EGALITARIAN DYNAMICS

Liminality, and Victor Turner's Contribution to the Understanding of Socio-historical Process



EDITED BY
Bruce Kapferer & Marina Gold

Egalitarianism
VOLUME 2

EGALITARIAN DYNAMICS

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Egalitarianism

General Editor:
Bruce Kapferer, *Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, University of Bergen, and Honorary Professor, University College London*

Although frequently understood as having originated in the European Enlightenment and discussed as a key concept of a Western modernity, egalitarianism is conceived here as an energy underpinning most human action when confronted with forms of oppression that deny, destroy, inhibit or limit the achievement of human potential. The volumes in this series contribute to the general understanding of egalitarian processes and the barriers to their realization.

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Egalitarian Dynamics: Liminality, and Victor Turner's Contribution to the Understanding of Socio-historical Process
Edited by Bruce Kapferer and Marina Gold

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Victor Turner – a fierce and penetrating intellectual presence: Vic and Edie Turner at an informal mealtime seminar in Japan, 1981. Photo courtesy of Don Handelman. Others in the photo are Masao Yamaguchi and Bruce Kapferer.

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INTRODUCTION



LIMINALITY, STRUCTURE/ANTI-STRUCTURE AND EGALITARIAN DYNAMICS

Bruce Kapferer

Victor Turner's major focus on the liminal as a general theoretical orientation began in *The Ritual Process* (1969) and continued in much of his writing to follow. The chapters presented here were written in the context of seminars and discussions concentrating on dimensions of egalitarianism in which Turner's development of the liminal concept was considered to be highly relevant.

The powerful implication in Turner's idea of liminality is that it is the core dynamic of sociocultural processes: of the constantly changing directions, parameters, registers of human existence everywhere. The liminal is apparent at the margins, boundaries and transitional, often dangerous, vulnerable points of the human passage through existence. Turner gives the idea of the liminal a central, indeed a pivotal significance in the understanding of the dynamic generative courses of human life, both creative and destructive. He concentrates on the critical intensities (antithetical, contradictory, negating, reductive) that are the dynamic of the liminal. At their most abstract he describes them to be structuring and anti-structuring: the one crucial in the other with processual, changing, reorientational, transitive, transformational effects. Turner explicitly considers a vital dimension of structure to be a hierarchizing, ordering dynamic that is overcome by negating, radically ahierarchical energies that release, perhaps paradoxically, new orientations in human life and social assemblages. The transitive force or potential of the liminal opens to new possibilities of existence and understanding.

Our initial concern in this Introduction is to outline some of the key methodological influences leading to the writing of *The Ritual Process* and its core

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ideas, which relate to the approach to egalitarianism behind this volume. *The Ritual Process* is a book about change and transition at a time of transition and change for Turner and for anthropology. When published, there was ongoing post-Second World War reconstruction in most areas of life; anthropology was expanding and effectively being re-established in a world where there was a concern to break from the constraints and inequities of a past implicated in the human destructions of war. Still a relatively new university discipline, anthropology was in the throes of reinventing itself. For example, as a critic of colonialism, its dehumanization and especially racism, it re-evaluated (away from anthropology's colonialist associations and implications) the general conceptual significance of its hitherto emphasis on non-Western societies for its understanding of the human species as a whole.

Turner's *The Ritual Process* is one outstanding example,[1] as it repositioned the role of ritual in anthropology. If ritual was at the root of human consciousness (so much a view in archaeology and in anthropology, a mark of a strong evolutionist bias) it is also at the crux of human being's continual becoming. *The Ritual Process* is through and through a work about ritual as harbouring the conjunctive forces of human change: emancipatory, creative and generative as they may well be constraining, restrictive and destructive. In ritual, conventionally conceived as an engine of the irrational, Turner finds dynamics that supersede or encompass or stand apart from the rationalisms or rationalities (even of science, and manifest in its discoveries and excitements) that might claim to overcome it. In this sense, *The Ritual Process* sees ritual as more than the seat of the irrational of consciousness, as in so much understanding, but rather as revealing some of the human dynamics vital in the human formation of history. In ritual, Turner discovers equalitarian[2] expressions that are at the heart of human consciousness (ontologically universal in) basic to the unity of human being, as this is simultaneously the ground upon which human diversity and differentiation arises as a continually (re-)originating and creative phenomenon. Turner's path-breaking work in anthropology sees in rite equalitarian/egalitarian forces as inseparably joined in struggle with the hierarchical that emerges from, as it were, the same equalitarian ground. Reaching beyond its importance as a work about ritual, *The Ritual Process* is through and through concerned with an egalitarian impetus as being ingrained in human being as such, an inexhaustible energy of human creation and history. Edith Turner (2012) makes this explicit in her application of the concept of *communitas* to progressive social movements, although the approach here is more concerned with its ambiguities and contradictions, its negative as well as positive aspects (see Friedson this volume).

