in establishing an atmosphere of the “holy” and “sacred,” or what Valsiner (2014a) would call hyper-generalized sign fields. These hyper-generalized sign fields guide the affect and meaning-making of the pilgrim. These complex signs are overdetermined and open to many meanings, and thus give the

person flexibility to construct meanings as they bring their beliefs, desires, and previous experiences to these encounters.

Shrines and Temples in Japan. Let me give two examples of the cultural organization of the pilgrimage route in modern Japan and how the pilgrims' experience is mediated through liminal affective technologies. The first example comes from Mt. Kōya, one of the most sacred mountains south of Osaka in the Wakayama prefecture. First settled by the Buddhist priest Kūkai, posthumously known as Kōbō Daishi, Mt. Kōya is home to a complex of temples, assembly halls, tombs of famous figures, and other buildings. The *Danjogaran* is the center of the complex with the main sacred buildings. Paths connect these different locations in a network of routes that afford mobility (see Fig. 5.1).

Drawing closer to the center of the complex, one begins to encounter the redundancy of symbolic objects. Figure 5.2 shows a section of the path marked with many small Jizo statues. Jizo is a bodhisattva who is a beloved figure usually depicted as a Buddhist monk. These statues can be found in very ordinary environments throughout Japan: in shrines on the side of the street, at playgrounds, or next to rice fields and other places people work and pass by in their daily lives. Jizo is beloved, in part, because he is the deity that attends to the spirits of those who have died (Horton, 2007, p. 116). At Mt. Kōya, these statues are also situated at the periphery of the path, and individuals pass them by on their way to and from other places in the complex. The abundance of icons in this setting is unique, and sets up the affective tone of the traveler—it does not determine but it affords and suggests certain ways of feeling (Beckstead et al., 2011).



Fig. 5.1 Path at Mt. Kōya



Fig. 5.2 An abundance of small Jizo statues at Mt. Kōya

The second example comes from an architectural structure common to shrines in Japan. *Torii* are gates comprised of two vertical posts or pillars and a horizontal lintel curved upwards, like birds' wings in flight, found at Shinto shrines. *Torii*, similarly to Jizo statues, are embedded into everyday environments and paths that people take in their daily movements to and from home. Since Shinto shrines are often found in Buddhist temples, *torii* gates are incorporated into these environments. Beautifully simple and abstract, *torii* gates create a threshold, and therefore separate and unite *inside/outside* and symbolically differentiate the pure/impure zones. Purity is an essential facet of Shintoism, and the gate provides the gateway to a ritually purified space (Keane, 1988). Fushimi Inari-taisha in Kyoto is famous for its sheer volume of *torii*. These range from the large *torii* that stands at the entrance of this shrine to the thousands of *torii* that line the main path weaving its way about the mountain (see Figs. 5.3 and 5.4).

Torii gates are one of the many cultural inventive ways that have been created to organize the environment in Japan and convey a felt sense of passage; one is leaving behind the ordinary and moving into an extraordinary realm as one moves through these gates. Given their abstract nature, they defy simple representational understanding. The reiteration of these gates at Fushimi Inari-taisha stands out and becomes an alluring place to visit, even for individuals who encounter *torii* daily in their everyday travels.

These are only two examples of how material symbolic objects encoded into the path function as liminal affective technologies that create an atmosphere suggesting a passage from ordinary to extraordinary environments. *Torii* gates, statues,



Fig. 5.3 Large torii gate at Fushimi Inari-taisha in Kyoto, Japan



Fig. 5.4 Main path in Fushimi Inari-taisha with reiteration of torii gates

paintings, and other artifacts and relics that can be found at temples, shrines, and other sacredly alluring places constitute one form of synchronic scaffolding, in addition to diachronic scaffolding such as cultural frames and feeling rules (e.g., Hochschild, 1979), that enables and guides affective states and experiences (Brinkman & Kofod, 2017). The exaggeration of an object or the redundancy and repetition of multiple objects are critical sociocultural means to guide human meaning-making, and ensure that the person is “surrounded by the general direction for ways of feeling” (Valsiner, 2008, p. 73). Pilgrimage paths, as Turner noted above, are organized and cultivated in such a way as to build an affective load and to create hyper-generalized affective fields (i.e., awe) that are not easy to put into words but yet move beyond the present experience to texture future experiences (Valsiner, 2007). Paths are organized with material symbolic objects that mark transitions between spaces (i.e., inside < > outside, ordinary < > extraordinary), or are encoded into the periphery of the path. Critically, these objects are technologies devised to guide human passage and to keep the pilgrim immersed in the setting. While we pass through doors, gates, fences, and other thresholds on a daily basis, pilgrimage provides a new context and unfamiliar settings in which we encounter familiar cultural forms and undergo affectively heightened experiences.

The experiences of pilgrims in Shikoku. In order to examine the experience of pilgrims, we can briefly examine accounts of a few modern-day pilgrims who completed the Shikoku pilgrimage route in Japan and observe how the path, movement, and beliefs coalesce to facilitate a deeply moving experience. The Shikoku pilgrimage traces the movement of the Buddhist priest Kūkai, posthumously known as Kōbō Daishi, who traveled around and trained on Shikoku. Kūkai was a prolific figure in Buddhism in the eighth and ninth centuries and many myths and legends have emerged about his life. This ancient pilgrimage consists of 88 temples organized in a circuit route, and completing this journey typically takes a pilgrim who is on foot between 30 and 60 days. Modern-day pilgrims frequently break up this pilgrimage into many visits over months and years.

Eiko Hoshino (2007) conducted interviews and explored online self-reports to examine the motivations and experiences of Shikoku pilgrims. Hoshino found that most pilgrims had little religious reasons for their journey, as they were not particularly religiously devoted, and instead mentioned doing something “challenging to the spirit” or “searching for a refreshing life” (p. 68). Another pilgrim referred to his decision to prolong the feeling of freedom they recently found after their retirement. Still, one pilgrim left on this pilgrimage immediately after breaking off her engagement. These reasons illustrate that pilgrimages are common ways of making sense of life transitions and disruptions that occur (i.e., spontaneous liminality) (two mentioned making this pilgrimage immediately after a broken engagement and retirement).

Regarding their experiences, pilgrims frequently mentioned how their experiences were profound and quite emotional, especially as they approached the last temple on the route. One pilgrim stated how after finding themselves alone they began chanting and quickly experienced “completely sinking into a different world” and feeling as if they were “the only one existing in this world” (p. 69).

Similarly, a pilgrim who had earlier described how he felt reverence for the gods and Buddha, but he was not a devoted Buddhist or participant in the Shinto religion, reported:

I have gained the knowledge that ‘I am not *living*, but rather that I am *being allowed to live*.’ I have to make special mention of this subject. As soon as I was certain that the eight-eighth temple, Ōkujobi, was getting closer, my eyes overflowed with tears, and there was nothing I could do to stop them. I walked along without thinking, repeating ‘thank you, thank you’ over and over, waving clenched fists with huge tears running down my cheeks (an account of Japanese pilgrim, Hoshino, 2007, pp. 70 – 71, italics in original)

Finally, another pilgrim who was also arriving at this last temple had a “moment of religious ecstasy, a moment of extreme bliss” (Hoshino, 2007, p. 70). This pilgrim returned home searching through Buddhist literature to make sense of his experience. Interestingly, the lack of religious devotion or sentiment for most pilgrims was not a limitation to experiencing profound emotional, and occasionally religiously articulated, experiences and new insights.

These reports convey how each pilgrim’s experience was a momentous matter, in Turner’s words (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 23), as each pilgrim moved away from the relative stability of home and found themselves in a world where the limits of everyday life were temporarily suspended. While these reports did not mention the material symbolic features of the path, they would have passed by and through torii and temple gates, religious icons and artifacts in abundance, and other symbolic elements that they would have previously encountered in their ordinary environments. As Turner’s analysis would suggest, the path becomes increasingly built up with artifacts, activities (e.g., ritual washing), and social suggestions to constrain their physical movement and guide the affective relating to the setting. The pilgrimage path becomes a rich symbolic world of liminal affective technologies that promote the pilgrim’s full immersion in this setting and the conditions, including the freedom to “mentally wander,” to generate meaning that grows from their experiences.

Conclusion

We create stability and purposefully, if only fleeting, dissolve this stability through our physical and mental voyages beyond our familiar worlds. Alternatively, we find ourselves thrown into situations that puncture and disrupt our coordinated and organized worlds. These experiences, as Stenner illuminates, “cry out ... for imaginative symbolic expression, precisely because they challenge and transform the taken-for-granted order of daily life” (Stenner, this volume, pp. 9–10; see Kurrat, 2019, for more on pilgrims’ motivations). Pilgrimages present us with historically rich religious and cultural forms through which individuals and groups can grapple with life’s misfortunes, and experience personal and social transformations by literally and figuratively moving beyond the structures, social statuses, norms, routines, and rhythms that regulate daily life. Victor Turner understood pilgrimages as an

exemplary liminal event, with deeply moving experiences and full of *potentiality*. Elaborating on van Gennep's tripartite structure of rites of passage, Turner understood liminality as a ludic experience where individuals could remove themselves from the "normative hooks" of practical reality. As with other liminal events, pilgrimages are passages characterized by ludic qualities and mediated through symbolic cultural forms that the individual encounters in a new setting. Stenner's theory of liminality draws on and goes beyond the work of van Gennep and Turner, in part, by amplifying the ways transitions are guided or canalized through liminal affective technologies that enable liminal experiences.

This chapter explored the experience of the pilgrim by integrating Stenner's theory of liminality with Turner's conceptualization of liminality and his seminal work on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are much more than the movement from point A to B and then back again through liminal space. Rather, the pilgrim's journey occurs on and through a richly layered *path* that has been culturally set up and constructed to promote expansive affective and imaginative experiences, intrinsic to liminal experiencing. Stepping onto a path initiates the movement from the familiar environments to unfamiliar settings and encounters with social others and cultural suggestions encoded into the environment and shared activities along the pilgrimage route. On their journey, the pilgrim crosses through thresholds that are saturated with myths, stories, legends, and tangible artifacts and signs to immerse the pilgrim in an atmosphere of feeling. For Turner, the initial freedom that pilgrims experience as they begin their journey gives way to a setting that is organized through the reiteration of symbolic objects. This redundancy of objects and rituals constrains the physical and affective movement of the pilgrim. The *passage of the pilgrim* is assisted, among other ways, by the material and symbolic landscape and the peripheral social suggestions that structure the experience of the pilgrim and prepare them for a potentially momentous event. The path is a conduit for movement and a boundary between the past and future, ordinary and extraordinary, and heaven and earth where novel experiences, insights, and developments might emerge. Pilgrimages are socially guided by goal-oriented institutions, yet this event is relational and unfolds through the dialogue of the person and their social worlds. Pilgrims are not passive passengers, but active participants in the quest for the infinite, comfort, or even an adventure.

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Chapter 6

Liminality in Play: The Role of Materiality and Patterns



Martina Cabra

Introduction

Paul Stenner proposes a thought-provoking paper on liminality and cultural experiences where he argues that cultural experiences have a liminal source. He builds his argument in three parts. First, he outlines the central tenets of a psychology based on process ontology explaining the importance of liminality as becoming. Second, he looks at specific cultural experiences to show their functions as “worlds within and between worlds” in people’s engagements with them. And third, he claims a continuity between cultural experiencing, from birth to death, *where* cultural experiences can be found. He follows Donald Winnicott (1990) in proposing that they are located in the transitional space that allows us to construct what is called “the psychological realm,” “space,” or “lifeworld” (Schütz, 1945).

The main contribution of the chapter appears to be the argument of the commonality between phenomena that could appear radically different. The enjoyment of a breathtaking painting, engaging in pilgrimage in Spain, and children playing Vikings, Stenner claims, are cultural experiences which constitute worlds within and between worlds (Stenner, 2018, this volume, p. 3). When engaging with them, these experiences demand from us a suspension of the actual limits of reality, to enter a new order of things. They require us to withdraw our attention from our surroundings and become sometimes absorbed by them. This withdrawal can, for example, make us jump at the sight of ordinary things such as a cat passing while enjoying a good film. But these cultural experiences do not only suppose a suspension of limits: Stenner further follows Winnicott in locating cultural experiences in a transitional space (1990)—a space where the distinction between physical and

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psychological reality is blurred. But what aspects of the physical and the psychological reality can actually be blurred or suspended? How much of it remains and limits our experiences?

In this commentary, I explore Paul Stenner's argument in the area of play. I argue that looking at play brings forward the importance of material arrangements and relational patterns in cultural experiences. The latter set the stage and define the boundaries within which liminal experiences can take place. The chapter proceeds in three moves: I first outline the central features of Stenner's argument; I then present what the sociocultural approach can bring forward for understanding cultural experiences, particularly, that of play; and finally I substantiate these claims by analyzing observations of children's play. With this, I exemplify the two aspects pertaining to *how* cultural and liminal experiences mutually limit and make each other possible: (a) cultural experiences are made of material realities just as much as they are psychologically reconstructed and socially negotiated, and these define what can be done, said, or thought in different situations, and (b) people develop recurrent modes of *passing through*, patterns, for engaging in cultural experiences through their lives. I move from Stenner's propositions to children's play and back to understanding liminal experiences as ruptures from the ordinary, the known, or the given. In so doing, I try to show specific ways in which *passing through* not only is about transformation, but also relies on and is made sense of through the constancy and recurrences in our experiences.

Liminal Sources of Cultural Experiencing

As humans, we constantly engage in activities that rupture our common and stable relation to the here and now—we dream, read novels, fantasize, and watch scary movies. We also plan weddings, go to mass, dress up for carnivals, and play hide and seek. Other times still, we lose our jobs, move to another country, or make a scientific discovery. These experiences change and affect us in more or less lasting ways. Life-changing novels, newfound love, or unprecedented laughter during a game can mark and change how we view the world. Whether brought upon ourselves or spontaneous, these ruptures, looked for or surprising, propel us out of the commonality of our daily lives. They can suspend or question our relationship to things and create a new world we did not know existed.

Paul Stenner (2018, this volume) takes the idea of change and becoming as the starting point to propose a psychosocial approach to human experience based on a process ontology. He outlines some key points that process thought has brought forward, to then propose that there is a liminal source for cultural experiences. He claims that, first, situations and experiences can be termed actual occasions, and that in turn these are ultimately processes. Second, certain experiences can be defined as worlds within and between worlds. And third, their location is a tertiary transitional space (Stenner, this volume).

In process thought, becoming is the central point from which reality is defined. The world is constantly changing, becoming something other. In this becoming, it is ultimately made of what is called actual entities or actual occasions (Stenner, 2018; Whitehead, 1929). These can be situations or experiences and are called entities constituted by their own becoming. For process thinkers, “the actual world is a process” (Whitehead, 1929, p. 35). Taking this principle as a starting point, Stenner (this volume) defines phenomena of transition, becoming, passage, and emergence in human experience as liminal: liminal situations are “passages between worlds and between what is no more and what is not yet” (p. XX). If the world is a process, a process of becoming of actual entities, then when considering an experience, it will be understood as a transition from an actuality to another, or as concrescences from a virtuality into an actuality (Whitehead, 1929). This means, for example, when experiencing something new, such as thrill in a situation that used to provoke anxiety, this passage is a transformation of an actuality to another actuality—the actuality of one’s fear to the actuality of one’s thrill—or when someone finally gets on a plane after having imagined what it would be like countless times, a virtuality is concretized—the virtuality of the imagined situation becomes real and concrete. The notions of virtuality, actuality, and process allow us to consider experiences and situations from the viewpoint of their transformation as well as to trace their mutual relations in time.

Although these claims come from process ontology, it is interesting to focus on their implications for a psychological understanding of experience. I outline the three ideas that support Stenner’s argument of the liminal source for cultural experiences: actual occasions are processes, certain experiences can be defined as worlds within and between worlds, and their location is a tertiary transitional space (Stenner, this volume).

Thus, from a psychological perspective, Stenner first claims that there is continuity across different experiences such as playing football, getting married, and entering a sect. All actual entities, that is, situations or experiences, are related to one another through their relations to one another—called prehensions. This means that we can trace a line of situations defining others further in time and making their transformation possible: I can decide to get married while remembering a happy dream, or decide to leave town after a life-changing religious sight in the woods. The dream or the religious experience and the life decisions relate to one another in defining a world in and for themselves: they constitute that actual universe of particular entities.

Secondly, he proposes to apply this starting point to what Donald Winnicott termed “cultural experiences.” Dreams, play, art, and religion constitute such experiences. Stenner defines these, following Schütz (1945), as “worlds within worlds” because of their doubled feature: watching a movie and playing pirates require a suspension of the usual principles that regulate our relation to the real—we may usually think dragons do not exist but accept them within an interesting thriller. As they are considered systems in themselves, they further require a certain internal coherence of propositions. For example, a flying Robin Hood might not be an acceptable character within a play between children of the classical folktale.

Third, if cultural experiences occur within worlds, then the question of *where* cultural experiences take place becomes important. Stenner follows Winnicott in asking not what these experiences are, but *where* they take place—not in a geographical sense, but in terms of psychological experiencing. The *place* where they take place is neither in a physical nor in a psychological reality, but what is termed a tertiary, transitional space. Between creation and appropriation, the transitional space requires neither a full suspension of physical reality nor a complete subjective hallucinatory state: it is between worlds. Thus, cultural experiences are “worlds between and within worlds” (Stenner, this volume).

Put together, these three points justify Stenner’s claim that cultural experiences have a liminal source: if the world is a process and any occasion analyzed is in the process of becoming, then play, religion, and art—as occasions—can produce potentially transforming experiences and can become something other. These experiences can further do so in spaces that are neither solely in the physical nor only in the psychological realm, exactly because they constitute occasions of in-betweenness as the liminal. The worlds defined by them intertwine with others of our canonical reality as the world is in a constant move towards the becoming of each instant.

It is interesting to note that while process thinkers’ propositions bring forward the centrality of transformation, change, and fluidity, other arguably compatible sociocultural approaches (Stenner & Zittoun, 2020) have been concerned with defining also what limits, bounds, or remains through changes (Hviid, 2008; Valsiner, 1997; Zittoun, 2006, 2020). When people experience new things, view the world differently, or make new life decisions, what is it that remains or can be recognized across situations? I will now explore some of these propositions about continuity in the case of pretend play.

Two Sociocultural Propositions about Play

Children’s play is a largely observed, studied, and reflected-upon phenomenon (Handelman, 2001). Despite its pervasiveness, there is a wide variety of interpretations as to the function and origin of play (Handelman, 2001). What we know is that children play. They may elaborate, develop, or exercise through it, but they play. The perspective of cultural psychology on play proposes to start from its observation and makes it a case to look at the tension between constancy and change (Hedegaard, 2018; Hviid, 2008; Hviid & Villadsen, 2018). While playing, authors argue, children explore worlds (Iannaccone et al., 2019), elaborate experiences (Freud, 1923), and build their personal life concerns (Hviid, 2008). In other words, they become who they are and who they will be. Sociocultural psychology has, on the other hand, made claims on how constancy or continuity in people’s lives is developed but it has done so in other domains than play. I thus here propose to explore and extend those propositions to the area of play.

The sociocultural approach that concerns me here has a similar starting point to Stenner’s psychosocial perspective. They are both concerned with processually

explaining the mutual making of the social and the psychological (Cole, 1996; Stenner, 2018; Valsiner, 1997; Zittoun et al., 2013). For this, sociocultural psychology poses that social guidance is a core process in development (Valsiner, 1997, 2000). It further defines internalization as the process that allows understanding how the social becomes psychological (Valsiner, 1997, 2007). It has thus made two interesting propositions to make the case for a continuity in people's lives: i) social guidance is central in development and takes place through material and relational grounding and ii) the result of the internalization process is the personal construction of relational patterns for engaging in and with the world (Zittoun, 2020). Yet, even though experiences are guided and internalized, the person is active in so doing, and this opens the space to understand that there are margins of freedom in the relations of people to the world.

Social guidance, in its relational and material aspects, has a fundamental role in development (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992; Valsiner, 1997; Zittoun, 2020). The fact that children learn how to move around their living room, to avoid dangerous plugs, and to play with dolls or trucks has been studied as deeply marked by the geographical and spatial arrangements of people and the surroundings (Spark et al., 2019; Valsiner & Lightfoot, 1987). The modes in which people and things are organized in our lives leave traces in the ways in which they then act, think, and remember (Zittoun, 2020).

In Valsiner and Lightfoot's (1987) study on safety in children, the authors claim that "the child's actions (and thinking about these actions) are related to the structure of the environment (...). Specifically, the structure of a particular environmental setting determines the range of possible actions available to the particular child, who has developed a certain level of action skills and reasoning capabilities by the time that setting is encountered" (1987, p. 63). What they show is that little children may need, at first, safety blocks for plugs, in order not to put their fingers in them, or table corners so they do not hit their heads. With time, such devices become redundant, as the child learns to avoid the plugs and the table, constructing a zone of possible movement which includes places to be avoided, often in a peripheral way and not as a part of the conscious stream of thought. If we think of ourselves as adults, we do not usually hit our heads with tables and still do not think "I will avoid the table now" every time we walk past it: there is a peripheral guidance of our movements in space.

From the other end of development, or another starting point, in his study of ornaments, Valsiner (2019) explored how ornamentation can guide our psychological experiencing. The upward pointing of shapes and figures in a Catholic church leads our eyes to higher points of the building and thus, maybe, to higher places with God, in the skies or Heaven. He further proposes that such ornaments have three characteristics. They first have a high redundancy, or repetition of form, such that they can be recognized in many places. Second, they involve directionality of suggested movement (enacted or in thought): they guide movements in one or another direction. And third, they are perceptually peripheral but semantically central, that is to say that they provide the semiotic framing for the possible movement, although their structure is not a part of conscious deliberation. His basic thesis there

is that “it is through the peripheral experiencing of external ornaments we develop their internal field-like counterparts in our minds” (Valsiner, 2019, p. 11). This field-like counterpart that we may reconstruct in our mind is a symbolic reconstruction of the guidance provided by the objectivized field. In Valsiner’s case, this argument is made in the case of ornaments; but I argue here, as Zittoun (2020) has done in the case of a hill, that it can be extended to the material and symbolic arrangements of our everyday life, such as bedrooms, kitchens, and gardens, as I will try to show in the example to come.

The way in which spaces are organized and objects disposed around us may be first a display of some already existing social structure—such as there being two bathrooms for men and women evidencing the sexual binarism (Skoglund & Holt, 2020). But these structures are further reconstructed psychologically, guiding our behavior and thoughts. In the case of children playing, such dispositions delineate the boundaries of the possible worlds they enter in, and by extension define the possible ways for the children to elaborate their experiences and create new ones.

It is interesting that Valsiner (2019) considers ornaments as a type of pattern, an aesthetic pattern which has been objectivized. As anticipated above, the second point that allows us to understand people’s continuity in cultural experiences is the idea of patterns. People have been shown to develop something that remains and allows recognizing oneself and others across various and different situations. These have been termed schemas, dynamic patterns, personal life philosophies, melodies for living, or motifs (Bartlett, 1932; Cabra, 2021; Neisser, 1976; Wagoner, 2013; Zittoun, 2020; Zittoun et al., 2013) and they can be thought of as the result of the internalization process in a large sense. What these terms have in common is that they all designate different forms of patterns.

Zittoun (2020) defines patterns as “a movement that follows a specific configuration of dynamically coordinated elements, and that has certain stability (...) in a given environment also generates dynamic patterns of feeling, perception, thinking or acting, and thus engages experience” (2020, p. 32). People can thus be thought of as developing stable modes of engaging with others and with the world. And although many controversial terms such as personality or identity have been used to define such constancy in people’s lives, I speak here of relational patterns, as a way to bring forward their grounding in everyday life relations, actions, as well as their dynamicity. These patterns are multimodal and can be recognized in oral dialogue, written forms, drawings, clothes, and house decorations.