Published nearly fifty years ago, *The Ritual Process* maintains its relevance. Egalitarian issues and cries for liberation have achieved renewed intensity at

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the current historical moment. In the context of Covid-19, climate change, digitalization, and such crises as the Ukraine war, the global situation is arguably approaching what Max Weber might have described as a switch point in history (see Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma 2019), or, in Karl Jaspers' ([1949] 2011) conception, an axial age (see Kapferer and Kapferer this volume). It is certainly a period of considerable social and political transition in which Turner's thought has renewed significance.

An egalitarian or egalitarianizing ethos, a freeing, liberating, opening sensibility, runs throughout Turner's development of the liminal. It could be said that *The Ritual Process* extends from Turner's strong egalitarian orientation. Such is deep within his biography prior to and in the course of him becoming an anthropologist, and was to be ingrained in his liminal idea and its general theoretical significance (see Deflem 1991). Victor Turner's intellectual commitments, especially literary, shared with his life companion and collaborator Edith, express an egalitarian ethos (see Edith Turner 2006). William Blake was a particular Turner favourite, whose great mythic libertarian romanticism was a regular source of inspiration. His experience in a bomb disposal unit, as a conscientious objector, during the Second World War, fed Turner's egalitarian anti-authoritarian values. As he would describe his experience of the dangers of bomb disposal, the highly intense situation of imminent death, held little room for the distancing rites and rules of military rank. Presumably too, it gave an intensity to Turner's enthusiasm for life, so much the feature of his anthropological perspective and his engagement with ritual as the main source of key ideas relating to the liminal.

Turner credits Arnold van Gennep's classic *The Rites of Passage* (1909) as the inspiration for his development of the liminal concept, although as we will propose, van Gennep's work was more of a catalyst for ideas that were already in formation: the liminal being a cohering concept for their realization that went well beyond van Gennep.[3] Turner together with Max Gluckman saw an identity between van Gennep's perspective and Gluckman's general anthropological approach, which sought to understand social life as a dynamic process through attention to situated events, what was described as 'situational analysis'(see Gluckman 1940 [1958], 1961; Mitchell, 1956, 1983; Garbett 1970; Werbner 1984; Evens and Handelman 2008; Kapferer 2005, 2015). Gluckman's orientation was a deviation within the dominant Durkheimian/Maussian social anthropological paradigm, with a strong historical understanding augmented by a Marxist leaning. Such influenced the broad intellectual frame for what Gluckman was to establish as his 'Manchester School', announced and set out in Gluckman's BBC Reith Lectures, and published as *Custom and Conflict* (1955) (see also Gluckman 1968).

Turner was a leading adept, and his first major and now classic ethnography, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957), exemplifies key

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potentials of Gluckman's perspective. Furthermore, the writing of this monograph together with the field experience upon which it was based, opened the way to Turner's own radical redirection for social anthropology, *The Ritual Process*.

Schism focused on successive critical sociopolitical events of conflict in village society that revealed and momentarily resolved the effects of underlying contradictions in principles of social organization (that of virilocal residence at marriage in matrilineal systems), exacerbated by the village fracturing impact of the colonially mediated inclusion of traditional society within an encompassing and expanding globalizing world capitalist order. Here Turner realized a major significance of Gluckman's anthropological concern, which was not to separate the traditional from the modern so much as to see them as different shapes of the contemporary, and to examine their enmeshing and mutual differentiation and production within overarching global forces.[4]

Ritual was not Turner's primary interest in *Schism*, although it was addressed as having an integrative function in articulating a new arrangement of sociopolitical relations. Turner concentrated on the dynamic intensity of events expanding Gluckman's situational analytic perspective. He did so by concentrating on the internal process of events, showing how their dynamic not only refracted the tensions of change (intensifying already underlying contradictions) but were vital in setting redirections in social life and articulating significant shifts in the structuring of social relations. Turner conceived of events as following a Hegelian dialectical dynamic of breach, crisis, redress to reintegration (see Turner 1957: 91–94), where a new resolution of contradiction-driven conflict was reached in a continuing unfolding emergence of the social.

Turner's schema for the analysis of the dynamic crisis of events anticipated what he was to develop as the potential of the liminal concept, effectively a point of crisis and a moment of differentiation and (re)creation.[5] His decision to present his event ethnography dramatologically extended on Gluckman's (1940 [1958]) own situational event analysis innovation describing a bridge-opening in Zululand, and Gluckman enthusiastically accepted Turner's methodological move.[6] It brought the key players in the process of events to life, their personalities, the nature of their existential struggles, the forces engaged in their shifting relations (the stuff, or imponderabilia, of everyday life) that are the basis of anthropological intuition (an important aspect of the recommendation of immersive fieldwork) into the analytical foreground for conceptual formation and general understanding. The potential of Gluckman's situational method[7] was further realized, bringing the richness of the anthropological field experience, so often excluded in commanding theoretical approaches, into analytic play. Thus ritual that Turner experienced as thoroughly critical to Ndembu life became more centrally placed in explan-

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atory interpretation. The stage was set for Turner's performance-symbolic aesthetic perspective, to which he was already predisposed, to become so distinctive in his ritual analyses and anthropology generally.

Turner's major ritual ethnographies (1967, 1968) follow *Schism*, culminating in *The Ritual Process* (1969), which like Gluckman's *Custom and Conflict*, but perhaps more radically so, constituted a major redirection in social anthropology. It was bound to happen for methodological as well as for a variety of personal reasons of life crisis: among them career changes and larger events in the embracing social and political context.[8] We concentrate on the methodological acknowledging that this cannot be easily separated from the whole context of Turner's unfolding lifeworld.

Turner had reached a descriptive and analytical impasse, which he partially solved with his dramatological innovation that was consistent with the situational analytic frame. This was a method that was directed not merely to illustrate argument and theory but to problematize it. That is, to match theory and the understandings it achieves with the evidence, with the complexities of life and its situations in such a way that theory and conceptual understanding might be challenged, exposed to its limitations, perhaps giving rise to new concepts and theory.

Turner was already dissatisfied with the a priori abstractionism of Durkheimian functionalism and with a relatively flat materialism that excluded much of the lived field experience of the fieldwork encounter in the interests of the confirmation of the then commanding theoretical discourses. Ritual was an example, with so much of its anthropological conceptualization or definition being determined within the rationalism and frames of Western scientific positivism, not to downplay the tendency to subordinate what is identified to be ritual to Western cultural/religious assumptions (Asad 1993). In other words, ritual, its definition and understanding, was subordinated to dominant and dominating discourses that obfuscated or refused key dimensions of the phenomenon at hand. Ritual was set within the rationalist objectivist abstract terms of commanding theoretical narratives in such a way as to demonstrate their potencies of comprehension over those that ritual practices addressed and the potentials of understanding that they may have opened towards. Ritual in effect was/is treated as a 'minor discourse',[9] frequently quite literally so (e.g. as evolutionarily inferior to the secular Western modern), not to be considered seriously within its own parameters of understanding with regard to the opening of new horizons of possibility. This, we think, is what Turner was saying in *The Ritual Process* with reference to his statement that ritual was insufficiently addressed in his experience at Manchester.[10] Turner's concentration on ritual, as we have indicated, led to an opening up of some of the analytical constraints imposed on social anthropology of the time. His path through ritual steered towards

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a more holist (wholistic) anthropology in which the discipline could realize some of its larger potential and promise, and demonstrate the ambition behind anthropology's foundation: anthropology as a subject that could contribute towards a general and universal understanding of human being transcendent of relativism in which the practices of all human beings were important not merely as demonstrations of theory but as revealing and suggestive of new and general understanding. Turner was realizing, in effect, anthropology as no longer so much the discipline of minor discourses as the subject that might reveal the major in the hitherto minor, that could overcome the limitations in dominant and dominating perspectives.