What I will try to show now, based on this argument, and on Stenner’s propositions, is first that people engaged in cultural experiences sometimes elaborate their experience and are in the process of transforming how they feel about certain situations. But in this process, the grounding of their activities in the practical and material things that surround them leaves traces in their psychological life. Secondly, people construct their own relational modes and these have forms that resemble the forms of the lived spaces. The patterns characterizing each person’s mode of acting can be then considered a result of the internalization of the material arrangements and forms, as well as reconfigurations of relational dynamics. These patterns are a

way to recognize the continuity that characterizes people's modes of acting and communicating across their changes and transformations.

In a longitudinal study that followed children's ways of doing gender through play in family and school settings (Cabra, 2021, 2020), I identified the importance of such material arrangements and relational patterns. I will thus show this in the case of children playing, a case that is interesting for two reasons. First, because of the way in which play occurs, in comparison to abstract thought or fantasies, objects and materiality have a prominent role. Secondly, relational patterns are more clearly enacted, and expressed in a less generalized form than life philosophies, closer to their relational origins to parents or significant others. I now turn to the case of two children playing in the frame of this study.

Playing School

Luke and Natalie are two 4-year-old twins, whom I observed during the period of a year as they finished kindergarten and started school. I will focus here on a specific pretend play situation to illustrate my argument. This observation took place on a Sunday, after their last day of kindergarten, before the holidays and beginning of primary school: it was a day in between.

Luke and Natalie had been complaining for months about starting school. They told me and their mother repeatedly that they did not want to start school. The theme of school did not come up in play situations and the issue was avoided by them whenever someone tried to talk to them about it. On this Sunday, I came to their house to conduct some observations and they invited me to play. It was here that I saw them play school for the first time.

When I arrived we played mommy, daddy, and baby. We ate, went to school, and took a trip on holidays. They acted as mummy and daddy and me as the baby. They prepared what I need to go to school and repeated the sentences their parents told them when they dropped them off: "Everything will be ok," "I will come back tonight," etc. They also repeated other "calming" sentences that the parents tell them such as "we are right next door" and "just call if you need me."

Going back to Stenner's points, these children are in a moment where their life is in a liminal space: they are in the process of becoming primary school students. Their routines will be different, and their friends and everyday life activities too. Things as they know them are in the process of changing. They are also in between worlds; it is a moment in between what is no longer but is not yet: they are not pre-schoolers anymore, neither are they in primary school. They are between the world of babies and the world of children. The liminality of this in-betweenness creates the possibility for these children to engage in pretend play: the change in place, timing, activity, and frame that this passage will entail requires some elaboration from their part that they try to do through playing. The tertiary space offered by play allows them to manipulate and appropriate some of the new things they may have to live through in the following months:

Sequence 23:

Luke: You do as if you were a baby. Now, come.

Researcher: *I pretend to cry*

Natalie: Your mom will come later. She comes back tonight darling.

Luke: You couldn't speak (*clarifies to me as baby*)

Natalie: Oh, you're probably thirsty! (*she gives me milk in a bottle*)

Luke: Wait Natalie, this is so that you're not warm (*he puts a cape on my head*). You need to heat yourself because you had been in the snow.

Natalie: Here's your bottle.

Luke: We're right next door. If you say mum or dad, we come right away darling.

We all pretend to sleep. Then they both take my hand and take me to the living room.

Luke: You have to go to school now ok?

Natalie: Yes, come, this is your bag. You will have fun and mommy comes back tonight ok?

Researcher: But you come back tonight?

Natalie: Yes, darling, we come back later. Now we need to go to work.

They leave and the mother comes from the kitchen to tell me with a big smile: They're playing school!

They come back with a bag each.

Natalie: We got you presents. Now we go on holiday. Come, darling.

We go to the bedroom again. Luke takes three suitcases. He wants to carry them all by himself. Natalie pretends to speak on the phone.

Luke: I take all the luggage.

Natalie: Come on darling lie down.

Luke: I drive

Natalie: Daddy drives

Luke: Get under the cover. We will put the cover because it rains.

I get out from under the cover pretending to wake up.

Natalie: But, darling, can't you see there's still the moon?

Luke: We're right next to you darling. I have plenty of suitidays, suitcases.

Researcher: Where are we going?

Luke: We're going to New York!

Researcher: I want my dummy! (*they laugh*)

Luke: Me, I'm the baby. No, you're the baby.

Natalie: Stay in the car.

She gets out of the bed (of the car) to talk on the phone.

Natalie: Yes, I'm going on holidays. I'm with my darling (*me, baby*) and my ... the dad.

Luke: Me, I'll meet you on holidays. You go with the pram and I'll drive.

In those 30 min of play, we lived through 3 or 4 months of life, in which they finished kindergarten, went on holiday, and started school. The liminal experience of finishing kindergarten, starting school, and, in a large sense, growing up is at the foundation of the engagement in a type of pretend play such as this one. An experience of play, where they can do and be who they do not know they will be and try some of the options out, gives them a safe space, a possibility to start elaborating and shaping some of that unknown future.

If we take the sociocultural propositions developed above, we can bring forward other points that pertain to how this passing through takes place. For example, what type of world within worlds can these children create in play? Although play might enable any possible imaginary scenario, what we see is that children's play seems limited in its actual forms. The characters and their actions are, on the one hand, bounded by the material arrangements the children reconstructed through life and, on the other, by their relational patterns. Thus, to understand such boundaries, this type of analysis requires to look beyond the cultural experience and refer to other aspects of the children's life, such as location, dialogues with others, and recurrences across situations (Cabra, 2020). I hold that it requires analyzing spaces, objects, and children's uses of them. It also requires comparing the personal reconstruction of spaces in guiding thought and the development of patterns. The reconstruction becomes more salient in contrast with other children's work of reconstruction in play (Cabra, 2021).

Thus, in this case, let us look first at the space in which Luke and Natalie were playing (Fig. 6.1). In their play area, there is one particular aspect that stands out: everything is there clearly demarcated and separated. Luke's toys and Natalie's toys, their beds and boxes, costumes, and animals do not mix in the room. They each have very-well-demarcated corners.¹

Luke and Natalie have a bedroom and a play area, which are connected by a small ladder and a little "board game room." In the bedroom and play area, each child's toys are clearly separated. In the play area, there is a wall separating the dollhouse (1) and the cars and garage (2). In their bedroom, Luke's bed has a

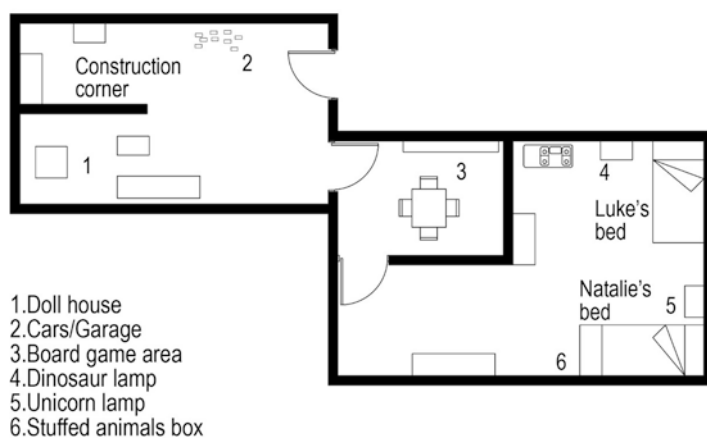


Fig. 6.1 Luke and Natalie's room and play area

¹This separation is not necessarily a constant in children sharing bedrooms with their siblings. Some children in this study mix all their toys, while others mix some but not others. There are many ways in which bedrooms can be organized (Cabra, 2021).

dinosaur lamp (4) and Natalie's a unicorn one (5) as well as a pink stuffed animals' box (6). The toys chosen for and by the children have been arranged in the house in a very separate form. There is, in the way objects have been disposed, a clear-cut separation between what is each of their things and sides of the room.

It is interesting that, in the pretend-play sequence before starting school (Observation 23), the children's tasks and activities are also clearly separated: one is the mom and the other the daddy, I am the baby, and I am supposed to behave like babies do. The clear-cut separation of objects in spaces of the bedroom is found again in the clear-cut separation of actions and tasks in the pretend-play scenario. As argued above, such material arrangements of the toys and the bedrooms can be psychologically reconstructed and guide experiences and behaviors. There is here a parallel between how they act and how the spaces have been organized around them. The clear-cut demarcation of spaces and separation of object—the construction corner separated from the doll one, or the unicorns far from the dinosaurs—are found as clear-cut separation in roles and actions when playing family and school.

Secondly, Natalie in this case evidences what I have called a relational pattern: she ventriloquates her parents' voice and other adults'. She frequently employs a tone of voice and phrases that she has heard adults around her say. In Sequence 43,² Natalie is first explaining why the researcher cannot be a baby boy and when the researcher asks her "then what kind of baby am I?", the child replies "You are my darling baby ..." in a soft, loving voice. She is here getting out of continuing to have to explain by borrowing someone else's voice to respond.

Sequence 43

Natalie: I am the mommy and you are the baby.

Researcher: The baby?

Natalie: Yes, but not a boy baby, a girl baby because daddy had a boy baby when he was little but now, he said we would have a girl baby ...

Researcher: So, I am a baby what?

Natalie: You are my darling baby ... daddy put a hook on you so that you don't run away. I am going to work darling. Goodbye.

Equally, in Sequence 44, Natalie is again trying to convince the researcher to do what she wants and for this, she makes use of many different "adult sayings," such as "it's the rules my dear," "stay here my darling, this will be good for you," and "it's not the children's choice! It's the parents who decide." These sayings may come from many different situations—playing a board game with a parent, being ill, and

²Although the numbers of the quoted sequences refer to events later in time, this strategy is a constant through the year in which the study took place.

disobeying her parents—and they are, as heard, reproduced to try and get the play-mate to do as the child wants.

Sequence 44

Researcher: What can we play in school?
Natalie: We can play anything we want!
Researcher: Can we play knights?
Natalie: No, because that's the rules my dear.
Researcher: Can I play princess?
Natalie: Yes, because the teacher wants. She decided we are all princesses.
Researcher: Even boys?
Natalie: Yes, even boys.
Researcher: I take the motorbike then.
Natalie: No, because it's too big and we need to put it in the bag.
Researcher: And the princess?
Natalie: Yes, take it, here, stay here my darling, it'll be good for you.
Researcher: Did you put fairy dust?
Natalie: We go to school and you take the princess. It is not the children's choice! It's the parents who decide ... (<i>she points the finger at me</i>).

I called this relational pattern “ventriloquism” (Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Gillespie, 2005). The mode Natalie comes up with what is made of parental and other adults’ utterances—what their parents tell them when they are sad or when they do not know what to do; she proposes to “solve” in a way, or to navigate this situation, by drawing upon these calming references that the parents provided. We are here very close to the content of the situation; what is going on is quite statically reproduced from the typical interaction pattern with their parent. In the pretend-play situation in which the beginning of school was elaborated (Sequence 23), Natalie speaks in others’ voices, explaining “mommy and daddy are right next door” or “call me if you need me.” Although such borrowings of adults’ words are quite common in children’s pretend play, what allows us to consider this a relational pattern is its salience and recurrence: there is a continuity in how she speaks and engages with others. Thus, by borrowing these words, she enters a world in a certain way—she may not transform into a purple dragon but might rather find a briefcase to get to work.

Here, considering the material arrangements as well as the relational patterns we just referred to may tell us about the shape such play worlds can adopt. Together with the notions of passing, becoming, and transitionality from process thought, we can shed some light on the possibilities and limits of the play worlds that can emerge, on the type of cultural experience that the liminal affords, as well as on the possible becoming of the liminal through such engagements.

Conclusion: Materiality and Patterns

Paul Stenner (2019) proposed to adopt a processual outlook on human experiences and particularly to consider liminal and cultural experiences as defining each other. These ideas, when applied to people's actual experiencing, show us the fluidity in our lives, the transformations that different cultural experiences permit. He further claimed that there is a continuum between different cultural experiences, based on the radically suspended character they may have—from situations of children playing pirates to adults reading breathtaking novels, and older people visiting holy sites to speak to lost loved ones. These engagements can have long-lasting and transformative effects on people's lives, and they are also characterized by either a complete or a partial suspension of realities' principles.

Some sociocultural psychologists complemented the processual outlook with claims about continuity in people's lives, particularly by theorizing the role of the material elements in experience (Valsiner, 1997; Valsiner & Lightfoot, 1987), as well as the development of people's relational patterns (Zittoun, 2020). I have proposed to explore these claims in the case of children's play.

In the example presented here, Natalie and Luke's play is first understood within a liminal space, an elaboration process of changing school and growing up. I then tried to show how playing was here also anchored in the objects of bedrooms, built around how the spaces are organized. It is with these elements that the children will represent what will happen to them in the next months. The children acted in a way that mimicked the organization of spaces: these have been reconstructed through their life within them, and thus guide their behavior. In the case of Natalie in particular, this guidance was displayed in a certain relational pattern she constructed to navigate novel situations.

Liminal moments in children's lives and their elaboration through the activity of play provide one first step to understand how transformations in children's lives are possible. But this is not enough: cultural experiences take place depending both on the material conditions that guide human relations and people's relational patterns. Thus, what I have here tried to show is that playful cultural experiencing may be bounded by, first, the spaces in which children play. These are made of complicated entanglements of matter and form: there are red and blue Spiderman figurines, hard rocks, soft teddy bears that can cry, etc. Their materiality and symbolic reconstruction provide certain paths and lead experiences to follow certain lines—although they can be resisted and even transformed at times. Secondly, children develop recurrent strategies or relational patterns with these liminal or transitional spaces: some learn to tolerate all sorts of transgressions of physical norms while others abide by a strict compliance of norms defined within a system (knights cannot fly or have superpowers, they ride on horses and fight with swords). The way in which the cultural experience can take place, the possibility for there to be a transitional space, is marked by the materiality of the world in which they take place as well as by these modes of passing through.

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Chapter 7

Maintenance Art: Paul Stenner's Liminality and the Case of Older Caregiving Spouses



Tessa Morgan, Robbie Duschinsky, and Stephen Barclay

The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct

The Death Instinct: separation; individuality; avant-garde par excellence; to follow one's own path to death—do your own thing; dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification; the eternal return; the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species; survival systems and operations; equilibrium (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, 1969! *Proposal for an Exhibition "CARE"*).

Born out of frustration of performing the seemingly incompatible identities of new mother and artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles begins her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* outlining the two properties she views as underpinning the patriarchal capitalist system (Ukeles, 1971). She dedicates the remainder of her manifesto proposing how *Care*—the intended name of her new exhibition—provides an animating force that blurs the boundaries between motherhood and art as modes of existence. She writes that she aims to make visible all of the “washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc.” involved in everyday life by putting her life on show by living in an art gallery for a month. In this “world between a world” offered by the public gallery space, Ukeles contemplates the sometimes dirty, always constant, processes of the everyday social reproduction of the self-as-artist and self-in-society. Through her work, Ukeles presents an open question: How women's lives can be remade into something more manageable and just?

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Ukeles' focus on maintenance as a creative strategy is offered as a deliberate counterweight to the rapid developments of the 1960s. This "decade caught between one America and another" was both one which saw the rise of the women's, civil rights and gay liberation movements and a conservative Richard Nixon presidency amidst the deepening of the imperialist Vietnam war (Heale, 2001). Interestingly, it is within the period of cultural flux that the concept of liminality is introduced into the English-speaking academy by Victor Turner's advocacy of Arnold van Gennep's 1909 ideas (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967). In attending to questions of what happens when individuals find themselves "betwixt and between" recognisable social states, we can see Turner and Ukeles as analogous projects of trying to take stock of the liminality of their collective Western milieu (Turner, 1967, p. 97; see also Douglas, 1966).

Scholars have argued that we are now in a persistently liminal period replete with economic and social instability following the 2008 global financial crisis along with slower burning crises including ecological disaster due to man-made climate change and biological changes meaning we are living for far longer but with an increasing number of chronic life-limiting conditions (Piketty, 2014; Szakolczai, 2014; Baraitster, 2017; Klein, 2019; WHO, 2017). Paul Stenner's new theory of liminality has thus arrived at just the right time to be exceedingly useful for fellow critical theorists seeking to make sense of our dizzying historic moment (Stenner, 2017; Szakolczai, 2009; Brown, 2005). The particular utility of his theory lies with the conceptual tools he offers us to (1) precisely diagnose liminal moments and (2) understand how people can agentially and creatively navigate a range of liminal zones.

Taking up Stenner's call to apply his concept of liminality to empirical research, this chapter draws on three specific case studies drawn from a year of longitudinal narrative interviews and observations with 17 older couples all aged over 70, living in the East of England, and where at least one member was diagnosed with a palliative, life-limiting condition and the other was their primary caregiver. Taking seriously the somatic as well as symbolic bridge between life and death offered by Ukeles, the first section of this chapter considers the ways "uh oh" moments can be triggered by seemingly mundane moments of care that catalyse older spouses' reinterpretation of their situation and self. We will argue that such moments of disappointed expectations are inseparable from the wider "uh oh" moment of biomedicine itself. The second section will then compare and contrast the ways older caregiving spouses make use of what Stenner terms "affective liminal technologies" to pursue—albeit not always successfully—"ah ha" moments that complete liminal passages. We will draw on intersectional theory to further illuminate how people's specific social location can explain why some older caregiving spouses remain stuck in the liminal contrary to their wishes. Ultimately by following Ukeles' rallying call to "zero in on pure maintenance" we can see how the act of older spouses' care work becomes an art *and* sometimes art itself as they navigate the very real circumstances of life and imminent death (Ukeles, 1971, p. 2).

Stenner on Liminality

Stenner argues that liminal experiences occur when someone or something is confronted with “this is not” experience, which he defines as “disturbing events” that trigger an “emotional flash of consciousness” as a result of a “disappointment of expectations” (Stenner, 2017, pp. 80-1). He argues that this passage is negotiated via a deep empiricism, which includes the sense data of presentational immediacy (what is currently observed) and causal efficacy (the events immediately preceding the “event”) (Stenner, 2017, p. 98). It is the mismatch between these two senses that prompts an “uh oh” moment. He distinguished further between “devised” “uh oh” moments like marriage or coming-of-age ceremonies which are expected versus unexpected, “spontaneous” “uh oh” moments like the loss of a spouse from terminal illness or the breakout of war (Stenner, 2017, p. 16). He argues that in both cases people may draw on “affective liminal technologies” to navigate the discombobulating nature of liminal passages (Stenner, 2017, p. 25). These technologies are often utilised to bring about an “ah ha” moment defined as “a new insight or intuition permitting the drawing of a new boundary” ultimately ending the liminal experience (Stenner, 2017, p. 83). He argues that devised “uh oh” moments lend themselves better to more formalised liminal affective technologies such as ritual, plays, songs and other culturally enshrined art objects. In fact in some instances they are used to precipitate liminality as attested by van Gennep’s original focus on how rituals often work as rites of passage (Stenner, 2017, p. 14). However spontaneous “uh oh” moments—precisely because of their unexpectedness—tend to use more discrete and/or makeshift and impromptu symbols.

Stenner’s account of liminality provides two important contributions to the existing field of liminality. First, he usefully decouples the concept from the rites of passage, which have until now provided its main explanatory thrust. By doing so Stenner brings back in the ambivalence at the heart of the liminal experience while also capturing experiences not necessarily rendered visible by this traditional schema. For example, while the dying phase might make the cut of a liminal state, caring for someone dying is less identifiable as a necessary rite of passage. A second and related point is that he places the onus on the analyst to explain exactly what makes something or someone liminal as opposed to defaulting to pre-existing “experiences” commonly regarded as liminal. This makes clear the important contributions empirical social scientists can make to the development of the concept through close observation and discussions with their participants.

Third, and perhaps most innovatively, Stenner argues that we must be attentive to the new forms of subjectivity produced within—not only after—the liminal passage. Stenner tells us that the “uh oh” occurs when someone is faced with a sense of crushing conformity or exhilarating freedom that goes beyond certain expectations that they have had for their life (this is not *my* experience). Liminal periods are thus ripe for the production of new forms of self. What is more, Stenner’s focus on processual thought also challenges us to think about *how* these new subjectivities are constructed. While they may form along the lines of the death instinct through dynamic change and deepening individualism they are equally likely to form via

life-instinct processes of attempted unification and maintenance (or indeed any combination of the two).

End-of-Life Care and Liminality

Liminality has been widely used in end-of-life studies because death has been associated with a definitive rite of passage (Little et al., 1998; Navon & Morgan, 2004; Nicholson et al. 2012). Julia Lawton has argued, however, that in modern times the diminished religiosity of the West has meant that the dying period itself rather than the afterlife has become the key liminal passage (note that van Gennep's discussion of the liminal only begins once the person is dead) (Lawton, 2009; Szakolczai, 2009). It is in this context that those providing end-of-life care are now commonly described as liminal too because of their proximity to death and the expected dramatic changes to self in the post-bereavement period (Jordan, Price, Prior, 2015). Nevertheless, by viewing liminality as a description of a state rather than a process associated with material lived specifics of caregiving, end-of-life care studies have done precisely what Stenner warns against: dulling the concept of liminality into an "observable 'it'" (MacArtney et al. 2015). The taken-for-grantedness of end-of-life caregiving as liminal is deficient on a number of levels but most notably because the diagnosis assumed to trigger the liminal period is far from clear-cut in the cases of long-term yet life-limiting chronic conditions such as dementia and advanced frailty which disproportionately impact older populations (Gardiner, et al. 2011; Larkin et al., 2007). Moreover, given the cultural expectations to care for one's spouse in sickness and in health, the revelation that one's partner requires care due to illness is associated with a shoring up of one's social status rather than a shattering of expectations (Howarth, 1998). This is particularly prominent for women who are disproportionately expected to care for children, grandchildren and parents across their life course (Kittay, 1999). To understand precisely how end-of-life care is experienced as liminal as well as to make sense of the subjectivities that are produced betwixt social states we therefore need to look to the specific disturbing events that make older spouses go "uh oh".

The "Uh Oh"

Donna

Donna, as with all the women you will meet in this chapter, is married to a very ill man.¹ At age 80 she is the primary caregiver for her 84-year-old husband Mikey who is 6 years on from a diagnosis of vascular dementia and in remission from

Note

¹Note that all names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of participants.

penile cancer. Most recently he has developed mini-strokes meaning, as Donna puts it, he could drop “like a sack of potatoes” at any moment. His diagnosis and even his castration as part of the treatment for his cancer received very little attention in her narrative however. She seemingly incorporates such dramatic occurrences fundamentally back into her understanding that getting older is necessarily involved with developing disease and as his wife she was always going to be the one caring for him. What occupies Donna’s narrative attention and what we argue has triggered her “uh oh” “this is not” experience moment that comes about over a seemingly more quotidian matter of tea-making.

The story below features in some variation in each of the three audio-recorded interviews:

R: ... But I have to hide the kettle now and all tablets are out of sight because we’ve had a couple of times where he’s taken my tablets so I’ve had to put them all away hide them and the kettle because good job I was here he decided he would make a cup of tea and I thought I’ll let him just keep an eye on him. So he filled the bowl the washing up bowl full of water put the kettle into it and then filled the kettle up.

I: Oh.

R: and then he was picking it up all dripping to put on the electric [pause].

I: Oh, that would have been dangerous.

R: and well he would have electrocuted himself I think so that is [pause] a bit of a worry so what I’ve got to do is just take out of sight anything that with the gas, he hasn’t got a clue how to cos you have to press it down hold it and then turn it well he wouldn’t think of that he wouldn’t be able to turn it. And think that oh you know so that is one good thing so really it’s the kettle so as long as everything is out of reach of him doing any damage to himself, and I’m only gone sort of half an hour but in the mornings, I always walk the dog early mornings so I just leave him in bed until the lady comes to sort him out.