Through his focus on ritual, Turner began to move away from the dualism that characterized much Western commanding thought. Thus he shifted away from Cartesian mind/body dualism, which separated the mental from the material. Ritual in its practice, in performance, gives expression to sensibilities (the subjunctive in Turner's usage) that cannot be adequately grasped cognitively, verbally or symbolically, independently of direct experiencing. Meaning is embodied and immediately communicated (in the sense philosophically addressed as 'presentational' by Susanne Langer [1942], referenced by Turner, following Whitehead rather than Kant). Dichotomizing and oppositional logics of the kind that separate the traditional from the modern or contemporary, and the small from the large scale, are modified to draw greater attention to their intermeshing, the production of the one from within the other, as well as cross resonances. In the non-dualist holistic perspective that Turner pursues through ritual are revealed civilizational themes common to all human being regardless of space or time, or scale or complexity, including their critical dynamics and historical generating force.

Ritual or ritualization is a phenomenon of human crisis. In this sense it is a universal human phenomenon apparent and emergent at critical moments in the process of life, regardless of its designation as religious or secular (the distinction Turner makes between the liminal and the liminoid carries this implication). For this reason, forms of ritual practice might be conceived as a potentially important source of concepts and theory generally applicable to all human beings (the more so in Turner's approach, where ritual is ubiquitous, generated in the crises of process, and is itself a processual dynamic). In other words, ritual rather than the basis for a divided understanding of human being (e.g. a separation of the non-modern from the modern, or of the rational from the non-rational) may be the ground for a relatively unified understanding of human being, a promise of anthropology and a motivation behind the publication of *The Ritual Process*.

Some six years following the publication of *The Ritual Process*, Turner makes this more explicit in his republication of his first two major ritual essays following *Schism*: 'Chihamba: The White Spirit' and 'Ndembu Divina-

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tion: Its Symbolism and Techniques' in *Divination and Revelation* (1975). In his Introduction to this volume, Turner reflects on the significance of the essays for the anthropological direction he was then well-establishing.

Divination is thoroughly about structure, its conflicts, its differentiations, its exclusions. Its dynamic is analytic (the reasoning within structure): atomizing, reductive, often intensely divisive in practice (e.g. in sorcery). Divination for the Ndembu and generally across cultures and situations reveals the process of structure for what it is, a dynamic that creates or generates the orders of existence, of human life, but also the organizational formations, the fault lines, points of contradiction and conflicts that are vital in structural collapse, whether social or personal. Divination is deconstructive of the forces within structures that may break human unities, which are particularly apparent at liminal and transitional moments and times in human ongoing experience and history. These are also when anti-structural forces are given rise, in what Turner highlights as *communitas* – that drive against the dividing, separating forces of structure, potentially establishing a new basis for human reorientation and organizational formation.

> I have frequently written about *communitas*, meaning by this, relationships [that] are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, non-rational, existential, 'I–Thou' (in Ludwig Feuerbach's and Martin Buber's sense), between definite and determinate identities. The empirical base of this concept was to some extent my experience of friendship during the war as a non-combatant private soldier in a British bomb disposal unit. But it was mainly village life in Africa [that] convinced me that spontaneous, immediate, concrete relationships between individuals not only were personally rewarding but also had theoretical relevance. *Chihamba*'s dramatic . . . climax in the social anti-structure of universal friendship, following the ritual slaying of *Kavula*, seems to me the epitome or concentrated essence of African village *communitas* raised to metaphysical power by symbolic action. (Turner 1975: 21–22)

For Turner, *communitas* is more profound than notions of togetherness, solidarity, and so on, although no doubt there is a strong sense of it, and certainly some of its spirit, in such concepts. He identifies different kinds of *communitas* but these manifest at root the deep essence of the experience in the *Ndembu Chihamba*, which Turner presents as virtually pre-ideological and universal across humanity. Thus aspects of the anti-structure of *communitas* in *Chihamba* resonate with similar expressions in great religious and political movements and philosophies worldwide, and, as Turner indicates, in the themes of great literature (of Melville's tale of the cosmic struggle with Moby Dick, or Dante's ascent to Paradise in the Divine Comedy).

Turner refuses the critique that his idea of the liminal, and especially the concept of *communitas*, was born of his conversion to Catholicism. He re-

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jects the criticism of Robin Horton (1964, repeated in Werbner 2020) that the concept of *communitas* is Thomist, noting that Aquinas himself repudiated his *Summa Theologica* that Turner is accused of presenting (Turner 1975: 18–19).

Communitas is the unity of being and most specifically, as he writes the *urgrund*, of human being, humanity. It is non-structural and anti-structural only in relation to structure. Prior to structure it is also the fundamental unity of being from which humanity, in the processes of its diversification, differentiations and hierarchies, takes form. Turner distinguishes his concept of *communitas* from that of Durkheimian transcendence, the collective effervescence of rite whereby the social or society comes into existence out of its individual elements.[11] *Communitas* for Turner is beneath the social (not reducible to the social) and its structures of life that can in their formation and process destroy the existential unity that *communitas* expresses. Therefore, with Turner, *communitas* is a continuing generative and regenerative force in human existence. It is captured in religion but is not confined to it. *Communitas* is not ecumenical but universal, a force that is general throughout humanity, both expressive of its undivided unity as it is an energy at the root of human being's process of cultural and self (re)creation and change.

While *communitas* is not structure, it is the basis from which structure, or a diversity of structures, emerges. This includes both egalitarian and hierarchical assemblages (see Keeler this volume) or formations that in our view are ideological (organizations of value) and closely linked and implicit in the other. Egalitarianism is defined in relation to hierarchy and vice versa, so neither can be comprehended independently of the other. *Communitas* may be understood as a key spirit of what is broadly understood as equalitarian, human being as an undivided unity outside structure whose potency is in this unity as such, and protected in the ritual or often ritualized suspension (*communitas* is given to ritual)[12] of structure, frequently at transitional spaces, moments or times. However, non-structure is continually vulnerable to being overcome by structure. This is the potential of *communitas* that is the ground and starting point for structural reformation: the reassertion of the orders that surround it and/or the emergence of structure and hierarchy from within the non-structure of *communitas* that is the ground of structure, whose strongest unity is in hierarchy in which inequality is the key principle. What might be grasped as the paradox of *communitas* (the emergence of structure from non-structure) is expressed in the final events of the *Chihamba* rite (which intends the rebirth of structure) that centres on the killing of *Kavula*, 'the grandfather of all the people' (Turner 1975: 75, 98–115), the Ndembu being of the totality, in the interpretation here, the unity of the fundamental contradiction within existence. *Kavula*, in Turner's exegesis,

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is in actuality not killed by the ritual candidates in the *Chihamba* (the 'killing' is a terrible act in the candidates' own transition, regeneration), and might be understood as the pushing back of the non-structural ground in the re-emergence of structure that *Kavula* effects.[13]

Some of the critique of Turner's *The Ritual Process*, certainly among a few of his colleagues at Manchester at the time, was that he had abandoned the strengths of its methodological innovation in social anthropology and its socially egalitarian and liberating project. This was manifest in Turner's concentration on ritual and religion, which in radical quarters was the engine of conservatism, tradition and – worse – hierarchy, Catholicism being an example. In other words, he betrayed his egalitarian orientation, and most notably his own erstwhile Marxist concerns. The argument here is that this was far from the case. Through ritual the limitations both of Durkheim and of Marxian perspectives were overcome and otherwise augmented and modified in continuation (e.g. Turner's distinction between liminality and liminoid has shades of Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, but does not treat them as absolutely distinct). *The Ritual Process* is virtually a reinvention of social anthropology, an opening up of the discipline, to a great variety of perspectives from numerous fields of human enquiry, science and non-science, and most especially the understandings born of experience and its inventions through the perspectives and structures of practice. There is a refusal of anthropological relativism and an emphasis on continuities across difference and the contribution of humanity, both as a whole and in its specifics, as the source for its conceptual understanding. The concept of *communitas* insists on a common humanity in the face of its differentiation and differences.