[Interview 2].

In this moment the presentational immediacy of Mickey’s incapacity to boil the kettle combines with the casual efficacy that had he been left to his own devices he would have severely injured or killed himself. As such it is a moment of recognition that his actions, not simply his body, have become a liability to himself. Deeper still, however, when he is unable to conduct this ritual fundamental to British culture—making of tea both for oneself and for others—his autonomy and indeed his adulthood are called into question. Haim Hazan has argued that tea-making is a “time-reckoning device” because it is so “deeply entrenched in the daily life” of English adults (Hazan, 1987, p. 206). For Donna, Mickey’s inability to make tea sticks out to her as a point at which she recognised herself and them as a couple *in* time making her home space feel extraordinary (Cavell, 2018, p. 20). Lauren Berlant has described this sense of feeling historical as a process of when “amidst the usual activity of life ... norms and intuitions suddenly feel off” (Berlant, 2008, p. 5).

Locating Donna's "uh oh" moment in the mundane seemingly contravenes Stenner's contention that given that liminal moments require a "suspension or interruption of recurrent events" they do not occur in mundane settings or "business-as-usual" routines (Stenner, 2017, p. 82). Nevertheless, we would argue that taking ordinary insights seriously helps to further contextualise Stenner's theory. In a time of increasing chronic illness amongst other forms of "slow death" as Berlant terms it, "zones of ordinariness" are often acutely difficult to diagnose as they comprise at once places of "life building and the attrition of human life" (Berlant, 2007). Thus it is incredibly difficult from outset to predict what will be experienced as mundane or exceptional. Moreover, because many of our participants could not easily leave their homes (due to caregiving constraints and/or physical limitations), we argue that something altering in their everyday is liable to produce more severe existential whiplash than if it were to happen elsewhere. Indeed, utilising Stenner's conceptual tools to "autopsy" the everyday highlights that the location of the biggest change may be felt on the level of one's subjectivity (Cavell, 2018).

Upon recognising that her husband is no longer able to participate in adult practices, Donna reconsiders her husband's personhood and in turn her own. Like many participants caring for someone with dementia, Donna refers to her husband at different points as "baby-" or "child-" like (Kontos, 2005). This "uh oh" moment therefore attests to a changing level of dependency in their relationship. Donna now must be attentive of her husband 24/7 in order to keep him safe. In this moment she also recognises that she can no longer be reliant on her husband for certain aspects of their joint lives, such as intimacy identifiably exchanged through the making and receiving of a hot drink by someone dear. Thus the moment at which she recognises she must become her husband's ever-present minder, as a mother would her child, is also the moment at which the depth of their pre-existing "nested dependencies" as Eva Kittay terms it reveals themselves (Kittay, 1999).

Through this twofold process of ontological coalescence Donna senses that she and Mickey have subjectively transitioned from being two individuals to being a dyad. The formation of a dyadic unit between care provider and care receiver has been similarly observed in ethnographies examining healthcare assistants caring for older adults (Buch, 2013) and familial care provided to dying kin (Mazus, 2013). This scholarship has focused on the dyad emerging from habituated process of intimate, intensive body work through which care providers come to see their care recipient's body as an extension of their own (Lawton, 2009). As is made visible through the Donna's "uh oh" moment, their dyadic connection precedes intensive body work and is rather located in the changing logic of their long-term romantic relationship.

In this distinct context Donna and Mickey's account also indicates ways that the dyad can take a more mutual rather than hierarchical form. This is evidenced in Donna's subtle deployment of the term "like" following any instance she uses infantilising language. We understand this semantic choice as an act of maintenance, both of his dignity but also of the legitimacy of their kinship connection (Borneman, 2001). It provides a defence from her becoming her husband's mother, which is taken as the paradigm of one person (the mother) being instrumentalised into the

other (baby) (Ruddick, 1989; see also Chodorow, 1978; Baraitser, 2009). Their mutually contingent lives are further attested to by the spontaneous decline of Donna's health amidst Mickey's increasingly rapid decline of cognition and motor function. Between the first and second interviews, Donna collapsed at the bedside of her husband who had recently been discharged to a care home from hospital following another mini-stroke. She is subsequently admitted as a patient in a nearby hospital. Rather than herself and body simply being an extension of his then, we argue that they are mutually constitutive of each other. Just as she performs a role of keeping him safe and alive, he also offers her the will and reason to continue to live. In this context it is perhaps unsurprising that it is when he is taken out of her care that her body reveals the full extent of its decline. It is only through her repetition of the tea story against the changing realities of their health and their mutually increasing inability to psychically care for each other that Donna and Mickey's intersubjective and inter-corporeal connection is made tangible, both to us as analysts and on some level to Donna herself. In this process it becomes clear that this "uh oh" moment was never just about when it went wrong for Mickey but rather for them both.

Donna and Mickey's situation thus offers an interesting insight into Stenner's contention that there always remains an unbridgeable gap between the psycho and the social (noting that the psychosocial is his broader theoretical framework for liminality). Stenner argues that one must always make an "imaginative leap" if we are ever to feel the pain of another (Stenner, 2017, p. 15). Nevertheless, we argue that to take seriously the ambiguity and uncertainty at the heart of the liminal is to leave open the possibility for new subjective entities to form within it. We contend that in acute moments prompted by the ontologically challenging and physically draining nature of end of life, care may really get under one's skin and form previously unimaginable subjectivities including the dyad.

Biomedicine's "Uh Oh" Moment

Donna and Mickey's story can be regarded as a microcosm of a wider "uh oh" moment within the contemporary biopolitical enterprise. Michel Foucault argues that the current modern form of power structures is arranged around the "power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death" in order to ensure healthy, productive populations (Foucault, 1976). The widespread emergence of non-curable, life-limiting conditions such as dementia in late modern society poses a significant challenge to the biopolitical order to continue to "foster life" (Foucault, 1976). Ironically this situation can be understood as an unintended outcome of the success of public health campaigns, public sanitation initiatives and developments in medical technology, which means that people are living into such advanced age and are thus increasingly susceptible to developing palliative conditions that allude any biomedical cure. The ensuing rapidly globally ageing populations without the necessarily social support structures (at the level of society and family) to provide such care

have subsequently caught international and national organisations “off guard” (Buch, 2015a, b). It is also illustrative of the much deeper crisis of care at the heart of financialised capitalism whereby profit and growth are privileged over the maintenance processes and people involved in the social reproduction of society (Fraser, 2017).

In this context the second half of the definition of biopower “... disallow [life] to the point of death” has become increasingly relevant (Agamben, 1998; Biehl, 2005). In the *Birth of Biopolitics* Foucault prophetically argues that older people occupy a “liminal” status and thus can always be brought back into recirculation from retirement in the event of potentially destabilising crises (Foucault, 2008). A dramatic contemporary example of this has been the recruitment of retired doctors and nurses to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. In the slower burning crisis of the ageing population, we contend that older spouses have been implicitly recruited qua heteronormative social mores and explicitly by the lack of external support to be personally responsible for keeping their partner “in sickness and health”, in other words alive. By supporting for their partners to live into their very old age, older spouses help to ensure high longevity rates and the semblance of thriving productive economies that foster life intact. This is despite the individual impact incurred by those providing care (Foucault, 1976; Dassel & Carr, 2016; Potier et al., 2018). To publicise the extent of the care provided by older spouses (especially without any additional formal support) and the impact it has on their health, however, would undermine the notion of the universal healthcare system being responsive to people’s needs equally (Dixon et al., 2015, see also Davis, 2012). It would also show up the deeper crises of care which are predicated on some people, typically women, sacrificing their lives in order for other people and cultural norms to prevail (Sutherland et al., 2018). As such older caregiving spouses necessarily occupy a chthonic position in late modernity by being indispensable and yet necessarily invisible. Stenner’s conceptual arsenal enables us to articulate seemingly mundane instances of spouse care as structural “uh oh” moments in which the dyad may be one of many patches deployed by prevailing power structures trying to navigate out of the liminal towards an “ah ha” moment (Stenner, 2017, p. 83).

The “Ah Ha”

The other innovation of Stenner’s concept of liminality is his attention he pays to the resources—which he terms liminal affective technologies—used to navigate through the liminal passage and achieve a denouement—an “ah ha”. While rituals have typically been considered a “kind of technology for producing moving experiences that are conducive of psychosocial transformation” (Stenner, 2017, p. 25), Stenner argues that these only apply to devised liminal moments. Spontaneous liminal moments on the other hand both cry out for symbolic expression yet require new forms of symbolic representation because their unexpectedness locates them at the “very edge of semantic availability” (Stenner, 2017, p. 25). By animating the

liminal passage as a place people can exercise their agency via different cultural resources, Stenner also raises the possibility that people may fail to reach this “ah ha” moment. While both van Gennep and Turner recognise this outcome they pay remarkably little attention to it. In fact, Turner’s observation of young Ndemku initiates leads him to see liminal passages (by which he is referring to the devised kind) as equalising periods where previous signifiers of status are suspended, thus raising the question of how anyone can fail amongst such homogeneity (Turner, 1967, p. 99).

To take seriously the fact that some people get stuck in the passage shifts the attention to why? One potential response is that people want to remain stuck. Scholars conducting research with community-dwelling older frail adults have found that their participants actively strove to postpone the passage as it was preferable to any “end” that would be associated with institutionalisation (Buch, 2015a, b) or death (Nicholson et al., 2012). Stenner offers a more generally applicable, albeit ambiguous, answer that it has to do with the “capacity of the subject to, as it were, bear the event, and be transformed by it” (Stenner, 2017, p. 83). Gleaned from the importance Stenner places on subjectivity in shaping experiences of ageing in his previous work, we feel on safe ground to assume that he does not view liminality, like Turner, as a period of total subjective erasure (Stenner, McFarquhar, Bowling, 2011).

To better understand what shapes an individuals’ capacity to both utilise liminal affective technologies and access “ah ha” moments we draw on intersectional theory. Brah and Phoenix (2004) have defined intersectionality as an approach signifying the:

complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts (p. 76).

Intersectional thinkers understand identity as always “fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power” and help to show how macro-level processes can influence micro-level experiences including the processes through which people come to comprehend their lives (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013). This dovetails with our discussion above that it is precisely on the basis of some aspects of identity and features of one’s life history that people make casual inferences that trigger “this is not” my experience moments.

To help understand the variance in which some people are able to achieve their “ah ha” moment and others fail, the last section of this chapter will compare the cases of Carol and Helen who make dramatically different uses of affective liminal technologies despite sharing some key similarities of them both being in their late 70s (77 and 79, respectively), with slightly older husbands (89 and 82, respectively) who have multiple palliative conditions (cancer and Alzheimer’s vs. vascular dementia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)). In both cases their husbands have only just returned home from relatively long-term stays in hospital and care homes meaning they were both in a position of reconsidering their relationship and bodies in their home space.

Carol

Amidst the intensity of her husband's returning home from hospital no longer walking paralleled with the increasingly searing pain of her hernia in her left leg Carol turns to song. Intermittently breaking into song including Nat King Cole's *Unforgettable* across two lengthy interviews, Carol was perhaps an exception in her absolute enthusiasm for creative expression. Evidently thriving under the limelight of the devised experience of the interview, Carol showcased how the art to her caregiving involved the skill of reinterpreting her situation. Carol poignantly exhibited this through her rendition of *Jolene* directed at her husband who had sat deathly still and silent in his adjacent armchair for over an hour, with only the soft movement of his chest indicating life. However, when she began to sing to the interviewers, as a complete surprise his eyes opened and he even tried to sing too:

Carol: ... (Singing) Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, —.

Charles: Whoa.

Carol: - I'm beggin' of you please, don't take my man. Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, please don't take him just because you can.

Charles: Oh yeah. (Laughter). [Interview 1].

It is through her use of affective liminal technologies then that Carol forges her connection with her husband, simulating his personhood by offering him a tune. In sharing this moment she reaffirms his "dignity"—something she was very concerned with—as a music maker in his own right. Moreover, by reimagining *Jolene* from man-stealer to undertaker Carol wards off death and in the process undergoes the psychosocial transformation of her becoming his caring defender.

This reinterpretation is extended to her home setting, particularly the living room, which she positively resignifies as a stage for her creative pursuits. This is contrasted to her wider feeling of her home as a "prison" where she and her husband are trapped within because of the couple's limited mobility and lack of formal and informal support that it would necessitate to get out of the house. In a further act of artistic creation Carol sings for Charlie and me the song she wrote and recorded for their 41st wedding anniversary. In the tune of *I'll Take You Home Again*, Kathleen by Bing Crosby she sings:

"... I'll take you home again Charlie, across the oceans far and wide, but remember come back to England to me ..." [Interview 1]

The song achieves two things: symbolically transporting Charlie back to his original home in Jamaica and reassuring him that he will always have a home in her. It is in this way she is able to achieve her "ah ha" moment that symbolically enables him to be cared for and die at "home" while assuring them both that they will never be truly apart. Ultimately, Carol's ability to make art of the otherwise despondent situation resulting from the particular biopolitical circumstances attests to the ways that some older caregiving spouses are able to use their "bodies and pleasures" to make a life more liveable in their zones of abandonment (Foucault, 1976).

We emphasise *some*, however, as Carol's capacity for creative expression which is a result of mutually constitutive aspects of her subjectivity that is both produced and made salient through her achieving her "ah ha" moment. Her use of affective liminal technologies is influenced clearly by her working class identity, which as sociologist Lisa McKenzie has noted is steeped in storytelling as a way of making bearable the daily symbolic violence and economic hardship (McKenzie, 2015). For example, Carol told stories and sung as a way to ensure that her husband knew he would be cared for in a homely way despite the option for him to die at home having been taken away by a private developer who has recently brought up their whole council estate they had lived in for 20 years in order to raze it so as to maximise commercial profit. Her motivation for conjuring a sense of home through symbols and song was also pressing because both of them were migrants to England and thus living away from their homelands. Finally her ability to usher cultural symbols is heavily indebted to her being a Jehovah's Witness which is steeped in imagery language and use of song. Aligning with her belief system she also decides not to seek medical attention for her leg, thus contributing to her pained mobility and thus materially impacting her narrative situation. For all these intersecting reasons, Carol had an exceptional grasp of tools to narrate and a particular context conducive to narration which underpinned her deft use of affective liminal technologies.

Helen

Unlike Carol, Helen only used words and symbols leanly to articulate her situation which she felt ambivalent towards. The most symbolic she got was when she described how she felt "absolutely shattered". Her incapacity to reflect on herself is consistent with evidence highlighting how little time caregivers get to reflect on themselves (Olson, 2015). Helen herself reflects that she feels like a "cat chasing its tail". This fits with Ukeles's insight in an interview about her art that: "[c]apitalism is like that. The people who were taking care and keeping the wheels of society turning were mute ..." (Ryan, 2009). Reflecting this difficulty she had with articulating her situation, at one point in the interview she said:

"I could, I could, scream and cry, run [squeak sigh]" [Interview 1].

Sara Ahmed aptly acknowledges that women who fall outside of traditional feminine stereotypes of being "good" caring heterosexual mothers or wives often lack the language to parse their feelings despite having logic in their "gut" that something is not right (Ahmed, 2012). Michel-Rolph Trouillot's history of the Haitian revolution similarly suggests that mutiny against the governing elite is seldom thinkable let alone sayable before the event itself. Helen's privileging of affect—her sighing and squeaking—to communicate such a depth of her longing for a way out quietly illustrates this (Trouillot as quoted in Canning, 1999).

When trying to grapple with instances of the inarticulatable, Stenner usefully contributes that "consciousness is the crown of experience" rather than its

content (Stenner, 2017, p. 94). This is decidedly different from the conception laid out in the illness literature that “turning somatic into words makes it an experience” (Frank, 1995, p. xix). With reference to deep empiricism Stenner contends that an experience comprises the sense data of presentational immediacy (what is currently observed) and causal efficacy (the events immediately preceding the “event”) (Stenner, 2017 p. 98). Importantly, the “data” of experience can be what has been said but also physically or emotionally felt. It need not be externally communicable, nor fully comprehensible, to still comprise an experience.

Honing in on Helen’s expressions of affect such as sounds of relief reveals a new Helen creeping in at the edges:

Oh its just “ahhh” [sound of relief] you know. I play Mahjong on a Tuesday and it’s just a social ... “ahh” I’m away. I sit down and think, wow, this is amazing. He’s not there and he can’t call me and my time is my own. It does make such a difference. Absolutely makes a difference. I have a friend who is so good who will always ring me and say “what can we do this weekend”, or whatever. Most weekends I find I can do something. [Interview 1]

While this alternative rendering of self brings an “ah ha” in a sense of making conscious what is on the other side of his death, the transformative power is only partial. She is quickly brought back to the practicalities of the situation by the thought of her domineering husband’s claims on her time, speech and thought. This shows that his particular performance of masculinity further entrenches their dyadic subjectivity and in her case mitigates against her ability to achieve an “ah ha” denouement.

Thus Helen’s example shows how the gendered dynamics play an important role in shaping one’s capacity to utilise affective liminal technology; however, when contrasted with loquacious Carol we can clearly see that it is insufficient on its own to explain the disparity. In Helen’s case she belongs to the white upper-middle class where the expectation was that she was an acquiescent housewife of a nuclear family, whereas Carol as a Welsh working-class woman has always had to work to economically support her family of nine. Work thus provided her with an avenue to develop her own identity and capacity to assert it as already alluded to above. Ethnicity also undoubtedly shaped aspects of the husband’s respective gender performance whereas Helen’s husband occupies a privileged status as a white business-owning male—thus occupying a position of hegemonic masculinity in modern-day Britain, Charles is a Afro-Caribbean working-class migrant male occupying a sub-altern masculinity with less power relative to other men and arguably his white wife (see Connell, 2005). Consequently, by taking an intersectional approach we can better understand the way structural factors can impact people’s capacity to utilise affective liminal technologies and thus further understand reason for the disparities found around people achieving or not achieving “ah ha” moments.

Conclusion: Ta-da?

Paul Stenner’s reinvigorated concept of liminality provides applied social scientists with novel conceptual tools to understand urgent questions of subjectivity, experience and inequality engendered by late modern capitalism and rapidly ageing

populations. By directing us towards the specific events in which people's expectations for their lives are disturbed—either expectedly or randomly—Stenner provides an entry point into how subjects and their conditions of care are produced, sustained and reworked. Offering us the “uh oh” moment to think with revives the uncertainty inherent in liminal passages, which has been lacking both specifically in end-of-life care research and elsewhere. Similarly, Stenner's innovative discussion of affective liminal technologies restores the creative agency of people inside liminal moments to attempt to navigate towards “ah ha” moments. Moreover, his interest in the mutual connection between self and society embedded in his psychosocial paradigm enables us to reflect more generally on the concept of power and particularly how health and economic contexts prime liminal moments.

Drawing attention to the ways that some people fail to achieve “ah ha” moments begins an overdue discussion about the differential circumstances in which people arrive at these transformative life moments. Privileging affective and somatic cues as much as discursive signs makes Stenner's work particularly insightful here as it makes visible those occupying subaltern social locations who are both the most likely to find their experiences as jarring with wider cultural expectations (thus encountering with greater frequency “this is not” experiences) and the least equipped with specific cultural scripts to verbalise their oppression.

While this chapter has explored the decisive utility of Stenner's new concept, we suggest three avenues for taking his concept further. First, we argue that Stenner's concept ought to be applied to mundane settings and activities as zones of ordinarieness are no less important realms of meaning-making, particularly for those who are physically constrained to home by illness and/or caregiving activities. In this context we can see how people having liminal moments can draw on a range of processes Ukeles attributes to the death instinct such as development and change and/or life instincts such as maintenance to “bare” liminal passages. Second, we argue that Stenner's concept can be applied to instances of the dyad, which we understand as exceeding the bodily division outlined by his definition of the psychosocial. As we argue above, sometimes care really does get on and under people's skin resulting in a collapsing of subjective and corporeal boundaries. Third, we suggest that an intersectional perspective offers additional grunt to Stenner's attempt to make sense of how and why some people do not transition through liminal moments and/or make use of affective liminal technologies. Given Stenner's admirable interest in bodies and liminal ambiguity we think that all three of these insights can be accommodated within his wider theoretical lens, which thrillingly calls out for application and extension. Thinking liminally about increasingly ordinary instances of end-of-life care we argue that Stenner offers us a better vantage to see and access our historical moment so as to begin to provide nuanced answers to questions such as the one posed by Ukeles arguably even more pressing in light of our new biological order:

Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who is going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

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Chapter 8

Art Therapy as a Liminal, Playful Space: Patient Experiences during a Cancer Rehabilitation Program



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Introduction

Many patients with cancer face existential challenges in their struggle to find mental respite from their illness and a space for processing and transforming difficult thoughts and concerns. Research has shown that providing a space for cancer patients' own creative expression can foster healing processes and mental well-being (Gabriel et al., 2001). Patients and caretakers often have an intuitive sense of creative art expression being “therapeutic” in some way but lack knowledge and

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experience of how the significance of art therapy extends beyond relaxation or recreation (Pratt & Wood, 1998). However, evidence has shown that art therapy can facilitate existential meaning to peoples' experiences, especially when facing serious disease (Van Lith & Spooner, 2018; Guay, 2018).

Using art materials and elements for therapeutic processes such as self-expression and reflection requires the presence of a trained artist or art therapist who can assist the expressions and needs of the patients (Fancourt, 2017). The art therapist uses his or her understanding of the patient's interactions with the artwork to support self-awareness by creative self-expression. This involves noting the patients' responses to the art materials and how the artwork is executed (Fancourt, 2017). The thoughts and feelings evoked in the therapist by the client's artwork and those observed in and reported by the client all comprise the substance of the therapeutic encounter. Art therapy gives an opportunity for expression and communication without words and can enable people to come to an understanding of the nature of the problems with which they struggle. Thus, it provides a form for material expression as an alternative to spoken language. In other words, art therapy concentrates not on the artwork produced but also on the process by which it is made (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

In the rehabilitation of cancer patients, art has been found to ease life in proximity to death (la Cour et al., 2007), reduce anxiety and distress (Boehm et al., 2014), enhance energy in pediatric patients with cancer (Abdulah & Abdulla, 2018), or even reduce somatic pain (Kim et al., 2018). These positive effects might be facilitated by the role of arts in providing pleasure, increased disease-related resilience, expression of self, or enhanced social relationships (Lee et al., 2017).

Prior research exploring the use of art therapy often draws on psychological developmental, therapeutic, and/or existentially oriented theories such as those of the psychologist Donald W. Winnicott; the psychologist, psychotherapist, and philosopher Rollo May; and the psychiatrist and philosopher Viktor Frankl, which are indeed relevant for understanding the therapeutic process. However, less attention has been given to the potentials of art therapy in regard to liminality which may complement existing knowledge and practices of art therapy. Hence, aligned with the need for qualitative research on art activities within healthcare contexts (MacDonald, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2017a; Nielsen et al., 2017b), our approach is directed towards the significance of the art-therapeutic process, drawing on theories of liminality and play (Van Gennep, 1909; Winnicott, 1971; Stenner, 2017).

This chapter presents aspects of the experience and use of art therapy in a health-related program for rehabilitation of cancer patients that the authors have described elsewhere (Roessler et al., 2020; Assing Hvidt et al., 2020). Using theories of liminality and play as the theoretical lenses, we aim to show how a group of 40 cancer patients participating in a rehabilitation program have experiences of transition through art therapy. 33 women and seven men (within the age span of 31–76 years), across all disease stages and types of cancer, participated in a five-day rehabilitation program, addressing different existential themes (e.g., death, hope, love).