If *The Ritual Process* is about ritual and finds its significance in the repositioning of ritual in anthropological thought, it is also a deeply egalitarian and liberating work. It inspires an approach to egalitarianism that breaks with some conventional approaches in anthropology, and especially in Western liberal philosophy, that, as we shall discuss, tend to conceive of egalitarian thought and practice as the invention of the modern (more specifically of the West), born of its fall into the inequities of hierarchy. With Turner, egalitarianism and hierarchy have been inseparably joined from the very beginning of human consciousness, and are virtually the force of its human histories.[14] There are strong intimations of what we are saying in our interpretation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* ([1755] 1999), which begins with language and social formation reaching its hierarchical apex in the order of the state. It is with the formation of society (structure) that human inequality (which Rousseau distinguishes from what he calls natural inequality) grows. This echoes Turner's discussion of *Chihamba*, and is pursued in what follows.

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Beyond Eurocentrism: Egalitarianism and Hierarchy

Egalitarianism is approached here as a general abstract concept, multiple in expression meaning and existential manifestation. It refers to a dynamic, a process, that usually discovers its particular lived properties in concrete moments and situations of crisis. It is a concept that gathers around it or can include a great many other abstractions or pragmatic operators which may be relevant to its particular concrete realization. These include notions of democracy, freedom, human rights, and justice; or indicators, often for contemporary reasons of measurement and policy, such as economic equality and equality of opportunity.

Egalitarianism is a word that was first used in pre-revolutionary France, a term that expressed Enlightenment visions, an awakening to new understanding expressed in rational and secularist intellectual thought carried into social and political movements of liberal opening and of revolution. The French revolutionary cry '*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*' established egalitarianism as an abstraction that awaits its spatial (contextual) and temporal (historical) specificities, whose force in potential continues to echo around the globe. *Egalité*, equality, is the middle conjunctive transitive word, a 'betwixt and between', liminal term that links emancipation, freedom, to the realization of the undivided unity, *fraternité*, of humankind – or, in Victor Turner's more inclusive sense of *communitas* in which human beings are a collective unity on the basis of their shared human beingness, their raw humanity alone. *Egalité*, as the central term in the revolutionary cry, is an active word bearing the meaning of the whole towards an ever-changing world. It is highly performative. The human being, the individual in the condition of *egalité*, is stripped of all that may differentiate, distinguish, separate it from others, and revealed in its simple, human beingness, as at one with others. The French revolutionary cry is a dynamic, motional cry, filled with the energy of emergence.

Conventionally, often in discourse centred on the European and North American Enlightenment, egalitarianism is associated with modernity, especially political and economic modernity, ushered in during the circumstances of what Eric Hobsbawm labelled as *The Age of Revolution* (1962). Frequently, the American, French and Russian revolutions, not to mention the English and most notably the Haitian (the tragedy of the Haitian revolution of Toussaint L'Ouverture is significantly under-considered – see Buck-Morss 2005), are seen as marking the beginning of contemporary global realities, their rupture from the past, from the worlds of tradition. In other words, Europe and the Americas present themselves as the site of the apotheosis to full conscious awareness of the emancipatory desire of human

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beings to burst the shackles of their oppression and the realization of their potential undivided equality with their fellow human beings.

Notwithstanding the great influence the Euro-American revolutionary period has upon the understanding of egalitarianism (see Wolin 2001), and certainly of many major, but by no means all philosophical and theoretical positions, the concept of egalitarianism as developed here aims to separate it from the dangers of Eurocentrism and a sense of Euro-American ownership. This is apparent in political ideological usage when notions of egalitarianism are presented simultaneously to be Euro-American and to legitimate claims to dominance and accompanying moral authority. In such use what may be called the egalitarian paradox arises in which the egalitarian idea is joined to its contradiction. This is George Orwell's observation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The paradox is strongly apparent in tradition/modern dualisms where civilizational superiority claimed in an egalitarian modernity (associated with democracy, technological advancement) has been used to extraordinary colonialist, imperialist, nationalist, not to say racist, inegalitarian ends.