Liminality, Play, and Emotions

The chapter is based on the theory of liminality and the *rite de passage* framework proposed by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep (1909) as a way of understanding rituals and rites observed in traditional societies. The *rite de passage* is related to the dynamics of both individual and social life and characterized by three phases: *separation*, *transition*, and *reincorporation*. Any transition begins with a period of separation from ordinary or previous social life and concludes with a period characterized by a reaggregation to a new state of being. Van Gennep also named these three phases *pre-liminal*, *liminal*, and *post-liminal* to emphasize that each phase is a passage carried out in a specific physical spatial way that takes a specific amount of time. Liminal experiences “*happen during occasions of significant transition, passage or disruption*” (Stenner, 2017, 14).

In our understanding, cancer disrupts the habitual life of patients (Turner, 1969) transforming their life in relation to themselves and their significant others (Gibbons et al., 2014). Life-threatening illness such as cancer confronts patients with death as an existential fact and as such evokes a space of transition between life and death, a “threshold between one state and another, between getting better and not getting better” (Froggatt, 1997, 128). The British cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner (1969), suggested that transition can be transformative, thus describing liminality as a “stage of reflection” where “the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” occurs (p. 99).

The liminal person is thus in transition towards a different state of life. During the liminal phase, the individual exists in a state in which the past is left behind, but the future state has yet to emerge (Stenner, this volume). A rite of passage is more than a structured ritual, as each phase creates experiences of space and time that are different from normal everyday reality. Turner (1969) sees a rite of passage as a situation where there is a different structure from the one we know—the liminal phase is thus characterized by “anti-structure.” The transition to the new stage is not a transition away from a true self but rather deeper towards the self in the new stage of life.

In accordance with the psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, Turner emphasizes the central role of play in transitional processes. In Turner’s view, liminal experiences are characterized by a ludic recombination of patterns, which may concern, e.g., images of self or social relationships. Being in a liminal phase can be viewed as a process of playful experimentation, which may lead to the emergence of new ways of expression and self-representation (Turner, 1974; Rowe, 2008).

The close connection between emotion, play, and creativity was previously described by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who had uncovered the importance of expressing emotions in the associative space of children’s play: “Every playing child behaves like a poet, in that it creates a world of its own, or more accurately expressed, it transports things into its own world” (Freud, 1959, 174). The notion, that “playing is itself a therapy” was further explored by Donald W. Winnicott (1971) and will in this chapter be used to understand the processes that the participants in the rehabilitation program went through while working with art therapy. Painting as creative playing is considered both “joyful” and a place to express “tensions” (Lenormand, 2018, 83). “It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and use the whole personality and it is

only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (Winnicott, 1971, cited after Lenormand, 2018, 87).

In our chapter, Winnicott’s (1964) explanation of a suspension of limits for a new set of new limits to emerge is applied by focusing on the participants’ emotional experiences in a cancer rehabilitation. Therefore, the term “corrective emotional experience,” originally introduced by Alexander and French (1946) but modified by Winnicott, is introduced to designate emotional change during the art therapy intervention. In psychotherapy, the corrective emotional experience describes the crucial process that takes place. The therapeutic setting is hereby seen as a context in which patients are re-exposed in a secure and holding environment—made up by the empathy and awareness of the therapist to emotional situations that could not be handled in the past. In order to facilitate the patient’s self-development, the patient must undergo a corrective emotional experience that can repair the traumatic influence of previous experiences. While this is happening, the therapist supports the process by a holding attitude (Winnicott, 1964), which makes it possible for the patient to have a corrective emotional experience, and afterwards to try out new behaviors, initially in the secure environment and later in daily life. The idea of a possible correction of emotions by using certain experiences has been adapted to health science (Roessler, 2011). The corrective emotional experience in the context of a rehabilitation program using art and encounter between peers is understood as a reeducation of emotions that are linked to illness.

All in all, the concepts of transition explained through liminality, play, and corrective emotional experiences are useful in comprehending and articulating the underlying psychological and therapeutic aspects that help cancer patients undergoing rehabilitation to make the transition from one stage of life development to the next. This next step of transition includes both the returning to a cured life and for some participants accepting their approaching death. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore how theories of liminality can increase the understanding of cancer patients’ processes (including transformations) in art therapy.

The Cancer Rehabilitation Program

Based on existing research and prior experiences with designing psychosocial interventions for patients with cancer and serious disease, a rehabilitation program (for a detailed description see Assing Hvidt et al., 2020) was designed, including three elements:

- Group dialogues combining existential psychotherapy and spiritual care moderated by a clinical psychologist and a chaplain: The purpose of the group dialogues was to help integrate existential and spiritual life perspectives in the life of patients, thereby helping them create a feeling of meaning towards past lived and future life.
- Art therapy moderated by an artist with psychotherapeutic training: The purpose was to support patients in accessing inner resources through creative activities

that could facilitate both a nonverbal processing of difficult emotions and a mental respite. No prior skills were expected of the patients.

- The interaction with nature and the architectural surroundings was intended to support the dialogical and creative expressions during the course (Roessler et al., 2020).

All patients followed a five-day residential program. Two program venues had been selected for implementation: a place of retreat in the countryside offering courses to the public with existential, spiritual, or religious content throughout the year. The second venue is a facility located in a medium Danish city near a medieval castle and the sea. The facility is part of the region's university hospital and university targeting patients with rehabilitation and palliation needs. The courses were implemented in May and October 2018. Participation was voluntary, in response to promotional material. More than the maximum number of twenty participants applied for attending each course—the majority of whom were women. A psychologist, chaplain, and artist welcomed the participants and accompanied them through the week.

Each course day was initiated with a morning gathering, and afterwards the patients were divided into two groups, where one half of the patients worked with art therapy in the morning while the other half was engaged in group dialogue and vice versa in the afternoon. Each art session lasted 2.5 h, adding up to 12.5 h of art therapy per participant during the week.

In the group dialogues, a combination of existential psychotherapy and spiritual care was provided and moderated by a clinical psychologist and a chaplain. The purpose of this dialogic activity was to offer an integration of secular, existential, and spiritual perspectives on the participants' life situation and narratives in order to help create a feeling of meaning towards past lived and future life (Yalom, 1980). A focus on finding beneficial strategies to help participants cope with and manage their future was built into the dialogic activities.

The art therapist gave an introduction to basic color mixing intended to facilitate the process of painting, lower possible tensions to painting, and sensitize participants to color shades. Moreover, the therapist provided a framework for the workshop in order to defuse the process of painting by pointing out some of its aims: a relaxing activity, to enjoy working with colors, to enjoy the painting process, having the possibility to make up something, to express emotions, to be intuitive, and not having to think (Assing Hvidt et al., 2020).

The Art Therapy Intervention

The art therapy intervention is developed by the Danish artist Ole Lindqvist (for details in Danish see Graven et al., 2019). In the following, Lindqvist's understanding of art therapy and its mechanism will be described. In the art therapy sessions, patients are able to work with more than the spoken and interpersonal encounter;

they have their art piece as a third dimension. In our intervention, the artist aimed to support different forms of expression by providing a fixed time frame, classical music, and daily instructions. It was an assumption of the team that the creative process would not be compromised by disease. Through the painting activity, participants could unfold their creativity and art could thereby serve as a visual parallel language for emotions. Emotions following severe illness can be perceived as unbearable and complex. Art offers the opportunity to express emotions visually, using form and color without these necessarily being understood. Paintings can be the first step to understanding emotions, and through the individual's distinctive aesthetic means, qualities, and "handwriting," the image becomes a witness of the presence of the painter. Any psychological expression, such as dreams, play, phantasies, or images that arise in art therapy, has an underlying meaning that is typically not clearly understood. Therefore, the images often contain unexpected insights or important answers for patients to reflect on and make use of.

Data Collection

Participant observations were performed during the two courses by two researchers, who actively took part in activities and informal social gatherings.¹ Informal interviews were conducted during these activities. Before termination of the program, on the last day, patients were divided into focus groups, where the researchers posed broad open-ended questions to encourage patients to reflect on different elements of the intervention, including art therapy, and providing insight into what they experienced as significant to them and bringing about change (if any). Photos of the activities and the surroundings were used to direct patients' attention and stimulate discussion, such as those taken during the art activities. The interviews lasted up to 60 min and were transcribed verbatim. The results of the overall evaluation are reported elsewhere (Assing Hvidt et al., 2020).

Analysis

The interview transcripts and field notes were read several times and analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) focusing on what emerged as significant to the patients in the art therapy processes. The six focus group interviews were analyzed separately. To ensure rigorous analysis, the findings were discussed between the authors to achieve consensus on the understanding and

¹Ethical considerations: The study was approved by the *Research and Innovation Organization* (RIO) of the University of Southern Denmark (Journal no. 18/27303). All patients were provided with written and verbal information about the research project before attending the course and gave their written informed consent.

formulation of themes (Stiles, 1993). Interview transcripts were read individually several times to allow the researchers to get an overview. Afterwards, we highlighted—still individually—specific parts of the text, and discussed in a common process how art experiences influenced the participants' emotions. Subsequently, all expressions relevant to the participant's experiences of art therapy and influences on their emotional and cognitive processes were noted down. These reflection processes were combined into superordinate themes, containing as much complexity as possible. These steps were completed with all six focus group interviews, one at a time. Finally, themes were established capturing the participants' experiences of art therapy, and how these influenced their reflexive processes. On that basis, the themes were set in dialogue with theory on liminality and transformative processes.

Findings

The analysis identified three main processes of liminal transition: (a) engaging in a new creative realization or refusing to do so, (b) therapeutic change, and (c) reintegration: contemplation and peace. We show how the participants' experiences can be understood in the context of a liminal space facilitating reflection on new patterns of life. The use of art therapy as an extended part of rehabilitation care contributes to transformation of crisis by fostering patient expression and positive processes of "corrective emotional experiences."

Engaging in a New Creative Realization or Refusing to Do So

The patients felt supported by the art therapist to which qualities such as "warm," "calm," and "containing" (Winnicott, 1964) were attributed, and the working atmosphere without verbal exchange (as in the group therapy sessions). Several of the patients highlighted the valuable combination of group therapy and art therapy. Sharing with others and having the opportunity to emerge in individual spaces were described as activities enriching one another on a therapeutic level. In addition, being with other group members was mentioned as having a positive impact. Following their individual creative processes and seeing their pleasure were supportive in itself. Highlighting that the art therapy was also a collective, shared process within the group, a joint painting was crafted at the end of the week, where all group members gathered together in a circle around a big canvas and each group member put his or her imprint on the canvas moving to a new place every 30 s in a round-the-clock movement. No words were exchanged while painting and classical music (Bach) was played in the background. The music of Bach can be understood as an "affective practice that is regularly enacted and re-enacted to recreate, formulate and express valued feelings and emotions" (Stenner, 2017, 234). Bach, in our program, was implemented as an artistic element assisting the ritual of creative

expression. Following our art teacher Ole Lindqvist, Bach draws the participants' attention inwards and "wraps them in a warm blanket without displacing their pain," which seems to be a good support in an art therapeutical context.

Most of the patients had not painted since public school. Gaining some basic knowledge from the art therapist about the mixing of colors was reported by several of the patients as an enjoyable experience of "play" or "creativity" that helped take the mind off the illness. For some it seemed as if they were set back to an earlier stage of their life, reconnecting with the child in them, and enjoying playing with colors:

I have had great fun, like 'Wow, what will happen if I mix in this color and what if I mix these colors' ... I mean, I have painted terrible pictures, really ugly, but I think that it has been great fun.

The aspect of learning how to mix colors was mentioned by many patients:

I needed this pedagogical process, starting to mix two colors and getting a new one.

The more technical mixing of colors facilitates for the artist Ole Lindqvist the transition to an individual expression of emotions. Following Stenner (2017, 233), we can describe these processes of playing with colors and material as ludic activity, enhancing the pleasure of the participants. But also drawing on Winnicott's theory helps us to understand these experiences. Mixing two colors and getting a new one provide a new experience to a subject which might be produced by an explanation of the teacher but might also be produced "without interpretative work" (Winnicott, 1971, 55). So, the joyful experience of colors can be both a pleasant surprise and a part of a psycho-educative process.

Even though the majority of the patients enjoyed the art therapy sessions, some of them reported unpleasant emotions. For example, painting in a group under supervision was challenging or even transgressive in a negative way. Powerful and uncomfortable feelings were met when entering the more interpretative stage of the activity, where participants were invited to share thoughts and emotions relating to their drawing:

I had difficulties with the painting sessions, it was like an obligation to paint, I did it for the community, but I didn't get anything out of it.

For others, painting in a fixed time pattern evoked stress:

I am not a creative person; I didn't want to paint!

I had to overcome myself to get started, my tiredness, my energy was gone after the morning encounter.

It was like a violation, like choking, I was seized by anxiety (...).

The majority of the patients (37 out of 40) overcame the initial stress and anxiety and appeared to find sense and potential in engaging in the art therapy. They described the art therapy as positive and different experiences of change were formulated and had formed the process of reflection. The minority did not experience a change as they refused to participate in the painting.

Therapeutic Change

Therapeutic change describes a process, where either the therapist or the participant experiences a change of emotions. Van Gennep would say that change implies a passing through a threshold marking the boundary between two phases. The creative process of developing a painting can be interpreted as an expression of a disease journey. One woman described her painting process as an expression of the course of her disease:

I painted (...) a tree, it was a symbol of faith, but not just a tree, it was a tree, which got cut off, and planted with roots in the air, and birds nesting in the roots. So, there is life in something dead. (...) I think our cancer journey has made us all more tolerant and open.

The participants had been asked to paint their life as a landscape and as they experienced it (their life) just now. In the shown example (see Fig. 8.1), they should try to give expression to their personal “faith” in the landscape. In the above excerpt, a tree was planted reversely, that is, with roots not connected to the ground. This was experienced as a symbol of being wiped out and losing one’s faith, of having one’s values re-evaluated. The tree became the symbol of faith, a symbol, Turner might call it “comparative symbology” or “ludic capacity,” catching “symbols in their movement (...) to play with their possibilities of form and meaning” (Turner, 1974, 56). In other words, “in liminality people ‘play’ with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them” (Turner, 1974, 60). The roots, which are cut off, symbolize the separation from a former status or ground.

Other participants seemed to express through their paintings the difficulties they had experienced and noticed a sudden relief doing so. Here, painting facilitated a



Fig. 8.1 Expression of faith in the landscape

therapeutic process of expressing and sharing difficult thoughts and feelings connected to the illness experience:

I have had such a traumatic experience during my illness journey, and I tried to paint it, and it developed, and quite suddenly (...) something in me could just let go, was released.

This [the art intervention] is a free space where you can play and get instruction in how to mix colors and I just tried to get the colors that made me happy and content. The light colors make me happy!

The colors used and actively applied by the participant can be compared with a certain kind of music where you try to put oneself in a particular emotional state.

Also here, the quote corresponds with the abovementioned ludic activity or playfulness as part of the transition.

Sometimes, patients could identify parts of their paintings as having specific meaning:

The landscape became the symbol for what I am searching for.

The motives from Greenland, these symbols gave me power to overcome the abominable, it's a primordial force.

The other painting became more a symbol of what is of greatest importance to me ... I painted flowers, which symbolize desire.

The identification of change could be performed in different ways. While in some paintings meaning was created through motives and memories from a specific culture (here: Greenland), in other paintings aspects of a landscape (here: a river, a tree, a flower) became a symbol of a state of mind (see Fig. 8.2)—and could, for



Fig. 8.2 The motive of landscape

example, symbolize movement in life. Turning back to the former painting (Fig. 8.1), having your roots disconnected to the ground shows the uncertainty of normal life and tradition, and the lack of a future orientation: an orientation which is regained in contemplation and peace.

Reintegration: Contemplation and Peace

The majority of patients had experienced illness trajectories with multiple diagnoses and treatment, related appointments, facing challenges coming to terms with, and reintegrating their disease into their life. They enjoyed the possibility of some hours of quiet occupation, without talking or using much of their restricted energy reflecting on the life they were now to live with the disease that was now theirs. The art therapy sessions were experienced as undisturbed hours in a pleasant atmosphere with classical music as background. Quotes like “*It gives you a mental break,*” “*I let go of my thoughts,*” “*Everything was left out and I could concentrate,*” or “*You got a free space, where you could reflect on things without disturbance*” illustrate contemplation and beginning bodily sensations of peace.

Taking “*peacefulness home*” and having discovered the painting space as “*time for quiet contemplation*” were for many patients mentioned as the most important transformations and results of 5 days with art therapy. Referring to Winnicott, peacefulness as emotion can be seen as a corrective emotional experience provoked through the painting activities in a speech-free atmosphere accompanied by classical music. The emotion of being in peace was evoked by the mixture of a task and a space for individual expression that the patients afterwards tried to name by describing their process:

I can't paint. But time disappeared, and nobody thought about disease. I was so much in contact with myself, because I had painted and could take care of myself.

I was solely focusing on doing something to express myself.

In the ludic activity, not only time but also the constant reminder of the disease were paused. Besides the transforming calmness and quietness, some participants experienced what they dubbed “therapeutic change towards a meaningful life with the disease” (female participant) through painting.

The qualitative results of this study showed that the majority of patients in the program “Energy for Life” experienced positive and valued processes facilitated by art therapy. The patients described that working with art helped them find peace and reflect on themselves as capable and relieved. To paint was experienced as a uncomplicated activity, where they could concentrate due to reduced obligations in their usual daily life. They experienced the art activity mostly as a individual activity although expressing that it was a pleasure to be in a group (see Fig. 8.3). The implementation of art had mostly an effect on the individual, even when it was thought of as a group intervention. To express introspective experiences of inner healing and to describe own transformation proved to be the most important aspect. Finally, they

Fig. 8.3 Common painting on the last day of the week



experienced a sense of peace during the painting hours, which made them stay in reflective processes longer than they would have otherwise done.

Discussion

This chapter aimed to examine the perceived significance of art therapy among cancer patients in a cancer rehabilitation setting by using theories of liminality and play as analytic lenses. As described in the introduction, the concept of liminality can help to illustrate the therapeutical transformation of a subject, who has lost a former way of existence (here: a life without a life-threatening disease) but who has not yet been incorporated into a new one (here: either a life with a former disease or a life approaching its termination). This phase in between was framed by Turner (1986) as “betwixt and between” or as “gaining and losing meanings (...) as they travel through a single rite of work of art” (Turner, 1974, 55). This traveling period is occupying a challenging space where former structures and certainty of daily life have been removed (Stenner, 2013, 2017), and where emotions attached to daily life settings need to be corrected (Winnicott, 1964). Cancer patients in different stages, as in our program, are in a state, where the predictability of life is suspended.

For the patients participating in the program, this journey of passage through art therapy has been both an individual and a group process (Stenner, 2013), a process which has been characterized both by a painful and challenging “working” through in a Freudian sense and by a “playful” creative experimentation with colors and/or symbols. The individual and collective change through the painting sequences was obtained by the experience of a playful activity. At the end of the week, the

participants were coming to terms with the disease crisis and the reintegration of their self into the new life with the disease. Winnicott frames this phase as the place, where the individual “exists as a unit, not as a defense against anxiety, but as an expression of I am, I am alive, I am myself” (Winnicott, 1971, 56 cited after Lenormand, 2018, 88). We have called this a process of contemplation and peace. In addition, the process corresponds with the notion of liminality being a phase of both potentiality and potency, which was considered here as helping patients towards a new and appropriated view of life (Turner, 1974; Rowe, 2008). Thus, in accordance with Turner’s (1986) notion of liminality as a “fructile chaos,” art therapy may enable a maturation process to take place, helping patients to recalibrate their values and beliefs.

As we have demonstrated in the analysis, both theories of liminality and play can be used within health-related research fields. The Dutch founder of cultural history, Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), presented in his famous book *Homo Ludens* (1955) play as an “as-if activity”—a free activity separated from ordinary life. Using theories of liminality and play was helpful for the understanding of the experiences of critical illness (Bruce et al., 2014; Blows et al., 2012), but also for understanding painting as transformational activity in a health intervention. People having survived cancer or having to live with chronic or advanced cancer can be confronted with many situations where facilitation and expression of transformations may be beneficial. The art therapy might have supported the transition processes by providing a useful space for reflection. The aim of this study was to understand cancer patients’ liminal experiences of the significant processes (including transformations) in art therapy.

Reflective processes are essential in order for transformations to happen and we wanted to investigate how patients’ reflections during art therapy actually led to personal transformation (Turner, 1986; Stenner, 2017). The patients’ experiences were in many ways similar to liminal processes particularly by being in a form of “anti-structural” state going from one state of life to another, where normal rules do not apply. This indicates that art might be useful in helping people going through difficult periods in life with transformational processes. The patients’ experiences of contemplation and the freedom from family and daily life expectations characterized the mentioned corrective emotional experience, promoting a new capability. Additionally, how the art therapy sessions influenced their reflections indicates that processes of self-change were present. They started viewing themselves as being more capable (calm, peaceful), thus also reflecting a sense of agency.

Patients underwent new experiences through a playful activity. Unlike Melanie Klein’s focus on the “content” of the play, where play is used as a therapeutical technique, the findings from our program demonstrate a therapeutical approach without striving for interpretation. Play is “thought of as divorced from this essentially ‘objective’ realm,” meaning that it is possible to “play” with combinations of variables (Turner, 1974). Also, the analysis shows that the participants’ reflections occurred while reacting to external influences and perceptions, e.g., the sensory calmness. This study adds to the literature on how humans use the surrounding landscape, given by the quotes on the role of painting flowers or trees. Our study

provides support to the knowledge of how rehabilitation interventions may be transformative when working with concepts of play and liminality. The findings demonstrate how an art intervention can facilitate a transformative process or for some even a therapeutic change of behavior or sense of being.

Whether to recommend art therapy for cancer patients should rely on an individual assessment—performed by the group leader or the participant. We have found that art therapy for a few participants had been transgressive but not transformative in a positive sense. For them, the liminal space they entered when engaging in art therapy became a place of uncertainty and even anxiety. As a way to process these experiences, the verbal exchange with the other group members about their experiences came out as helpful, promoting their further contemplation while doing activities. Disconnecting from one's usual network and socially and culturally embedded activities may be supportive in some peoples' emotional processes but may also be an staggering experience for others.

Our participants went through a transformative process and their experiences (of calmness and peace) may indicate a break from their everyday life, a playful and creative learning of a new skill, and a deeper reintegration into the new life with cancer, but obviously we cannot expect any complete resolution of their crisis or a change of status.

Conclusions

The application of art therapy activities in our program is, with Winnicott's wording, a temporary suspension of limits through a playful daily ritual comprising listening to classical music with creative expression through art activities. The fixed setting of the art therapy is seen as a holding ritual in the sense of Winnicott proving the possibility to experience both regression and new limits by the repetitive quality. Art is also seen as a ludic quality, giving enjoyment through a real experience that has an intrinsic therapeutic value, and is capable to support self-healing through the acceptance of one's personal fate. This chapter aimed to analyze the application of art therapy in a cancer rehabilitation setting and we could conclude by asking about future implications. A five-day cancer rehabilitation program introducing art therapy provided the patients with increased awareness, possibilities for individual expressions, and processing of difficult experiences and feelings that, for many of the participants, led to positive transformations and a new way of reintegrating oneself into the new life with disease.

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Chapter 9

“I Must Have Contracted Swine Flu, Bird Flu or Ebola.”: How Patients and General Practitioners Negotiate Liminality during Consultations



Mads Bank and Lotte Huniche

Introduction

In this chapter, we conceptualize the liminality of illness as part of a culturally scripted and ritualized, but open-ended and nontransparent transformation process, characterized by uncertainty and affective intensification. After a brief introduction to traditional concepts of liminality we engage with studies on liminality in health in order to show how uncertainty and affectivity are part of patients' illness experiences. We then draw on the literature to show the strategies patients use in order to manage liminality. Then we move on to an empirical analysis and discussion of how the affectivity of liminality is negotiated by patients and physicians during initial consultations in general practice. We do so from a disciplinary grounding in social psychology (Brown & Stenner, 2009; Dreier, 2008; Gough, 2017; Lave, 2019; Stenner, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Finally, the micro-interactional processes in the clinic are reflected upon in the context of postmodern societies governed by a rationality of disease as abnormality rather than as part of life.

The concept of liminality was first introduced in the ethnographic writings of van Gennep (1960) and half a century later taken up and developed further by the anthropologist Turner (1967, 1969). In his seminal book “The Rites of Passage” (1960), van Gennep analyzed how rites are put in place to manage the transition of subjects from one social position to another, such as the transition from being a child to becoming an adult, from being a subject to becoming a sovereign, or from being a living member of society to joining the dead. “Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects” (van Gennep,

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1960, p. 13). van Gennep was interested in describing how individual change of social position and status is connected to the life of the collective, and how personal transition and cultural stability are accomplished at the same time. Van Gennep suggested that these transitions are socially devised, culturally scripted, highly ritualized, and characterized by a tripartite structure with three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. The separation phase is characterized by withdrawal from the current social position. During the liminal phase individuals occupy no position in particular. A new societal position is aggregated during the incorporation phase.

Turner (1969) elaborated on the social and psychological processes involved when individuals move through this tripartite structure. He describes liminality as a transitional process between different states of being where “persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). During liminality secular social structures and routines are abandoned. It is “a moment in and out of time” (Turner, 1969, p. 96), a “*stage of reflection*” (Turner, 1967, p. 105) that can serve as a basis for “the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” (Turner, 1967, p. 99). For Turner, the liminal subject position and openness of becoming involve personal identities and self-understandings to be in flux and this “often appear(s) to flood their subjects with affect” (Turner, 1969, p. 128). Cultural scripts and rites of passage are institutionalized ways of managing the intensified affective processes of liminality and securing social stability (Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1960). van Gennep and Turner’s concepts of liminality have served as inspiration and been developed further in the vast body of literature analyzing experiences of illness, treatment, and healthcare practices.

Studies on Liminality in Health

The concept of liminality has been taken up in relation to a range of diseases. A substantial number of studies are on cancer (Dauphin et al., 2019; Little et al., 1998), including cancer survivorship (Blows et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2014), breast cancer (Koutri & Avdi, 2016; Trusson et al., 2016), and cancer in combination with other life-threatening diseases (Bruce et al., 2014). There have been studies on long-term conditions and physical disability (Harrison & Kahn, 2004; Murphy et al., 1988; Willett & Deegan, 2001), such as kidney disease (Molzahn et al., 2008), diabetes (Sanders et al., 2019), and chronic pain (Honkasalo, 2001). In addition, liminality has been studied in relation to contested diseases (B. Brown et al., 2017; Greco & Stenner, 2017). Dauphin et al. (2019) describe how persons, before any diagnosis is made, become attentive to hardly detectable oddities and bodily changes that are not easily articulated, categorized, or understood. According to Dauphin et al. (2019) this bodily unease involves a basic uncertainty and fuzziness. In line with Dauphin et al. (2019) and Little et al. (1998), Sibbett (2005) proposes that people

enter a liminal state as soon as they suspect that they may be ill. Bruce et al. (2014) report on how persons across the illness trajectory narrate experiences of liminality, occupying positions and categories of being "betwixt and between" illness and health, worrying and not worrying, wanting to know and not know, and what is the matter and what is to be expected. In alignment with most other studies on liminality and illness/disease, Sibbett (2005) and Bruce et al. (2014) conclude that liminality can be experienced throughout the illness trajectory (e.g., Little et al., 1998).

Liminal Uncertainty and Affectivity

According to van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969), liminal transitions involve intensified affective processes, from which subjects emerge as occupants of a different social position, commonly with more status than the position left behind. Affectivity is intensified in pleasant but also in unpleasant ways. Commonly positive affects prevail combined with a heightened sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1969). Drawing on Stenner's distinction (this volume) between spontaneous and devised liminal experiences, illness, in most instances, affords spontaneous liminal experiences of an altered bodily state of being, uninvited and unwanted, as well as biomedically devised liminal experiences related to the search for a diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, etc. Subjects may or may not emerge as healthy from the spontaneous and devised liminal experience of illness, and may stay in transition, not cured or recovered, over prolonged periods of time. The accompanying affective intensification is commonly troublesome, disturbing, or disruptive, rather than exhilarating. For example Little et al. (1998) describe how cancer patients experience a sense of communicative alienation, boundedness, and loss of empowerment. Based on this body of literature we suggest that the liminality of illness needs to be understood in terms of how biological, social, and psychological uncertainties coexist and interact. We are interested in how liminal experiences of illness come about, are handled, and are devised by patients, informal carers, and healthcare professionals. Further, in the words of Stenner, "Of chief interest, however, is the *relationship* between spontaneous and devised liminal experiences. Devised liminal experiences, put crudely, are a culturally mediated means for processing or metabolizing the otherwise raw and wild experiences of spontaneous liminality (that accompany significant ruptures to our routine psychosocial experience and activity), and for coordinating that experience such that a degree of (good enough) attunement can exist between the demands of the social and the capacities of the subject (Greco & Stenner, 2017). Both of these forms of liminality stand in contrast with processes of experience and communication that are sufficiently stable, normative and predictable to be taken for granted as a shared world of practical reality" (this volume, p.7). As an example of the precarious relation between the spontaneous and the devised Dauphin et al. (2019) report on how some patients are reluctant to share their experiences and worries about bodily uncertainties with others, such as friends, spouses, or medical staff (GPs). One reason for this is the anticipation that their worries may

be neglected and Dauphin et al. (2019) describe how the lack of social acknowledgement of bodily and psychological uncertainties can produce intensified affective responses, as (potential) patients become anxious and may develop a distrust in their own bodies and/or the healthcare system. In this way, uncertainties can proliferate and become contagious when travelling across domains and interacting through patients' reflexivity. The *looping effect of uncertainties* pertains to the sense of one's own body, to the personal ability to assess one's health, and to the social position (Hacking, 2007). This looping effect contributes to a high level of (negative) affective intensity, accelerating experiences of liminality, and of being "betwixt and between." In contrast to the classic ethnographic studies of liminality, the affective processes involved in illness experiences do not necessarily involve *communitas*, but rather a sense of alienation and worry, of anxiety or even fear (Little et al., 1998).

The Temporality of Liminality in Health

In line with Turner's (1969, p. 94) description of the liminal state as *being out of time*, a number of studies show how the liminality of illness involves a disruption of the subject's temporality. This break with normality has been conceptualized as biographical disruption (Bury, 1982), or more radically as biographical abruption (Locock et al., 2009), facilitating the transition to what Little et al. (1998) term "acute liminality." Locock et al. (2009) report how patients facing life-threatening disease may experience this as a "death sentence," a sense of "life being over," and "having been denied a future." Little et al. (1998) describe how the uncertainty about the recurrence of disease involves a disruption of the part of our personal identity, where we imagine ourselves in the future. Similarly, Trusson et al. (2016) point to how uncertainties prevent patients in making plans for the future. Dauphin et al. (2019) describe how patients post-diagnosis are in a "subjunctive mode" which can entail doubt and fear, but in line with Turner (1969) can also open up for hope, will, and potential (Dauphin et al., 2019). Trusson et al. (2016) and Holmberg (2014) point to how the diagnosing and naming of disease can be seen as a scripted transition rite, facilitating a rapid move into acute liminality (Little et al., 1998). Little et al. (1998) describe how some cancer patients experience relief when a diagnosis terminates the uncertain process of medical examinations, while others experience a diagnosis as the introduction of a new set of uncertainties about treatment and its effect. In the examples discussed by Little et al. (1998), knowledge conveyed through diagnosis may reduce bodily uncertainties, but may equally open a space for social and psychological uncertainties to become more pertinent. van Gennep (1960) and Turner's (1969) models of transition would seem to suggest that after the phase of acute liminality in illness, the ritual around the termination of active treatment would facilitate a transition where subjects are reintegrated into society and the sense of liminality and affective intensity would decrease radically. In relation to health, however, the transition to a post-liminal stage when treatment is

terminated can be anything but clear-cut. Little et al. (1998) and B. Brown et al. (2017) point to how recovery is a complex and precarious accomplishment. Many studies agree that even after long periods of living without symptoms patients may experience sustained (Little et al., 1998) or prolonged liminality (Blows et al., 2012) that may last throughout life.

How Patients Manage Liminality

We have proposed that uncertainty, affective intensification, and temporality are inherent aspects of liminality. One way to analyze the processes involved is to pay attention to how bodily, social, and psychological uncertainties fluctuate and interact across the illness trajectory. These uncertainties are managed, mediated, or accelerated by the healthcare system, for instance, through the biomedical naming and framing of bodily sensations, physical examinations, tests, diagnoses, treatment, and support services. At the same time patients employ different strategies to manage uncertainty and affective intensification, some of which are productive, and some problematic or even disabling (Pietilä et al., 2018). In the literature on illness and liminality we have identified a number of distinct management strategies employed by patients. Below we present these strategies as divided into two subgroups: (1) strategies involving closure and (2) strategies for “being with” liminal experiences. Following that we turn to focus on the management of liminality during encounters between patients and physicians in general practice.

Management Strategies Involving Closure

According to Frank (1995) *the restitution narrative* is the culturally preferred standard for managing illness and uncertainty. The restitution narrative implies a chronology of the process of becoming ill, getting better, and regaining health. Although patients do not always recover, the narrative gives patients hope that health can be restored, and a sense of control and agency (Bruce et al., 2014; Frank, 1995). In the restitution narrative patients often explicitly acknowledge that illness is still present in their lives exerting influence as “deep illness” (Frank, 1995), present in the shadows (Bruce et al., 2014). Another similar narrative strategy is *the moving-on narrative* where people narrate themselves as recovered and experiences of illness are placed in the past (Martin et al., 2014). Placing illness as something in the past, clearly separated from the present and the future, reduces uncertainty and produces some stability (Bruce et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2014; Pietilä et al., 2018). A further narrative strategy involving closure is what Pietilä et al. (2018) term *interpreting illness within a wider context of life course*. Pietilä et al. (2018) describe how men with erectile dysfunctions as a consequence of medical intervention draw on normalizing discourse about potency loss and reduced importance of sexuality in old

age. In this way the disruption and uncertainty involved in illness are managed by interpretation not as disruption, but as a continuation of the patient's particular life trajectory. These *strategies of narrative closure* are found across the illness trajectory. A more pessimistic strategy, involving modification of the narrated life trajectory, is what has been termed *narrative foreclosure* (Freeman, 2002) or *loosing myself narrative* (Martin et al., 2014). Pietilä et al. (2018) describe how one way of managing uncertainty and affect is by denying the future and not making any plans. Making use of this strategy patients may become stuck in ongoing loops of thoughts and feelings about illness and lost bodily capabilities. Along the same lines, Pietilä et al. (2018) describe a strategy of *radical foreclosure*. In their study on prostate cancer, they contend that patients' psychological need for certainty is just as important as full recovery from cancer and its side effects. This means that some patients may choose more invasive and potentially disabling interventions in order to close down uncertainty about recurrence of disease (Hayes & Barry, 2014; Pietilä et al., 2018).

These strategies of restoring, moving on, reinterpreting/reintegrating, or closing down all involve (the promise of) psychological closure to diminish uncertainty and reduce negative affectivity. In the next section we address strategies that to a greater extent focus on "being with" the uncertainty and affective intensification of liminality.

Management Strategies for Being with Liminality

Several of the strategies described above involve temporal modulation. A common strategy used in different ways across illness trajectories consists of *temporal delimiting* (Bruce et al., 2014; Pietilä et al., 2018). Pietilä et al. (2018) describe how *temporal delimiting of an uncertain future* works by reducing the temporal horizon of the lifeworld. Patients do this by producing mental landmarks that limit the temporal span to be managed and overcome, and thus the kinds of uncertainties involved. Landmarks may be set for "living one day at the time," or "not worrying" until the next checkup or appointment with a medical professional. In this way, patients gain a sense of certainty and control (Pietilä et al., 2018). Some studies report how the uncertainty about relapse decreases after 5 years, which is the point where survival time is measured (Trusson et al., 2016). For many cancer patients this is viewed as a temporal milestone after which they can relax somewhat in relation to recurrence, though never entirely (Dauphin et al., 2019; Little et al., 1998; Trusson et al., 2016). As such, there are at least two different kinds of temporalities at stake: the production of mental landmarks to reduce temporal horizons and the long-term gradual normalization that is reported posttreatment.

There are almost no studies on pre-diagnostic liminality (Granek & Fergus, 2012), but Dauphin et al. (2019) report on how some patients in the pre-diagnosis phase handle the bodily uncertainties by intentionally "doing nothing" as a

deliberate tactic. This allows patients to entertain multiple realities (I have symptoms/I am not ill) and possibilities (symptoms may disappear/bodily sensations are no signs of illness). Postponing the visit to the GP and further medical examinations can be an equally problematic and productive strategy for managing uncertainty and liminality. Doing so means that people can hold on to normality and a relative sense of security (Dauphin et al., 2019). Conversely, postponing examinations and treatment can be fatal in relation to diseases such as cancer, where early detection and treatment are essential for survival. The strategy of *not reacting to bodily signs and postponing actions* relevant to maintaining health may involve a great deal of psychological work to tolerate bodily irregularities, personal and social uncertainties, and relational tension.

Other studies report on how patients across illness trajectories handle the paradoxical and double nature of liminality through a *both-and* strategy. Bruce et al. (2014) describe how patients with life-threatening diseases are able to live in-and-between contrasting narratives, experiences, and motives, described as being both ill and healthy, worrying and not worrying, knowing and not knowing, and living but not living. Along similar lines, Koutri and Avdi (2016) show how women treated for breast cancer talk about their sense of self as oscillating between a return to their prior state and a new state after the cancer illness. These women employ different narratives depending on the context and specific purposes. These liminal narratives may be characterized by anything like ambivalence, contradiction, and oscillation between past and present aspects of self. Both studies draw attention to how patients narrate different versions of themselves, and different aspects of health and illness in different contexts. These nonbinary narratives and social practices show how patients manage uncertainty, illness, and liminality by leaving the illness experiences open to negotiation. Being both-and allows patients to cope with (extended) liminality by experimenting with different performances of illness, subjectivities, and social positions (Bruce et al., 2014; Koutri & Avdi, 2016).

The last strategy can be termed *liminality as a vehicle for change*. It is well documented that experience of illness can involve post-traumatic growth, as the experience of liminal uncertainties confronts people with existential questions that may call for reassessment of priorities and values and an opportunity for positive change (Thompson, 2007). Existential uncertainty and intensified affective responses may be problematic, but may also be a vehicle for moving towards new ways of relating and a more “true” or authentic way of being (Dauphin et al., 2019; Sanders et al., 2019). Turning liminality into a vehicle for post-traumatic growth is an act of meaning making that is also described by Frank (1995) as a *quest narrative*. *Patients can use quest narratives to interpret illness experiences as an opportunity for positive transformation* (Frank, 1995; Martin et al., 2014; Pietilä et al., 2018).

Having drawn up patients’ strategies for managing liminality it is clear that a number of these involve the modulation of temporality. Other strategies use narrative meaning making to create closure, to integrate illness in biographies, or to be with liminality oscillating between different positions, affects, and views towards the future. In many of these examples patients psychologically transform

uncertainty into something expected or manageable by drawing on available cultural storylines, narratives, and medical discourses (Bruner, 1990; Frank, 1995). One notable difference is between managing uncertainty and affectivity through strategies involving closure or being with liminality. The strategies involving closure reflect the dominant cultural and medical logics and discourses in and beyond healthcare according to which uncertainty and negative affective experiences are managed by examining, diagnosing, and treating diseases. As described, these strategies may come with unintended consequences, as for instance when potentially disabling interventions are chosen in order to limit or eliminate uncertainty (Hayes & Barry, 2014; Pietilä et al., 2018).

Liminality in Healthcare Encounters

In the literature on the liminality of health the issue of how medical professionals collaborate and negotiate with patients around liminality is largely absent. Stenner and Moreno-Gabriel (2013) have conducted one of the few studies that investigate how the *scientific staging of liminality* (Stenner, 2016) unfolds in situated encounters in the case of organ donation. In the following we want to focus on how pre-diagnosis liminality is managed in situated interaction involving patients and medical professionals. Initial consultations anywhere in the healthcare system would lend themselves to the study of pre-diagnosis liminality. However, due to the publicly funded healthcare system in Denmark, the phenomenon is well known in general practice as this is the obligatory point of passage through which most bodily complaints have to pass to enter the realm of biomedicine. Here complaints may be diagnosed and possibly treated by the GP, or patients may be referred to further, more specialized examinations, treatment, and care. Further, initial consultations can be conceptualized as a culturally scripted *rite of passage*. Consultations with GPs are culturally scripted within the framework of evidence-based medicine and the biomedical principle of framing illness in terms of specific diseases, corresponding with differential diagnoses, and well-defined courses of treatment. Consultations are ritualized in ways designed to manage uncertainties. First, rituals in healthcare are designed to assist medical professionals and reduce uncertainty by providing guidelines and heuristics. These rituals are commonly not known by patients and may calm or intensify affective processes. Secondly, rituals in healthcare provide no clear pathway or explicit expectations for patients to lean on in their efforts to navigate through liminality. We are interested in how uncertainties and affective intensification come about and are managed by patients and GPs during initial consultations. Insights can inform not just the mutual management of liminality in general practice, but also elsewhere in the healthcare system.

How Patients and Physicians Manage Liminality in General Practice

The following analysis draws on empirical materials from a project on the prescription of antibiotics in general practice. The research team conducted participant observation of emergency consultations of suspected upper respiratory infections. Observations were followed up by interviews with general practitioners, focusing on thoughts, feelings, and professional reasoning in and about these encounters. The following is an excerpt from field notes taken during an emergency consultation involving a male GP (50) and a female patient (58):

"The patient starts by telling the GP that she is sick. The GP says that she does not look well, and the patient goes on and explains that she has recently returned from a trip to East Asia with the acting class that she teaches. [details changed to ensure anonymity]. During the trip, she started to cough a lot and feel ill, but initially thought it was due to the polluted air. After having explained the course of her condition the patient suddenly proclaims in a tone, which it is difficult to tell whether is serious or ironic: 'Naturally, I think I must have contracted swine flu, bird flu, or Ebola'. The GP laughs lightly as a response to this, and the patient continues: 'I just want you to tell me: 'you are healthy, you can go home' or that you give me some penicillin because I am not feeling well'".

We understand this as an example of pre-diagnostic liminality, brought about by interacting and looping bodily, social, and psychological uncertainties. The patient reports having a sore throat, coughing for several days, and a general feeling of being ill. This is obviously not comfortable but becomes a psychological problem when the uncertainty of not knowing what it is becomes entangled in the uncertainties circulated in discourses on health risks. Being liminal, betwixt and between being healthy and ill, makes the patient worry, accelerates her affective responses, and dramatizes her fears: *"I must have contracted swine flu, bird flu or Ebola."* It would be easy to understand the patient through intersecting categories such as female, artist, sensitive, and hysterical and to position her as irrational. And some physicians might. We suggest analyzing the patient's behavior as a skillful performance of liminality that makes collaborative intervention possible.

Collaborating around Liminality

On the one hand, the patient clearly articulates a (binary) common-sense understanding of the effect of obtaining biomedical knowledge from a physician. *"I just want you to tell me: 'you are healthy, you can go home' or that you give me some penicillin because I am not feeling well'."* If we take her words at face value, it is quite interesting that she articulates her bodily and psychological experiences as a problem (not feeling well, fearing serious disease), and at the same time puts forward the possibility of a negative result (a medical expert rejecting her illness experience by stating that she is healthy) as an acceptable outcome of the consultation.

This supports our assumption that her fears and worries are actually a serious issue which can disrupt her trust in her own bodily experience, similar to what is reported on post-treatment cancer patients (Little et al., 1998; Pietilä et al., 2018; Wenger, 2013). On the other hand, the patient dramatizes, and she plays around with her own rationality, when she says: “*Naturally, I think I must have contracted swine flu, bird flu or Ebola.*”¹ We could understand this as a performance of liminality. The artistic, dramatic, or even humorous performance makes it possible for the patient to articulate her worries and, at the same time, signal reflexive distance to fears and affective responses and thus maintain her status as a rational subject. This resonates with the strategies of *being with liminality* discussed earlier, as the patient manages liminality by positioning herself as being ill and healthy, rational as well as emotional, and safely within although on the margin of the medical discourse. This strategy can be regarded as an invitation to intervention. By saying “*Naturally, I think ...*” our interpretation is that she indicates and acknowledges that her experience of liminality is not only about bodily uncertainties, but also about socially distributed health risks, psychological uncertainty, and her own personal inclination to exaggerate fears and worries. Through articulating her problem and positioning herself this way, she invites the GP to intervene, not only into her medical condition, but also into her sense of liminality. The patient clearly articulates what she expects: that the GP can bring her out of liminality through providing her with one of the binaries of biomedical knowledge that she is either healthy or ill. In this way she follows the implicit cultural script and the communicative standards of consultations in general practice (Christensen, 2011; Larsen & Risør, 1997). In textbooks and through courses in medical communication,² Danish medical professionals are taught that in the first part of the consultation, termed *the patient’s part*, patients should be given time to speak freely, in order to elicit the reason(s) for the inquiry and to establish a common agenda. If not disclosed by the patient, the physician should probe into “thoughts, fears, and expectations.” In our example the patient has provided exactly this information. The next part of the consultation is termed *the physician’s part*. Here the GP typically inquires more specifically in relation to the diagnostic process and engages in physical examination and test-taking:

“The GP begins to examine her, listening to her breath with a stethoscope to her back while she is coughing and groaning heavily. Then he asks the patient to follow him into the room next to the consultation to take a blood sample to test whether her symptoms is caused by a virus or bacteria.

After having received the results from the CRP, the GP states: ‘Well, you do have an infection. That you have. But it is most likely due to a virus’. The patient promptly asks: ‘What does that mean? That it will pass with time?’, to which the GP responds that this is probably the case, but that she is to contact the out of hours medical service if it gets any worse. At this point the GP is interrupted by the patient, who exclaims in a harsh voice: ‘Hey - now I get confused! You went inside my body’ pointing to the spot where she was pricked by the needle, ‘and we went into that room, but you still cannot tell exactly whether it is ‘yes’ or ‘no’?’”

¹ In 2014 when this research was conducted, swine flu, bird flu and even Ebola, were circulating.

² One of the authors teach post-graduate physicians about medical communication.

In this part of the consultation the patient's expectations are frustrated. Presumably, the patient relies on the cultural discourse about medical consultation as a knowledge practice that produces truths through the ritual of medical examination. However, rituals and knowledge practices in healthcare are often nontransparent to patients. Even though the patient's skin has been pierced and blood removed from her veins to be translated into a numerical value (CRP), the kind of unequivocal biomedical knowledge that the patient expects does not emerge. In order to analyze this further, we will briefly discuss the kind of biomedical knowledge at stake.

Liminality and Point-of-Care Tests (CRP)

Let us take a closer look at the technicalities of the C-reactive protein test (CRP) used in the consultation. The CRP is widely used as a standard *point-of-care test* in general practice in Scandinavia and Switzerland (Melbye & Stocks, 2006). The CRP, as many other health technologies, is an indirect measure, not designed to distinguish between viral and bacterial infections. CRP measures the amount of C-reactive protein in the blood, which is an indication of damage to cells. Cell damage is commonly caused by infections, but is also less frequently involved in a range of other diseases. Although a CRP test cannot differentiate between different infections, levels are used pragmatically in conjuncture with other sources of information. The clinical guideline describes that numerical values below 20 indicate a low probability for bacterial infection, and the recommendation is to abstain from treatment with antibiotics. Conversely values above 99 indicate a strong probability of a bacterial infection. At both ends of the scale are uncertainties and a need for clinical judgement drawing on multiple sources of information, but even more so if values are in the broad middle range between 21 and 99. The recommendation is to consider antibiotics when values are above 50.

The CRP can with relative certainty help GPs to dismiss or confirm a hypothesis of serious bacterial infection, but contrary to what many patients hope, CRP cannot provide an unambiguous answer to the question of what ails them. In the present case the result of the CRP is explicitly in the “gray” area and the GP infers that the patient *probably* has a viral infection, but is not able to tell with certainty. The failure to produce an epistemic object of a knowable disease means that new uncertainties arise. This includes bodily and psychological uncertainties of the present and future: I feel sick! Can it be cured? Is it something serious? When will I be feeling well again? In addition, research on the prescription of antibiotics indicates that consultations that do not result in diagnosis and treatment involve a range of social uncertainties, where patients can come to question if their visit is legitimate and if they are wasting the GP's time (Stivers, 2007). These social uncertainties can be further entangled with contemporary norms, discourses, and moral obligations to be rational citizens (Greco, 1993) which questions the subject's social position and status (van Gennep, 1960). Affective intensity and unease of the situation can accelerate as uncertainties loop and interact. Stenner's concept of “liminal hotspot” is

one way to conceptualize how a patient becomes locked in a state of high arousal/affective intensity. The educational and research literature on general practice describes some of these dynamics, and emphasizes that it is important to legitimize patients' visits, especially when no treatment is offered (Christensen, 2011; Stivers, 2007). One example of how this is done can be saying: *luckily, it was nothing you needed treatment for, but it was good you came to see me*. In our analytical framework, this is an example of how liminality and the accompanying affects can be managed by reducing *social uncertainty*.

Returning to the case, the patients' dramatic response can be seen as a result of diverging epistemologies. Contrary to what patients might believe, medical knowledge is rarely exact, but rather about probabilities, hypothesis, prognosis, and pragmatic truths that are inferred retrospectively. If the patient gets better, it is assumed that the right course of action was taken, whether treatment was prescribed or not. Pragmatically, this is unproblematic, but tensions arise, when numbers do not bring the relief that the trust in their objectivity commands. As the affective intensity of liminality is accelerated, voices are raised, fingers pointed, and emotions stirred. The patient's sense of liminality becomes a pressing issue for the GP:

"The GP talks the patients through different actions in relation to various scenarios: He says that it is most likely that she has come down with a viral infection, but if she does not feel better within 24 hours (Friday), she should go and pick up some medication at the pharmacy, he will write her a prescription. If she takes the medication and nothing changes during the weekend, she is to contact the medical emergency to obtain something stronger. Furthermore, he schedules a follow-up consultation three weeks later in order to listen to her lungs and make sure that she is feeling better. The patient summarizes: 'Okay, I just need to make sure that I have understood you correctly' after which she repeats the three different scenarios which the GP just listed and what she is to do in each case."

In the sequence above the GP tries to govern liminality in several ways. First, he tries to trade the expectation of truth, with knowledge in the form of statistical probabilities by saying that she *most likely* has come down with a viral infection. He then, in parallel with the strategies discussed earlier, tries to manage liminality by dividing the uncertain future into smaller parts, offering a range of possible actions in relation to various future scenarios. Among GPs this is referred to as a "safety net." One way of providing a safety net is the use of a "wait-and-see" or delayed prescription that makes it possible for the patient to act by picking up medication at the pharmacy, if the condition does not improve (Høye et al., 2010). The safety net reduces uncertainty about the future and the associated negative affective intensity. It decreases the urge for unequivocal biomedical knowledge by making potential actions and interventions visible and possible, prolonging the (medical) care beyond the consultation. This opens a space where patients can be invited into a reason-based agentic position where they can assess their well-being and choose treatment or not. In this way they have the possibility to *be with the experience of liminality and uncertainty* and let the illness run its natural course, possibly without medical intervention. This strategy of stretching and folding temporalities in order to prolong medical care beyond the consultation, and creating a psychological, social, and

temporal space for processes of healing, is described by Bank and Rogne (2018) as “governing the present through the future.”

Negotiating the patient’s Will to Knowledge

In a further example, we shall see how another GP tries to resist the patients’ *will to knowledge* (Foucault, 2019) by returning the psychological task of managing uncertainty to the patient:

Fieldnotes (reduced): A father brings his five year old daughter to the consultation. Today they are here because the daughter is coughing. The GP examines the child, listening to her lungs and looking into her ears. The father asks if it could be whooping cough, and if they can test for that. The GP tells him that she thinks testing is a bad idea. It will most likely show nothing and only be uncomfortable for the child. The father goes on and explains that the daughter has also had an upset stomach. To this the GP replies that it is very typical of a viral infection and that it does not require penicillin. [...]

This is a common example of how a parent can experience (minor) symptoms in his young child without a (medical) explanation. The fathers’ heightened sensitivity to the bodily symptoms of the child generates liminality, uncertainty, and negative affectivity at even minor bodily signs. The parent tries to manage liminality by the culturally prescribed solution: seeking the assistance of a physician and of biomedical explanations. The father’s request is however dismissed by the GP. In the follow-up interview the GP explains her interpretation of the child’s symptoms and her reasoning about the consultation:

GP: “It is all about uncertainty, uncertainty, uncertainty, isn’t it?! And extremely many contacts with the health services, they [father and child] were here yesterday too, and did not feel reassured. And the mother also consults physicians where she works [...] And ... ahh ... really, really insecure parents who constantly worry about the child. [...] you can tell from my records that there is a pattern of inquiry that is extreme. There has never been anything seriously wrong with her [the child], never ever. It is always like this, right?!”

The GP goes on to explain:

“We are a bit closer to something like anxiety [...] anxiety does not lessen by examining and checking, by what we term control behaviour. And they [the parents] really want to have everything checked out all the time, but it just fuels their anxiety, it just keeps them going, and they are anxiously waiting for answers, for NEW inoculations and NEW examinations and NEW physicians and ... that has to be calmed down, right? I have to dare to make that decision and say no, it is not beneficial, which I do not believe it is.”

The GP points to the interacting and looping of biomedical knowledge, uncertainty, and affect. This is parallel to what Little et al. (1998) found in relation to cancer patients. When obtaining knowledge to the effect of “closing down” uncertainty, new unknowns surface which, in turn, generate new uncertainties. In relation to illness the awareness of new unknowns becomes especially potent in facilitating liminal processes, as the looping of unknowns and uncertainties may prompt us not only to problematize what we know, but also to question the sense of our bodies,

subjectivities, and even our social positions. In this light the GP does not manage the father's wish for closure through the provision of biomedical knowledge. The father repeatedly brings forward symptoms and suggests a *candidate diagnosis* (Stivers, 2007) to the GP in order to obtain knowledge that can diminish liminal uncertainty. The GP, however, tells the father that testing is a bad idea, and that nothing will probably come of it, thus dismissing the father's quest for certainty through biomedical knowledge. The GP then goes on to negotiate the management of liminality in other ways. At the end of the consultation the GP asks: "*Do you feel safe enough to leave?*" *The father nods, and says, "yes ... although it is not very pleasant."* By saying "safe enough" the GP reduces the social uncertainty about the legitimacy of the consultation, by acknowledging the father's liminal uncertainty as something precarious that needs addressing. Through this strategy the GP invites and urges the father to manage the affectivity of the liminal situation psychologically. Through this strategy the GP tries to scaffold the development of the parents' ability to "be with" an acceptable degree of uncertainty in biomedical terms, without falling prey to the unhelpful and self-generative looping effect of bodily, social, and psychological uncertainties.

Being with Liminality in General Practice

In the examples above we analyzed how physicians skillfully try to help patients manage the uncertainty and affective intensification associated with liminality. Across our empirical material from seven different general practices in Denmark, we find a range of parallel examples of how managing liminality is a central aspect of consultations. A substantial number of patients do not necessarily see the GP to get *treatment*, but to calm their worries and affective responses by figuring out what is or is not the matter. Diagnosis and treatment are the prescribed standard of what GPs are trained to deliver, but this standard is challenged with respect to managing the liminality of suspected illness. In the first example the patient and the GP collaborate to reduce the affective intensity of liminality. As closure could not be produced biomedically the GP invited the patient to deploy a strategy of temporal delimiting. Collaborating around the reduction of social and psychological uncertainties enabled the patient to "be with" the experience of liminality and affectivity. A common understanding was produced during the consultation and the GP's use of humor worked to deflect some of the tension (see Bank & Rogne, 2018). In the second example, we highlighted how a father who consulted the GP about his daughter repeatedly displayed a *will to knowledge* in order to close down uncertainty and the experience of liminality. In contrast to the first example, tension builds as the GP resists the father's need for biomedical closure. In this situation the GP acts authoritatively by declining further examinations, as she believes this is not in the best interest of the child. Simultaneously, the responsibility for managing the affect associated with liminality is transferred back to the parent, who is left with this unpleasant psychological task.

These examples point to just how important it is to understand the relationship between spontaneous and devised liminality of illness in patients' lives and in healthcare encounters. This problematic is arguably important and timely for social psychologists to grapple with theoretically as well as empirically (Hunniche & Sørensen, 2019; Rose, 2013). Our attention here has been drawn to how different strategies for managing liminality and negotiating psychological and social uncertainties play a part in reducing negative affect. Much could be gained, if patients and physicians were able to employ a variety of strategies for managing experiences of liminality to reduce the kinds of demands for biomedical solutions that are counter-productive for patients and a burden for healthcare services.

The Paradox of Improved Healthcare and Intensified Liminal Affectivity

From a social psychological perspective, it is important to contextualize how and why liminality can be a pervasive problem for patients and medical professionals. We propose that the negative affective intensification of liminality cannot be understood only in terms of sensitive patients who worry too much. Rather, it is fundamentally tied in with broader societal structures and discourses (Rose, 2007). One aspect is about uncertainty and risk. A range of scholars have described how individuals in postmodern societies are governed by a rationality of risk and uncertainty, living in what Beck (1992) has named “risk society” (see also Bauman, 2013; Massumi, 1993). These processes are accelerated by the distribution and consumption of knowledge in digital media. Massumi (1993) argues that subjects, through the exposure of risk discourses, become subjected to a constant low-level fear, or what Szakolczai (2010) has described as permanent liminality. Liminality and low-level fear are managed through a continuous alertness to risks both probable and unlikely. We suggest that the proliferation and spread of information on health and illness contribute to the affective economies of societies and individuals. Having argued for an intimate interrelatedness of uncertainty and knowledge, these affective processes are paradoxically accelerated by the increasing capacities of healthcare and information and communication technologies. Little et al. (1998) draws on Foucault (1978) and argues that the era of biomedicine and biopower has introduced a new paradigm of illness, not as an existential condition, a part of our ordinary lives, but as an abnormality that must be treated and done away with. Managing illness as a part of life is no longer a part of our intellectual and emotional vocabulary. The social structures, understandings, and strategies that previously helped us to manage the liminality of illness have been altered in the process of modernization (Giddens, 1991). Paradoxically, the *will to knowledge*, the trust in biomedicine, and the acceleration of risk, uncertainty, and fear become a trap, where subjects are left in permanent liminality (Szakolczai, 2010). In this way, biomedical knowledge practices contribute to self-generative liminal processes involving knowledge,

uncertainty, and affect. In this light it gives food for thought when the GP, towards the end of the interview about the consultation that involved a father and daughter, states:

"I have to dare to make that decision and say no, it is not beneficial, it is my firm conviction that it is not. You can ... or I can, I was wavering a bit inside, because oh no, are there some other GPs who would say that something should be done ... you see?"

As she "wavers a bit inside" and compares her actions normatively to those of other GPs she too gets caught up in the affective dynamics of liminality and uncertainty. Having to collaborate and negotiate around the negative affective intensification of liminality in patients can potentially generate more *will to knowledge* trapping physicians in the same looping effects of uncertainty as the patients, potentially reinforcing and accelerating affectivity in undesirable directions.

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Part III

Concluding Response

Chapter 10

A Feast of Liminal Experiences and Expressions



Paul Stenner

Liminal affective technologies, whether ludic, sacred, aesthetic, therapeutic or some other variety, operate with or on time in a cultural zone that is conceivable as a world within a world. In this volume we see discussion of several examples, from film to child's play to pilgrimage to art therapy to ecstatic communion to song. My thesis is that these 'as if' worlds within worlds have their source in liminal experiences *between* worlds, and that—via this source—they enable the *devising* of experiences that help people to make new sense of their existence during life transitions. This commentary will give particular attention to operations with or on time, and how these operations are crucial to new sense-making.

Writing this commentary gave me better insight into why Francis Bacon considered that some texts 'are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested'. Bacon was making the point that there are different ways of reading proper to different kinds of texts, but also that the way a text is ingested and digested will also depend upon the constitution and experience of the reader. What a feast of texts have been prepared in this volume!

Alien Food: Aesthetic Technologies and Dream

When reporting how his life changed as a very young man when his father died in 1579, Bacon wrote: 'I myself remember, that being in Paris, and my father dying in London, two or three days before my father's death, I had a dream, which I told to

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divers English gentlemen, that my father's house in the country was plastered all over with black mortar' (Scott, 1908, p. xxiv). Whilst between worlds, Bacon dreamed (a world within a world). Irreversible time precludes the possibility that Bacon knew of the fact of his father's death before it happened, but in another sense, thanks to our capacity to entertain the future, we all know death before it happens, especially our own. How we can live and dream with this knowledge is a different question. But what about the dreams we do not have? What about the undreamed dreams which, as Tania Zittoun (TZ) puts it in her evocatively crafted contribution, 'may just wait for us until we are ready to dialogue with them, and to open ourselves up to imagine and live what is yet to come'?

What do aliens eat? TZ brings to the table a rich and far-reaching analysis of the film *Arrival*. The film crystallises many of the issues dealt with in this volume. An emergent event: a new arrival constitutes an 'uh oh!' experience which poses an existential challenge to a world whose present now becomes past and whose future becomes unclear. This is the arrival of the liminal present of a world between worlds. A process of metamorphosis follows in which the new 'alien' arrival is encountered, and then gradually incorporated into a world that is new in so far as its pattern has shifted to 'incorporate' the alien. Those who go through the passage emerge different on the 'other side', although the process of becoming also allows continuity. The world at stake can be that of an individual or, as in this case, a wider collective. Hence in the midst of the liminal occasion opened up by the novel event of alien arrival, the main character, Banks, is shown *going through* a transformation which will eventually change, not just her, but also the global situation of humankind. Banks' spontaneous liminal experience (as presented in the film) comes to be mediated by a liminal affective technology: the surreal smoky rings of the alien 'heptapod' language. Learning the alien's language changes Banks' dreams and disrupts her sense of time, and *liminalises* it. For example, when she dreams of the death of her child the viewer initially takes this to be a disturbing dream of a past trauma triggered by the alien arrival. But as events unfold it becomes apparent that the dream is not a memory but a premonition of the death of an as-yet unborn child. But it is precisely Banks' vision of a future yet to come which changes the course of events between humans and heptapods. We finally understand that the aliens have arrived because—also capable of seeing the future—they know that their survival long-term depends upon future collaboration with earthlings. Notwithstanding the particular deaths of Abbot, Costello and Banks' child, the future of humans and heptapods alike is saved from destruction *thanks to the access to the future granted by the dream*. By means of its depiction of Banks' experience of liminalised temporality, *Arrival* thus takes its viewer through their own curious experience with temporality, calling time into question and making it a matter for pondering and digestion, as if an entire cosmology and an entire future were at stake.

Ecstatic Wafer and Communion Wine: Between the Sacred and the Aesthetic

Robert Innis (RI) offers us soul food, something comparable to a communion wafer. He concentrates attention on two historical experiences: St. Teresa's convent ecstasy and Philip Larkin's melancholy of churches. I am grateful to RI for engaging with my work so thoughtfully, and for finding this new way of *not* dismissing experiences such as those of St. Teresa and Philip Larkin. He directs our attention to the sacred sphere and its close relation with the aesthetic (Bernini's sculpture and Larkin's poetry). He also helps further finesse the distinction between spontaneous and devised liminal experience by zooming with precision onto a particular type of experience had by what might be called *liminal specialists*. But he argues that St. Teresa, Bernini and Larkin exemplify a liminality that moves *within* a world rather than *between* worlds. Neither St. Teresa during her ecstasy nor Larkin in his church seem to be *between worlds* in the sense of going through a life transition, and hence, RI suggests, my analysis hits a limit.

But must we follow RI in viewing these experiences, and the liminal affective technologies (LATs) which support them, less as a liminal movement beyond the self, and more as stabilising and supporting a pre-existing self? St. Teresa had entered the Carmelite Monastery in Avila, Spain, in 1835 at the age of 20, but even though she had already taken her vows, her autobiography suggests that her famous experience occurred as part of a protracted conversion experience that began 20 years later. Conversion surely suggests a degree of movement *between* worlds. It would certainly be a mistake to frame St. Teresa's liminal experience as spontaneous. St. Teresa—like Bernini, Larkin and Emerson—was a specialist *deviser* of liminal experience who devoted much of her life to an existence in something like permanent liminality. The Carmelite Monastery can be conceived as a veritable machine of 'spiritual exercises' brimming with devices and techniques for the production of sacred experience. One can only imagine the years of dedicated devotion it took to produce an ecstatic experience capable of lasting several days! This level of dedication is surely rivalled only by artists (like Bernini and Larkin). The intimate connection between sacred and aesthetic LATs is starkly exhibited both in the relation between Bernini's sculpture and St. Teresa's rapture and in the poet's repeated encounter with churches. As liminal specialists they worked on and with LATs of various kinds throughout their lives. But what this means is that, more than most, they lived their lives within their preferred worlds within worlds. Where most of us read poems and sermons written by others, they devoted their lives to *creating* by means of these LATs. The world *within* which they moved was already a liminal world within a world and, through it, they situated themselves permanently between worlds.

We should recall that Victor Turner's notion of permanent liminality was informed by his study of monastic and mendicant existences within world religions. In the world within a world of a convent or monastery, certain features typical of transition rites (abstaining from sex, observing diets, separation of genders, wearing

habits, etc.) are prolonged in time or rendered permanent. The nuns and monks are expected to live their lives as a tightly knit community in relative isolation and to specialise in accessing a world beyond the mundane existence outside the walls. It occurred to Turner that the features of a short-lived liminal passage had been fixed in space/time as a permanent institution. What St. Teresa, in her ecstasy, was 'stabilising' and 'supporting' was not her existing self, but her capacity to *move beyond herself*. Bernini rendered that same experience of liminality permanent in marble. We should ask why Stendhal's devout monk took pains to point out the easy confusion of Bernini's sculpture with profane pleasure. In this experience—and without denying the *considerable* share of the body—St. Teresa surely found herself *beyond the pleasure principle*. She was reaching a *beyond*—ever 'creeping in at the edges' (see Morgan et al.)—from which to experience anew. Her experience was surely intimate with what Emerson called 'prayer': 'contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view'. Larkin too, in trying to move beyond himself, found himself ever returning to the 'serious house' he discovered in churches, and wondering about his motives which seemed to come from a place beyond pleasure.

Samosa and a 'Sex on the Beach' Cocktail: Time out for Ludic Pleasures

Sanna Schlieve and Sébastien Tutenges (SS/ST) take us far from convent ecstasies and church visits to the liberties of young Danes visiting a Bulgarian holiday resort, or whilst expatriated in India, but continuities remain. They portray the irresponsible behaviour of the former, and present the latter as exploiting the oppressive labour conditions of local workers. SS/ST modify William James' notion of a 'moral holiday' to show how the ordinary moral principles people might be expected to observe 'at home' can be temporarily suspended when 'away', but without any sense of moral failing. Metaphorical moral holidays, it seems, enable actual immoral holidays. Morality, write SS/ST, is 'always with us' and there is no 'neutral standpoint'. But what does this have to do with liminality? Whilst not wishing to make light of the moral issues SS/ST rightly raise, I take issue with their tendency to reduce the meaning of liminality to a *social representation* through which semantic mediation a positive meaning is given to conduct that should be condemned as immoral. Their primary concern is that the ludic pleasures of leisure allow their participants a sense of immunity from morality. The Danish workers they studied in India could ignore international labour standards *because* they told themselves the story that their current existence is merely temporary (they are 'as if' on vacation in 'a very fancy hotel').

Essentially, SS/ST argue that indulgence in moral holidays is not some natural fact of human nature but is guided and supported by *social representations* which encourage people to *construct* being 'away from home' as a liminal moment of freedom, and to perpetuate that construction in their communications. Taken to an

extreme, this perspective might hold that what we call ‘liminality’ is, in fact, nothing but a social representation: something we enact because it has been constructed as a permissible reality by social representations. It is a short step then to *blame* talk of ‘liminality’ for moral failings as if it were reducible to the positive declaration, ‘here and now, everything is permitted’. Hence SS/ST suggest that a ‘traveling rite’ (representation of liminality) is what *prevents* their participants from *feeling* the apparent immorality of their conduct. Despite a concluding observation that occasionally ‘letting go’ may have some health benefits, the general tone takes a dim view of ‘debauched’, ‘corrupt activities’, ‘atrocities’ and ‘forbidden vices’.

I have argued, from a different theoretical perspective, that liminality is a vitally important aspect of reality. Indeed, liminality scholarship opens up ways of addressing how moral orders are themselves revalued and transformed in the historical process. For example, surely the observer position tacitly occupied by SS/ST is *part of* a broader genealogy of morals in which the source of morality itself is thoroughly questioned. SS/ST judge their participants from a broadly Durkheimian position of social scientific authority. Zumwalt (1982) and Thomassen (2016, p. 7) have teased out some long-standing conflicts between the Durkheimian tradition (which social representation theory is part of) and liminality scholarship. Discussing the meaning of liminality, Thomassen (2016, p. 7) advises ‘a reflexive use of the term, rooted in its intellectual and anthropological history, with due stress on the concepts of experience and transition’. For Thomassen, the Durkheimian tradition is precisely *not* the intellectual root of liminality scholarship, but a tradition against which liminality scholars since van Gennep have struggled. This point is important, but can be over-exaggerated (Turner continued to draw inspiration from Durkheim). Nevertheless, despite engaging with some aspects of liminality theory, SS/ST tend to reduce liminality to social representations and attack the experiential relevance of transition with striking assertions like ‘when people travel ... no matter how far, *they never move into unknown territory*’. This claim, surely questionable, is encouraged by the very definition of a social representation as functioning to render familiar, known and communicable what might otherwise be unfamiliar and strangely ineffable. When figured as a social representation, liminality morphs from a theoretical account of transition into a type of semantic glue that either ‘makes it possible to retain a stable moral experience’ or, on the contrary, anchors the possibility of amoral conduct. So, what difference would adopting a process approach attuned to liminality make here? I offer five observations:

First, whilst I agree that the activities of Danish youth in Sunny Beach can be usefully construed in terms of a culturally devised mode of experience, I disagree that this ‘is a “devised liminality” (Stenner, 2017) *in the sense that it is purposefully designed to create moments of histrionic release*’. Liminal experience is experience of, or facilitative of, *passage* and not mere ‘histrionic release’. It is about becoming and not simply about permitting the pleasure principle its moment of freedom from the usual strictures of reality. Indeed, to the extent that SS/ST are correct that their participants *do not* experience passage, applying the concept of liminality becomes problematic.

Second, although I deviate from Turner's rather epochal (and *Durkheimian*) distinction between liminal and liminoid, the latter notion certainly opens unavoidable questions for SS/ST. Turner directly associates the liminal with mechanical solidarity in which collective representations have a common meaning that is absolutely binding on the conduct of all members. Liminal phenomena are thus obligatory, sacred, collective, socially integral and ultimately functionally supportive of the social order. In societies characterised by *organic solidarity*, by contrast, ritual liminality is superseded by liminoid phenomena which are largely optional, secular, individualised, socially marginal and often critical of the social order (in Moscovici's parallel argument in the field of 'knowledge', an optional multitude of 'social representations' superseded unitary and binding 'collective representations'). *Liminal* phenomena, from this perspective, occur in pre-industrial societies where a deep distinction is obtained, precisely not between work and leisure, but between sacred work and profane work. Turner thus defines liminal phenomena as 'ergic-ludic' because work and play were *not to be clearly differentiated*. Ritual was the seriously playful work of articulating human existence with divine work and play (Turner, 1982, p. 52). Liminal experience unfolds, as it were, between cosmological and earthly practice, recurrently articulating local human activity into the widening circles of society, world and cosmos. A rite of passage fleetingly exposes each passenger to the rhythms and mysteries of a whole cosmic organum. For Turner, the move from liminal to liminoid was associated with factors like the separation of church and state within modern capitalistic economies underpinned by the alliance of science and technology. Under industrial capitalism the difference between mundane work and leisure becomes a basic structural division and rituals are made increasingly subservient to rationalism and individualism. In place of a divine cosmological work of natural rhythms the new 'organic solidarity' aims to order human work technologically and politically, including providing leisure opportunities. Turner traces these developments to sixteenth-century England and notes the significance of Francis Bacon's publication of *Novum Organum* in 1620, a liminoid work that 'definitely linked scientific with technical knowledge' and both with power (Turner, 1982, p. 53). The sacred, we might say, increasingly withdrew from both work (real-ity principle) and leisure (pleasure principle). I say 'increasingly' because Weber drew attention to the manner in which the religious ethic of Protestantism at first came to reside in *serious work* during the course of Western modernisation (in direct antagonism to the kind of sacred source St. Teresa was exploring in her playful work). As Turner put it referring to Calvinism and puritanism: 'Work and leisure were made separate spheres and "work" became sacred' (Turner, 1982, p. 38). When Larkin, a self-proclaimed Anglican agnostic, found himself lurking in the 'serious house' of the church he had rejected, he was nevertheless acting in consistency with the protestant dislike of ritual and other externalities: the serious work is the important thing (e.g. the poet's vocation), and the enemy is the 'cakes and ale' of sinful luxury (as the Calvinists liked to put it). Deprivation, Larkin himself observed, was to him what daffodils were to Wordsworth. What is required is a moralistic self-examination of conduct in order to further self-discipline and root out indulgences (the devil finds work for idle hands). Leisure pursuits—sport in

particular—became disciplined and professionalised, a tolerated release of superfluous energy (working engines ‘letting off steam’). But, as Weber showed, after a few generations this religious spirit largely evaporated leaving just a valorisation of a systematic capitalistic approach to ever-expanding profits that could now be happily rewarded via the pleasures of hard-earned leisure and consumption. The crucial liminal feature of organon-guided transition gave way to a private ‘me’ space for pleasure, leisure, entertainment or self-development.

Third, I therefore suggest *reversing* SS/ST’s analysis. The problems they observe are precisely due to *lack* of liminal experience. In a different contribution, TM/RD/SB correctly observe that my own approach to liminality opposes any ‘defaulting to pre-existing “experiences” commonly regarded as liminal’ (p. 4). The concept cannot be applied as if it were an ‘observable it’. We must refuse the tendency—increasingly common in the growing liminality literature—simply to assume that anyone in a situation vaguely characterisable as ‘betwixt and between’ is therefore liminal. In my account liminal experience is a concrete experience of disruption or interruption within a given actual stream of experience. I have characterised this in a simplified way as an ‘uh oh!’ experience (Stenner, 2017, Chap. 3). The problem that SS/ST identify with their participants is precisely that they are *unperturbed* and *carry on as usual*, despite events that should make them say ‘uh oh!’ The ‘social representations’ these participants draw upon *immunise them from liminality*. Far from ‘instructing the Danes that they are in a liminal situation’ these representations preclude it, leaving them *unmoved*. They are not themselves ‘liminal’ but an abstract parody of liminality, a parody that my approach guards against. In contrast to Turner, this does not preclude the possibility of liminal experience in these domains, but perhaps renders it less likely. The analytically interesting points to focus on are those moments of doubt when participants, despite their representations, begin to entertain a demand to think and feel differently: to *move* or become otherwise. For example, SS/ST would do well to attend to the moment at which Eya *does* waver and say, ‘I am a bit embarrassed about it now’.

Fourth, whilst experience and action may never be unmediated by culture, social representations are not the only mediators. To the extent that social representations render unfamiliar experiences familiar they function in a *structuralising* way (they bolster expectations and enhance predictability). LATs, by contrast, do not *structuralise* but *liminalise*. They do not *enhance* ‘the expected’ in order to facilitate the probability of predictable actualisation: rather they *suspend* expectations to increase the pool of available possibilities (Andersen & Stenner, 2020). Liminal affective technologies serve not to regularise experience into the patterns of normative order but to foster and manage liminal experiences beyond existing limited structural patterns.

Finally, before invoking the authority of William James we should not forget that when he briefly invoked his notion of a ‘moral holiday’ in his lectures on pragmatism, far from being moralistic, he was playfully critiquing the would-be moral certainties of many of his contemporaries. For James identifying something as a moral holiday is not to condemn it. Indeed, as he states in the second of these lectures, it is his ‘disbelief in the Absolute’ that leads him to ‘fully believe in the

legitimacy of taking moral holidays'.¹ James was seriously interested in religion and open to the real problem of the experiential sources of morality. In these same lectures he describes how pragmatism 'will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences'. Hence James was open to the possibility that, for example, St. Teresa was seeking the sources of morality in her ecstatic experience, and not just indulging in little moral holidays, secretly snatching squalid sexual sensations under the loosened cloak of religious devotion. In sum, although SS/ST deal with ludic pleasure, we find echoes of the sacred and its critique (echoes of Luther's reformations to eradicate the purchase of the 'moral holidays' he called *indulgences*?).

Bento Box on the Road: Pilgrimage as Awakening of the Sacred

Zachary Beckstead (ZB) also discusses 'travel' of sorts, but in his authoritative discussion of pilgrimage he takes seriously the possibility of liminal transformation. He affirms an expectation that 'the returning traveller is not the same as when they left', but instead of reducing these expectations to the prescriptive content of a social representation, he analyses their mediation as part of a liminal affective technology.

A process philosophical starting point is crucial here. He begins—via Ernst Boesch—with an account of human experience as existing in a tension between familiarity and foreignness: we long both for a home and for an unfamiliar *beyond*. We seek novelty as much as security. As actual entities, we are constantly becoming what we are, and hence concepts of 'movement' or 'transition' acquire two senses: first, like a stone flying through the air, our bodies move across space from position *a* to position *b*, etc., and second there is the movement through which the entity we *are* ceaselessly becomes what it is. The first is observable as if from the outside, and the second is experienced from within. As SS/ST affirm, we can move in the first sense without seeming to move in the second sense. And yet in fact we are always moving in the second sense: one experience follows another which gives rise to another, and no two experiences are identical. But under canonical circumstances all this movement—and all the little differences that enter into each new pulse of experience—is absorbed into a seamless sense of unified continuity 'had' by a subject (Husserl's 'natural attitude'). Hence a direct identity is felt between who they were 1 s ago, 1 h ago, 1 day ago (before going to sleep and after waking up) and even years ago when a small child. Within this stream of continuity even radical ruptures and remarkable novelties can be quickly absorbed: even after severe brain

¹ See [https://human.libretexts.org/Courses/Lumen_Learning/Book%3A_The_Originals%3A_Classic_Readings_in_Western_Philosophy_\(Lumen\)/03%3A_Epistemology/03.6%3A_William_James__On_Pragmatism](https://human.libretexts.org/Courses/Lumen_Learning/Book%3A_The_Originals%3A_Classic_Readings_in_Western_Philosophy_(Lumen)/03%3A_Epistemology/03.6%3A_William_James__On_Pragmatism)

damage, the pulse of experience, though perhaps compromised, is still unified, and—as it were—the gap is closed. But these jolts beyond the routine equilibrium can also be retained in a new ongoing sense of a turning point having occurred: Swann before and after he fell in love. After Hamlet's death, new unrealised ideals shape Horatio's future. This is possible because—unlike a stone moving through space—a person experiences themselves within their passing environment, entertains futural expectations, is disappointed or pleased by what is encountered and reflects upon what might have been and might be, entertaining alternatives and suffering matters of fact. In our actuality, we are each of us a composition of movement, and as such we can be moved in our movement, but any transformation is soon reabsorbed into experiential business as usual, and even those things we promise ourselves never to forget can slip away.

Examining some particular pilgrimage experiences, ZB shows how, as it unfolds, the pilgrimage route is carefully designed to move pilgrims out of their ordinary worlds and to engender progressively more extraordinary experiences of a world within a world. Furthermore, despite the fact that only a minority will have explicitly religious motivations, he suggests that many enter their journey after or during significant life ruptures (declining health, loss of a loved one, etc.), or because they are seeking alternatives to their past lives. In this sense, for many, pilgrimage 'is a quintessential ... *world within and between worlds*'. It serves as a LAT to frame, nourish and rework the spontaneous liminal experiences of those who are *between worlds* by means of engagement with a potentialising *world within worlds*. Again, radical specificity is needed here and not blanket generalisations like 'all pilgrims *x*': some pilgrims simply enjoy a pleasant liminoid walk from *a* to *b* and some are 'topping up' on a familiar adventure. Whether and how a given pilgrimage functions as a LAT cannot be stated in advance or abstracted from the concrete material and semiotic conditions at play (see Martina Cabra, this volume). Conceived as a LAT in ZB's hands, pilgrimage also reveals itself to be a time machine. This is not simply a matter of taking time out from the normal routines. The passage of the pilgrim, he remarks, is a conduit for movement across 'a boundary between the past and the future'. The path walked by so many over so many years is sowed with memories of Gods and heroes. The path to Mt. Kōya, for example, is strewn with a multitude of Jizo statues, each symbolising a dead spirit ripe for reawakening. The *Danjogoran* is haunted by Kobo Daishi himself. Thus as the pilgrim's long walk leaves their workaday life behind, so in its place is summoned an extraordinary world beyond linear time, through which a walker's life is connected to a collective past beyond living memory, which in turn stretches forward to the infinite. The little biography of one's individual life is enfolded and uplifted into a cosmic 'zoology'.

I was fortunate enough to visit Koyasan with my son just as he was turning 18, and by a stroke of fortune we arrived just on the evening that the path within Okunoin was being lit by candle-bearing pilgrims filing towards the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. We had not anticipated encountering these pilgrims and our own journey had been just 2 days in transit by jet, train, bus and funicular, but exhausting enough! Now, finally, here we were at dusk, passing through the ancient forest containing 200,000 gravestones of monks, each apparently awaiting the resurrection of the

future Buddha. We were given our own candles to plant in the ground in the name of guiding the return, for a flickering moment, of dead loved ones: reawakened from the past in order to participate in our future. This was indeed ‘unknown territory’ and neither Ezra nor myself will ever forget it.

Imaginary Milk from a Bottle: Repetition and Ludic Becomings

Martina Cabra deftly examines children’s play through a liminal lens and shows us that what is enjoyed in play can be a serious business. We usually think of play as fun; we do it out of pure pleasure; the lighter the better, as when a smiling child offers imaginary milk to a playmate. But like all cultural experiencing, play has a liminal source, sharing its ‘world within world’ quality with ritual, theatre, art, etc. These too can be fun, light and easy, but—going a little deeper—when necessary (as it so often is) they allow us a safe space to ‘enjoy’ and work through more frightening possibilities of tragedy, pain, loss, terror and death. This is why Winnicott argued that the secret of psychotherapy is to create conditions that allow those who are suffering, whose way has been blocked, to learn to play once more, play being the source of creativity and a precondition for self-development.

Freud (1994, p. 174)—himself deeply inspired by Greek (and Shakespearian) tragedy—also saw the connection between play and the arts, observing that every ‘playing child behaves like a poet, in that it creates a world of its own, or more accurately expressed, it transports things into its own world’. The cultural experiencing that happens in worlds within and between worlds is thus a form of enjoyment—within the limits of those worlds—of things that precisely *cannot* be reduced to hedonistic pleasure. Indeed, when grappling with such issues in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1920) critically reflects upon his own assumptions about the psychic relevance of ‘pleasure’. He starts to question his previous commitment to the idea that forms like play, dream and masochism are essentially surreptitious ways of snatching (coded) pleasure rewards (e.g. ‘wish fulfilment’) from behind the back of consciousness. He reaches for a more sophisticated, processual understanding. Play itself leads Freud ‘beyond’ pleasure when he observes that ‘in their play children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life’ ... ‘If the doctor looks down a child’s throat or carries out some small operation on him, we can be quite sure that these frightening experiences will be the subject of the next game’.

In the fieldwork described in her contribution, MC finds exactly this pattern of ‘repetition’ when Natalie and Luke—two young twins—‘play out’ their anxieties around their imminent transition from kindergarten to school. She shows how this case provides a neat example of how play *qua* LAT can work as a world within and between worlds (the twins are classically ‘in between worlds’ and they are both perturbed by the big step which will newly distance them from their parents). A

participant observer, MC joins in their playing and pretends to be a baby, crying because she misses her mom. Natalie and Luke comfort her, giving imaginary milk from an imaginary bottle and warming her with a cape, whilst uttering soothing words like ‘You will have fun and mommy comes back tonight, ok?’ ... ‘Yes darling, we come back later ... Now we need to go to work’. The value of this seems clear: through the mediation of a LAT (in this case, joint play), spontaneously arising liminality can be explored and newly symbolised in an enjoyable environment that is held in suspense from what is *not* play. Spontaneous experiences that *happen* to one (especially those that threaten a passive down-swerve in capacities to affect and be affected) can thus be reworked in a devised sphere wherein one encounters or discovers new more positive possibilities for *becoming active*.

But in this case (as perhaps in every case) it is important to qualify what it means for something to *happen* to one. At the time of playing, the actual transition to school had *not yet happened* to Natalie and Luke, and—most likely—what *had* happened is that they had been told by their parents that it *will* happen. What has happened to them is this telling of what will happen: the ‘uh oh!’ is an event pre-saging another event that *will soon happen*. According to my somewhat caricatured characterisation, the process of a spontaneous liminal experience is inaugurated by a disconcerting ‘uh oh!’ or ‘this is not’ experience of rupture, and resolved—often with the help of devised liminal experience—through an insightful experience of ‘ah ha!’ At stake in the process of restoring a lost ‘balance’ is a working out of the *meaning* of what has happened and, as a consequence, the meaning of what will happen in the future. This makes time newly relevant. But the equilibrium-restoring ‘ah ha!’ insight is not guaranteed and the disturbed process of symbolisation must be actually gone through. MC astutely observes the relevance of time when she notes how in ‘those 30 minutes of play, we lived through 3 or 4 months of life’. The play allowed time to be greatly condensed and rendered into a form manipulable by, and encounterable by, the three players. Luke and Natalie ‘ventriloquated’ into their play the soothing words—from the recent past or imagined future—of their parents (‘we’re right next door’, etc.). Devising this playful time machine thus allowed the twins to translate the problems of their own lives into a frame that is broad and pleasant enough to facilitate a feeling through their ‘between worlds’ predicament. Here we see exactly the relation between art and life that concerns us in this volume: the once dreaded future of life *beyond the play* becomes a little more manageable and desirable thanks to a certain re-temporalisation that is picked out and experienced in the play.

Freud is on exactly this path when he observes in *Beyond* how repetition of unpleasantness in play allows the player to ‘abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation’ (p. 286). In his famous discussion of the *fort-da* game of his nephew, Freud understands that thanks to the move from the micro-tragedy of act 1 (‘Uh Oh ... mummy/toy is gone!’) to the more joyful act 2 (‘Ah ha ... mummy/toy is back’) the child ‘passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game’. In this phase of his thinking, Freud is surely correct to note, albeit implicitly, the commonalities between the liminal cultural spheres of play, dream, art, theatre and therapy and to identify these

as safe sites within which the spontaneous disturbances following a shock (he discusses war trauma) can be progressively worked through. But in a curious way Freud both *opens up* these insights *and* immediately nudges them offstage in favour of his new favourite actor, *Thanatos*. For example, he recognises the positive possibility that ‘children repeat unpleasurable experiences ... [because] they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively’. But he immediately dismisses this as a mere ‘*additional reason*’ subservient to his preferred idea that the compulsion to repeat expresses a ‘daemonic’ will to death. Indeed Freud repeatedly uses the word *daemonic* to describe the ‘compulsions to repeat’ that best illustrate motivations beyond the pleasure principle. Certainly a person repeating a disturbing experience in play or dream or art or literature or therapy may *feel as if they were somehow possessed* by a force beyond their comprehension, since there are indeed unconscious forces at play here that escape the usual pleasure and reality principle-oriented self-interested rationality. But it is surely problematic to assert from an external vantage point of scientific expertise that they are indeed possessed by a daemonic will that craves nothing but death.

I raise this limitation of Freud’s *Beyond* because I want to chew over one aspect of MC’s excellent contribution with which I disagree: her overly stark distinction between process thought (which allegedly deals only with flux and passage) and cultural psychology (which she suggests can equip process thought with a much-needed dose of stability and repetition via notions like materiality and pattern). I do not see such a binary, first because process thought deals *above all* with continuity and second because much cultural psychology *is* processual (see Valsiner, 2014, Chap. 2 in particular). As MC correctly judges, my target in writing *Theorising Liminality Between Art and Life* was captured in the subtitle: *The Liminal Sources of Cultural Experience*. I imagined bringing a gift to the feast of cultural psychology which adds a new dimension to Jaan Valsiner’s second chapter: an elaboration of Winnicott’s insight that something remarkable is at play in ‘cultural experiencing’: ‘a continual *inventiveness* that provides a *continuity* that *transcends* personal existence’ (PS, *this volume*). Winnicott (p. 134) uses italics to ward off any ‘either/or’ between novelty and stability: ‘*it is not possible to be original except on a basis of tradition*’.

World views have long oscillated between basic conceptions of flux and permanence. Whitehead is clear that his philosophy is not a metaphysics of flux but an effort to accommodate both orientations. Ontologies of substance are skewed towards a permanence they take for granted. They assume that to be an *actual entity* is to be a substance with qualities. A hard, grey stone is paradigmatic of actuality because it appears to exist independently *here* in space and *now* in time. It moves when we throw it and we can calculate the amount of time it takes to move across a given space. Excluding subjectivity from scientific calculations is here a positive advantage. Comparatively speaking, the stone *qua* system exhibits *stable equilibrium*. It can easily be ignored, but even a stone has a story of *becoming* when time is viewed on the macroscopic scale of geology or on the microscopic scale of quantum physics. When science took living creatures seriously as subject matter, and

then human beings and their societies, it was harder to ignore the *internal* story of self-production, maintenance and becoming. New concepts like homeostasis and entropy/negentropy (and later *autopoiesis*) were developed and intimate relations between continuity and change, external and internal, were recognised as constitutive of ‘living systems’ (see Stenner, 2005). But as we move from stone through plant to animal, the ‘going through’ of those intimate relations calls increasingly for an adequate concept of experience. In first articulating such a concept, Whitehead emphasised that experience *involves a becoming*, ‘that becoming means that something becomes, and that what becomes involves repetition transformed into novel immediacy’ (136–7). Not *either* repetition *or* novelty, then, but *novelty thanks to repetition*.

Gilbert Simondon’s distinction between stable equilibrium and *metastability* is relevant here (see Wrbuschek & Slunecko, 2021). Following thermodynamic principles, stable equilibrium ‘excludes the idea of becoming because it corresponds to the lowest level of potential energy possible; it is the sort of equilibrium that is attained in a system when all the possible transformations have been achieved and no other force remains to enact any further changes’ (Simondon, 2020). Stable equilibrium, lacking potential, belongs to that which has exhausted the metastable dialogue between novelty and repetition: the inert, the dead, *Thanatos*. Metastability, by contrast, is a condition in which potentialities hover on the brink of individuation. It is not unique to living systems: the complementarity of wave and particle in quantum physics is metastable until ‘collapsed’ by a measurement, for example. A crystal too ‘individuates’ via a *physical* process through which the metastable chemical potentiality of a supersaturated solution is progressively actualised. With the emergence of life, however, the balance between repetitive and novel ways of actualising metastable potentials is further skewed in the direction of novelty. A living system, being negentropic, must maintain its own systemic continuity through a constant actualisation of newly generated potentials, and it must constantly regenerate its own source of potentiality. A living system, for example, *eats* from its environment, thus ongoingly renewing an internal supply of metastability by extracting from its food the potentials needed for the self-perpetuation of its operations (until it dies). Metastability is more than Bernard’s homeostasis whereby a free life requires a stable internal milieu. It implies an ongoing and recurrent process starting from an *individuation* through which a metastable ‘pre-individual’ *becomes* an ‘individual’ (see Tucker, 2018). And once ‘individuated’, individualisation must ever start again, each actuality becoming one more potential ingredient for the next experience. It is the recurrence of this *pulse* between potentiality and actuality that yields yet more sensitivities to possibilities *beyond* rocklike repetition. With the further evolution of human mentality and sociality—mediated by layers of symbolic reference carried through experience with ‘culture’—some of the potentials at play can be consciously entertained as alternatives.

Psychology, once it has eaten of this apple, cannot start with the notion of a fully formed individual but must broach the ontogenetic question of their individuation and of their arts of maintenance and transformation. Thus Nietzsche, the self-proclaimed ‘first true psychologist’, contrasted the equilibrium state of

contemporary thermodynamics (a mere resting place for the identical, the inert, the dedifferentiated) with the eternal *return*, where *return* meant precisely the opposite of stable equilibrium: namely, the (negentropic) *being* of that which *becomes*. Thus Winnicott invites us to consider the emergence of a ‘unit self’ as a process of individuation from out of a ‘potential space’. Winnicott’s third space/time shares with Simondon’s metastable pre-individual (2020) the *unformed* and *as if* quality of *potentiality-not-yet-actualised*. Thus Turner, writing in turn of liminal rites, described a *subjunctive* quality of ‘trembling in the balance’ (Turner, 1982, p. 44). When Turner further elaborated his notion of *anti-structure*, he drew upon Sutton-Smith’s theory of play as *protostructural*: a ‘latent system of potential alternatives’ which precedes and exceeds what he calls the ‘working equilibrium ... of normative structure’. In each case, something like a *process of experience* yields a new actuality through resolving the potentiality of the tensions, paradoxes and complementarities at play in a constantly renewed condition of metastability. We thus see a thread of continuity—not just between play, ritual, theatre, etc. as worlds within worlds of cultural experience but also from physical to organic life through to human culture. If a living creature carries a supply of metastability by means of metabolism, human life—without abandoning this method—solves a homologous problem at the level of coordinated conduct by means of culture. We who live beyond the indicative in the subjunctive mood of what *might be* and what *might have been* thus find new cultural ways of juggling the balance between repetition and novelty. Starting with ritual and play, these potentialisation devices are the liminal affective technologies which summon and foster ‘as if’ worlds within worlds which feed an insatiable forward thrust into the future, opening new ways of creating and resolving the paradoxes of metastability (Andersen & Stenner, 2020).

In sum, the phenomena so astutely identified by Freud in *Beyond* are best understood as liminal features proper to a *metastable* system that has been thrown beyond the normative structure of its usual ‘working equilibrium’. From this perspective, the phenomena of the *Beyond* are concerned with a problematic of equilibration (to use Piaget’s term), but that problematic is precisely *not* about a return to the deathly condition of ‘thermodynamic’ *stable equilibrium*. We cannot blame Freud if he lacked an adequate account of liminal metastability and took forward instead the thermodynamic notion of stable equilibrium. But this mistaken premise prompted him to (temporarily?) posit a fundamental ‘death drive’ to explain the unpleasant repetitions that he discovered in experience ‘beyond the pleasure principle’. This led him to overemphasise the relationship between repetition and displeasure, and to underemphasise the creative possibilities of repetition (indeed, that repetition is in fact the very being of becoming). Freud derived his theory of pleasure from Gustav Fechner, the inventor of psychophysics and inspiration behind modern psychology and, incidentally, a Spinozist and the first significant theorist of the *limen*. Freud (p. 277) himself attributes his equation of pleasure with stability and unpleasure with loss of stability to Gustav Fechner and acknowledges that his principle of constancy is merely ‘a special case under Fechner’s principle of the “tendency towards stability”’ (277). To follow the pleasure principle is to aim towards keeping the quantity of free excitation constant, or at least as low as circumstances permit.

When Freud makes the remarkable move of ascribing *pleasure itself* to the death drive,² he is observing this connection between pleasure and *restoration of a prior state of equilibrium*. Lacking a better concept of equilibrium—and *contra* Fechner³—Freud perceives this as a return to an entropic *stable equilibrium* associated with the inanimate inertness of death. But the ‘equilibrium’ of a living organism is never in fact stable in this manner.

Everything thus hangs on the characterisation of the relation between stability and change, which is why I have laboured this critical point raised by MC. Certainly, once equipped with the concept of liminal metastability, it is apparent that when a person goes through a spontaneous liminal experience they are thrown out of a prior equilibrium and into a phase characterised by liminal affectivity. But that prior equilibrium was never an inert ‘stable equilibrium’ but rather that of a *form of process* that has (temporarily) become pivotal or canonical (regularised, habitual, structured, perhaps *harmonised like a recurring melody*). None of this means that Freud was wrong to reflect on trauma as a certain *undoing* of bound energy which calls for a renewed effort towards binding (Friston, 2010). And he is surely correct to recognise how a shocking event can dislodge the pleasure principle: it can ‘provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis; and only after the binding has been accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and of its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered’. Only an already individuated ‘self’ can be ‘self-interested’ enough to follow and seek its experiences of pleasure. From this perspective, it is the liminal experience of being thrown ‘between worlds’ that opens ambivalent possibilities *beyond the pleasure principle*. The repetitions of the *Beyond* need not spell death but *more life* and indeed *more than life*. In short, an actual entity itself, being a composition of movement (a form of process), can be moved in its movement and transformed in its mode of transformation. Liminal experience is experience of such movement and transformation.

The Stone Guest Interrupts the Feast: Liminality Abandoned

Beginning with Ukeles’s art and her creative feminist rethinking of Freud’s death and life instincts, Tessa Morgan, Robbie Duschinsky and Stephen Barclay (TM/RD/SB, *this volume*) describe continuity as an incessant *art of maintenance* and self-production, and they focus on decline. They explore how this life-affirming work of maintenance is undertaken from within the gendered relationships of older heterosexual couples where the woman is the primary caregiver, and the man is diagnosed with a serious life-limiting degenerative condition. This contribution is remarkable in many ways, but not least because it manages to convey and combine political,

² ‘The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts’ (Freud, 1920, p. 338).

³ Fechner equated pleasure with the re-establishment of stability that follows its unpleasant disruption, but he never said that life is a bed of roses: ‘a tendency towards an aim does not imply that the aim is attained ... the aim is attainable only by approximations’ (cited in Freud, 1920).

experiential and sociological senses of liminality. Politically, older people's private homes in the UK are—like care homes more generally—increasingly becoming a liminal 'zone of abandonment' in that the care provided to their partners by older women is both indispensable (given the biopolitical situation of a society bent on neoliberal economisation yet 'caught off guard' by an ageing population) and largely invisible. This political backdrop powerfully shapes psychological possibilities. Experientially, TM/RD/SB focus both on actual 'uh oh!' occasions during which a new future dawns when the predictable flow of expected events is upset and on actual 'ah ha!' occasions in which the dawning future gathers a new solidity of meaning. They make the important point that spontaneous liminal experience need not be associated with rapid and dramatic transformations but that the concept can be applied equally in seemingly mundane settings involving the slow creep of change. Sociologically, they draw upon intersectionality theory to explore how and why people from different social locations may have different resources to manage their liminal experience.

80-Year-old Donna, for example, cares for her 84-year-old husband Mikey whose penile cancer is in remission but who suffers from mini-strokes and has vascular dementia. But TM/RD/SB observe that it was not a 'dramatic' event (like her husband's castration) that provoked Donna's experience of liminality, but the quotidian realisation that he was no longer capable of making tea and hence of continuing the 'time-reckoning' ritual that had been an intimate part and symbol of the mutually caring weave of their married life. Mikey dipping the kettle in the water in the sink heralded a transition in the sense of a deepening of his utter dependency upon her (the becoming of what TM/RD/SB call their 'dyad'). It dawned that the present they lived before this event had now become the present of the past, and so a new future—that of the dyad—must now replace the future of the past. A spectacular rupture is not necessary for business as usual to be interrupted by a hole in time. According to TM/RD/SB, the becoming of this dependent dyad was the beginning of the end, and when Mikey had to leave home after a rapid decline, Donna's health also declined.

Equally poignant is the example of Carol singing *Jolene* and *I'll take you home again Kathleen* to her now disabled and fragile husband Charles, rousing him from 'deathly still and silent' passivity. These songs function qua LATs as time machines. *Kathleen* 'symbolically transport[s] Charlie back to his original home in Jamaica' whilst at the same time returning both to their wedding anniversary. In the leaky threshold of interfusion between spontaneous and devised, *Jolene* the man-stealer morphs into *Jolene* the undertaker whom Carol beseeches 'please don't take my man', thereby giving the could-be prison of their small room new cosmic dimensions of significance. New value from the devised world within a world trickles into the world between worlds, and a future otherwise bleak takes on a new meaning, despite pervasive social abandonment.

Death is never far from discussions of liminality. The reason for this basic connection between liminality and death was already made clear by van Gennep, and it relates precisely to the thermodynamic concept of entropy that, following Nietzsche, I have shown to have preoccupied the Freud of the *Beyond*. I have never seen this

aspect of van Gennep's classic work properly discussed, and so will briefly raise it here. Newton's heavenly bodies can move perpetually in frictionless space (orbiting a large mass like the sun, for instance), but: 'although a body can move through space in a circle at a constant speed, the same is not true of biological or social activities. Their energy becomes exhausted, and they have to be regenerated at more or less close intervals. The rites of passage ultimately correspond to this fundamental necessity, sometimes so closely that they take the form of rites of death and rebirth' (van Gennep, 1909, p. 183).

Here we glimpse a cosmology in which rites of passage correspond to the necessity of energetic depletion and renewal. If *all* rites of passage resemble the passage from death to rebirth, this is because 'the transition from one state to another is literally equivalent to giving up the old life and "turning over a new leaf"' (van Gennep, 1909, p. 183). The concept of liminal transition, from its source, was thus closely connected with what Simondon (2020) would later call a metastable system maintaining the 'potential energy' needed for it to go through more energy-consuming transformations. Cultural rituals mark and guide transformations because 'the transition from one state to another is a serious step which could not be accomplished without special precautions' (van Gennep, 1909, p. 184). Read in the light of TM/RD/SB's contribution, does this contain the seeds for richer cosmological rethinking of the significance of death in our lives? Perhaps a significance that goes beyond the zones of abandonment cultivated by a biopolitical regime which cultivates *Thanatos* by consigning it to these zones?

In his 1976 book on Dionysos (i.e. before Giorgio Agamben), Carl Kerényi discusses the two ancient Greek words for life: *zoë* and *bios*. Far from polarising them, Kerényi brings to light the rhythm of their relation. *Zoë* is limitless and enduring life as such (as with the expression 'life on earth'), whilst *bios* is life *characterised* in the finite form of a given concrete creature. The finite life of a given *bios* asserts the biography of its individuated existence, and that biography ends with its death. Since it is proper that each *bios* dies, death is included in the concept of *bios*. *Zoë*'s relationship to *Thanatos* is such, however, that it serves as a contrast from which death is excluded: life as *zoë goes on*. *Zoë*, to borrow Kerényi's (1976, p. xxxv) metaphor, is like the endless thread along which 'every individual *bios* is strung like a bead'.

Bird Food: Therapeutic LATs

It is unlikely that a diagnosis of cancer will be experienced as anything other than a significant 'uh oh!' experience. It understandably raises immediate doubts and anxieties about the future and transforms the present, not just of the one who has now become a cancer patient, but also of those close to them. In this domain, the liminal affective technologies for working on and with this liminal affectivity tend not to be framed as ludic or aesthetic or sacred but primarily as therapeutic, because a proximal concern is transitioning to as 'healthy' a future as possible. With serious

life-threatening illnesses, of course, restoring health is often not possible, and broader 'existential' and/or 'religious' issues concerning the end of life can become directly relevant.

In another excellent contribution, Kirsten Roessler, Hvidt, laCour, Mau, Graven and Assing Hvidt (KR) explore experiences of transition during a cancer rehabilitation programme involving art therapy. Hence they also deal with life lived liminally in proximity to death and they grapple with how painting (guided by the artist Ole Lindqvist and supplemented by the music of Bach and group discussions) might serve as a liminal affective technology helping to devise meaning and continuity ('come to an understanding of the nature of the problems with which they struggle') by working with and on 'emotions', 'thoughts' and 'concerns' (liminal affectivity). As they point out, a crux of the issue is how patients with cancer can 'cope with and manage their future' (7) and how interventions like this can aid the process.

KR et al. approached the question of how art might influence emotions by running focus groups with 40 patients who participated in a 5-day rehabilitation programme and analysing the resulting transcripts with an eye for examples of reported transition experiences mediated by the art therapy. But, perhaps equally relevant, they also show some of the paintings produced by the participants. Importantly, they acknowledge that not all participants *wanted* to engage with art therapy, and a few found it an unwelcome imposition. I note as an aside that in an ideal world perhaps some participants would have preferred to engage with a different LAT (music, painting, creative writing, theatre, games, crafts, prayer—all offer possibilities), but this would require much resourcing and, judging from this contribution, it seems the Danish situation for cancer rehabilitation looks rather better resourced than most other places.

Having said this, the overwhelming impression from KR et al.'s report is of a positive and at times transformative experience for the participants. Any thorough analysis of the varied experiences should of course be accompanied by a careful analysis of how those experiences were shaped by the conditions supplied by the LAT itself. The art therapy was just one component in a broader event and clearly the entire 5-day event must be considered as a technology (LAT) carefully designed to *occasion* some unusual experiences and to facilitate their expression. The fact that each participant had a unique experience does not invalidate that each unique experience was to some degree occasioned by the programme. Although art therapy was not the only ingredient, each experience with painting must be understood as *this* experience with painting with *these* people in *this* devised setting at *this* time. Attending to the programme itself *qua* LAT raises a number of issues that cannot be disentangled from the 'effects' of the art therapy. First, the programme allowed each participant to remove themselves from their usual environment and patterns and to spend 5 days in an unusual and highly 'supported' space/time free from more familiar preoccupations. Second, some participants remarked on experiencing a certain 'back-to-school' feeling of being with a group, guided by a leader, in activities like painting that may not have been done since childhood. The unusual space thus affords a connect in the present to the past. Third, as commented upon by participants and the authors, the group went through the programme *together*. This was a

social experience amongst people who *shared* a cancer diagnosis in common. Being ‘not alone’ in expressing one’s experience is a significant ingredient (think of Turner’s *communitas*), especially given the potentially isolating trajectory of living with cancer (see Little et al. 1998). Fourth, the combination of group dialogue and art therapy afforded a mixture of discursive and non-discursive activity ideal for a ‘deep symbolic’ working through of any ‘embryonic’ feelings existing ‘on the edge’ of semantic availability, or any tensions and contradictions which might have been avoided pending an appropriate moment.

The LAT used was thus a complex *composition* of ingredients which together served as the occasion for unusual experiences and activities. The resulting experiences cannot be ‘explained’ as the result of *either* ‘relaxation’ *or* ‘recreation’ *or* ‘emotional correction’ *or* ‘new cognitive insight’, etc., since one might just as well say—at least when it is true—that new cognitive insight arose *because* of the relaxed environment and emotions were transformed *because* this was recreational ‘time out’. Like the ingredients that come together in the baking of a cake, once assembled in a LAT these ‘components’ are simply not discrete independent variables with independently determinable effects on a dependent variable like ‘positive therapeutic effect’ (although a good cook will know if too much sugar or too little egg has been used). And no matter how good the cake, its enjoyment can never be guaranteed since not only is the proof of the pudding in the eating, but also there is no accounting for taste (which varies, experience by experience). For some, the very (non-discursive) act of mixing colours, of seeing green concretely emerge from blue and yellow and enjoying the pure perceptual fact of this transformation, can constitute a temporary freedom from preoccupied rumination and incessant ‘interpretation’ (but for the participant who is ‘seized by anxiety’ this does not happen). There is also the smell of the paint, the texture of the containers and the feel of the brush now loaded with colour, now empty.

And when a transformative experience *does* unfold, it is of great interest to explore this further. One participant, for example, painted a tree, but not any tree: an uprooted tree, replanted with its roots in the air. Instead of growing in the usual fashion according to linear time (the visible portion at least should surely grow gradually upwards, from roots in the ground to leaves in the sky) a spontaneous liminal experience has uprooted it and *reversed* the usual course of things. The upside-down tree with its roots in the air is thus a potent symbol,⁴ created by the participant, of what might be called liminalised temporality. Uh oh! But this symbol of liminalised temporarily also expresses faith because the roots of the backward-growing tree now support the new life of nesting birds. Ah ha! New life. For this fragile artist, and doubtless for many more, this passing of the baton of bios via *zoë* back to bios is called faith. From the traumatic bleakness of one’s own imminent biologico-biographical death springs awareness that what might be called *life itself* (*zoë*) continues.

⁴Apparently in Norse legend Odin hung upside down from the ‘world tree’ pierced with his own spear (resonance with Teresa who was pierced by the golden spear of an angel?). There is also a long tradition of hanging Christmas trees upside down in parts of Eastern Europe.

I am not suggesting that this particular artist ‘theorised’ their predicament in exactly these terms. Art is never so simple, and nor is life. But for sure this artist *created* that artwork and in so doing they *expressed* or externalised something of their experience in concrete form available to others and to themselves. It is very unlikely that the process of producing this painting was a ‘heady’ matter of first coming up with the idea and then working out how to execute it. Art produced in this ‘heady’ way tends to be second-rate. Rather, it is more likely that the artist felt their way to producing the painting through the process of painting it, thereby lending tangible material form to feelings on the edge of discursive articulability (as a crystal grows along a metastable vector). But once created, the painting is there and, furthermore, can be talked about, reflected upon and discovered. It is, to borrow from Susan Langer (1978), a perceptible form expressive of feeling. But it is not a ‘self-expression’ like a cry of distress or fury. It does not display feeling like a symptom, like a clenched fist, but rather presents feeling that has been transformed into a symbol that—since it is public—can now be felt in turn by another. Furthermore, the feeling captured in this painting is not just the ‘uh oh’ of liminalised temporality, but also a certain affective reconciliation with this disturbance: a ‘way out’ from the blockage it caused in the form of a bigger ‘cosmological’ picture that includes the new life of the nesting birds.

Finally, in addition to Langer, I would also recommend engaging with Lev Vygotsky’s *Psychology of Art* to further develop an understanding of how liminal affective technologies actually work (see Zittoun and Stenner, 2021). Although Vygotsky deals mostly with literature, and hardly touches upon *making* art, he was amongst the first psychologists to grasp that art functions as a *technique of emotions* and that it becomes particularly vital during times of significant life transition. Vygotsky’s approach would help finesse notions like ‘corrective emotional experience’, which imply an almost mechanical process of rectification (although I do not doubt that KR et al. have a more sophisticated approach).

A Taste of one’s Own Medicine: Hidden LATs

Last but not least, Mads Bank and Lotte Huniche (MB/LH) help us to see how it is the task—often unacknowledged—of medical professionals to create LATs to manage and contain the spontaneous liminality often associated with sickness. They have studied what they call ‘pre-diagnosis liminality’ and concentrate on the uncertainty and liminal affectivity which can arise when people develop chest infections. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, their observations are now pertinent to practically every human being who comes to be concerned by a developing cough, perhaps accompanied by fever. Once again, the crux of the matter lies in the future: *uh oh! ... should I be worried?* Is this just a tickle in the throat or might I have a life-threatening virus? The decision to consult a medical doctor is thus from the start wrapped up with the question of resolving a disconcerting uncertainty: am I ill or not? If so, is it serious or not? Ideally what unfolds is a play in three acts. In Act 1

the patient reports the ‘uh oh!’ of his symptoms. In Act 2 the doctor does a physical examination or some tests, and in Act 3 she delivers a decisive medical judgement. The hope, then, is that the liminality inducing ‘uh oh!’ is met with the ‘ah ha!’ of either a clean bill of health or a clear diagnosis. In this way, the medical system can function simultaneously in three parallel ways: first as a *techne* for corporeal diagnosis and treatment (for example, the future of the invading bacteria can be predictably curtailed by penicillin); second as a liminal affective technology for managing the imaginings of an uncertain and possibly dangerous future (for example, the patient can be reassured that there is nothing wrong and sent home); and third as a social procedure with the power to determine legitimate absence from work, school, etc. (for example, the patient can take next week off). Crudely (since in practice they are fundamentally entangled), the first is biological, the second psychological and the third societal, and one might say that when an organic disease is diagnosed (e.g. bacteria are found), the biomedical ‘level’ decides or settles the psychological and the social levels (MB/LH call this ‘biomedical closure’). But the cases in which the medical system can actually deliver this clarity are rarer than one might think, and the unexpected problems that it generates are more common.

In the Danish cases dealt with by MB/LH, for example, the C-reactive protein test routinely used can provide only indirect information on upper respiratory infection and its probable causes (‘you most likely have a virus’). Some patients can therefore remain in a state of uncertainty. MB/LH show how any residual liminal affectivity is typically managed by inviting the patient to divide up their future into small manageable chunks (‘if you don’t feel better by Friday ... use this prescription to pick up some medication from the pharmacy, and if nothing changes during the weekend ... contact medical emergency to obtain something stronger’, etc.). On the organic level, this is a matter of planning to acquire and take medication, but on the social psychological level, the liminality of an unknown future is contained by structuring that future into reassuringly knowable and actable-upon quantities: the present, as MB/LH put it, is governed ‘through the future’.

But these temporalising techniques can also be insufficient to manage significant liminal affectivity and, under certain conditions, can intensify and further volatilise it. The patient, for example, might consider the doctor to be neglecting the seriousness of their case and—feeling told off for wasting precious medical time—amplifying their existing uncertainty with resentment and distrust. In this way, what Monica Greco and myself call a ‘liminal hotspot’ can develop between doctor and patient, and the more uncertain the available medical knowledge, the more scope for genuine conflict arises (Greco & Stenner, 2017). Rather than achieving ‘biomedical closure’, new ‘looping’ effects can be generated in which liminal affectivity is amplified and escalated across the levels rather than contained and reduced. Those who are ill but without a diagnosis can enter a subjunctive zone of uncertainty in which concerns about what their future ‘might be’ can easily grow into frightening proportions. When unresolved, the liminal affectivity generated can lead to a sense of paralysis, or to panic, or to a tendency to polarise into strict and conflictual ‘either/or’ thinking. But this is not a one-sided problem, as doctors too can find themselves caught up in the paradoxes of liminal uncertainty, as when the doctor

interviewed by MB/LH describes herself as ‘wavering inside’ recognising that her judgement call might not be shared by her colleagues, and could lead to trouble down the line (e.g. conflict with a patient).

As with all of these issues, there are important political and socio-historical dimensions. The more successful biomedicine proves to be, the longer people must live with chronic conditions that cannot be cured by biomedicine, and this despite the ever-higher expectations about its potency. Rather than operating to settle liminality, a biopolitical will-to-power twinned with the capitalist logic of an ever-expanding economy (driving ever-greater global inequalities) seems rather to expand and intensify liminality, and render it permanent. As MB/LH point out, the proliferation of liminal hotspots in which people become stuck in the transition of a vicious circle cannot be ‘blamed’ on individual patients and doctors: it is a structural aspect of the globalisation of permanently liminal societies. We who have the capacity to imagine the future would do well to speak and act. Oh, and to dream.

Conclusion

Starting with the aesthetic mediation of liminal experience by means of film and ending with the therapeutic mediation of liminal experience in a medical consultation, we have seen throughout this volume how the distinctive features of time brought into play by liminal ‘devices’ (including child’s play, leisure activities, ritual practices, song and painting) can be provoked by and work back upon the various experiences of life rupture that I have called spontaneous liminal experiences. This helps to draw into focus the distinctive nature of a rich plurality of otherwise divergent worlds within worlds: not just ludic, sacred and aesthetic, but also therapeutic (and what about pedagogic, romantic, philosophic, scientific, etc.?). Each of these ‘subjunctive’ worlds within worlds shows up as having a particular pertinence during ‘indicative’ circumstances of transition when people are *between* worlds.

Crudely, there is a liminality both of art and of life. But the crucial issue is how the subjunctive ‘as-if’ worlds that can be roughly gathered on the ‘art’ side of this distinction are articulated in resonance with the ‘as-is’ worlds of actual lives. We human beings are the amphibious creatures whose lives unfold in the mixture of both media. This is the fresh meaning I wish to bring—via some of Winnicott’s most enigmatic insights—to the expression *cultural experiencing*. I have risked the proposition that the worlds within worlds that constitute the obvious contents of human culture (play, sport, song, painting, film, theatre, ritual, prayer, pilgrimage, travel, therapy, etc.) have their source and their vocation in liminal experiences *between* worlds. They are provoked into becoming by the liminal experiences that they in turn serve to resolve. They are the source of an inventiveness that necessarily transcends personal existence, but that in transcending it affords the realisation of its continuity. This insight is often concealed by the fact that, for the most part, each of these LATs shows up as having a light, superficial and airy side focussed solely on the easy pleasures of leisure time. Far from plunging into life through its moments

of crisis, they seem more like a momentary artificial distraction from real life: a sensual reward between phases of work. And so they can be and increasingly are. And yet, beneath this comic surface each has a tragic side which does nothing but confront us with the problem of our unfinished finitude: we are not what we think we are. Thus the songwriter Townes van Zandt proclaimed the existence of only two types of music: zipadee-doo-dah and the blues.

Let me end by returning to *Arrival*. What is most difficult to digest is surely contained in the *tragic* aspects of the film. The heptapods are here because they need humanity if they are to save themselves in a future only they can see. The clairvoyance, that is, their bittersweet gift to Banks, requires her to find the courage to carry on—not just despite but because of what the future will bring. The death of the child we see born at the beginning is echoed in the promised continued life of the heptapod species following the death of the alien visitors. Could death itself be that which we have taken in that is the most difficult thing to digest? King Oedipus put out his own eyes when he finally understood how his failure to perceive his own destiny had enabled it to unfold. Of course, the best of comedy laughs in the face of all this, like Monty Python's *Brian* whistling on the cross.

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