The egalitarian concept, as developed in this discussion, is an open and opening one, relative to space or context and to time. While the word itself arises and is given particular changing, transitional, transformational force at a momentous period in European and American history, this is an acute expression (or cultural objectification) of aspects of existential, social and political processes that in the orientation here are immanent (and achieving different cultural and social expression) in the lifeworlds, consciously and unconsciously, of human beings everywhere. The word egalitarianism names diverse and varying dimensions of a processive (rather than necessarily progressive) dynamic that is integral to life and social realities, and is accordingly an enduring force of history, an understanding that is evident in most perspectives.

Egalitarianism, in usages relevant to the discussion here, is typically defined in dialectical relation to hierarchy. These are abstractions, egalitarianism and hierarchy being in mutual contradiction and negation. They stand, in the perspective developed in this discussion, by and large, for general formational principles that at their extreme are thoroughly contradictory or negating of the other, manifesting as their absolute positivity (their highest value) the negation or overcoming of that to which they are opposed. In this sense, as already indicated, the concept of egalitarian is inclusive of far more than simply the notion of equality (and, too often, economic equality); it also eclipses, often in a revolutionary sense, that formation or order it negates. The positivity of the egalitarian includes the negation of that, and its values, that it overcomes. Likewise with the concept of hierarchy, which includes far more than rank or status order, for example, but potentially a

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whole array of other relational qualities which separate and may have hierarchizing effect, often arising from dynamics of differentiation, that may have deeper qualitative dimensions other than those associated with status or power integral to most conceptions of hierarchy. Gender and sex differentiation may be examples.

The concepts of egalitarianism and hierarchy, as approached here, are not strict opposites but dynamically intertwined, the one emergent and immanent in and through the other. They are inseparably joined so that the negative of the one becomes the positivity of the other, relative to both time and space (history, moment, context and situation). The range of meaning, quality, and sense of what they may include, is always changing or variable.

Obviously, the concepts of egalitarianism and hierarchy are ideologically loaded, especially in the context of the history of European and American philosophical and political discourse. As abstractions, they are each conceived to be the inverse of the other. They are frozen, as it were, in such abstraction, lifted out of their dynamic. Thus, the egalitarian, nebulously understood as equality, potentially across any human practice, is positively valued in distinct contrast to the negative value accorded to hierarchy, nebulously asserted to be inequality across any human practice. They are presented as mutually antagonistic and exclusive absolutes, with the egalitarian as the ideal, vis-à-vis the real, hierarchy.[15]

The orientation here sustains the notion of the egalitarian as an ideal, something that is asystemic, even aside from the systemic as currently lived, an ever-receding utopic imaginary at the edge of reach, which motivates human being towards it. The egalitarian is a moving potential, open to constantly diverse and changing definition and realization. As an ideal in practice defined in dynamic relation to the hierarchical (and vice versa), both, therefore, being highly relative, egalitarianism is conceived as a major force in history. Egalitarianism and hierarchy are in mutually encompassing struggle. But egalitarianizing forces or imaginaries (whether consciously named as such or not), especially as ideals or a potential future, are enduringly encompassing or perhaps overcoming in relation to the hierarchical. Thus the egalitarian or egalitarianizing dynamic in hierarchical relation is the principal generative, often creative, changing, transitive, transformational energy in the structuring and restructuring of relations integral to human life.

The stress that this discussion lays on the dynamic intertwining of the egalitarian with the hierarchical – that they are intermeshed, which effectively conditions their process, their historical force – also means that they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the perspective moves away from Hegel's dialectic, of opposites in absolute contradiction, and extends Hegel's understanding of their mutual immanence that is an implication of his dialectic (see Zizek 2004).

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Thus egalitarian or egalitarianizing moments and processes can and do occur in dominant or overarching hierarchical orders. Buddhist practice, for instance, is egalitarian relative to Brahmanical Hinduism. The *dalit* liberation movement in India recommended Buddhism to be a movement aside from the dehumanizing force of caste discrimination legitimated by Brahmanism (see Jayaseelan 2022). Similarly, certain egalitarian ideological movements, those of Australian nationalism (see Kapferer 2011) for example, have exclusionary, virtually racist, hierarchizing effect. There are many other obvious examples. The concept of the state is synonymous with the notion of hierarchy as antithetical to an egalitarian ideal, yet is often touted as a necessary condition for social existence, as Thomas Hobbes famously contended contra Jean Jacques Rousseau. Yet the monarchical order that Hobbes defended, as hierarchical systems ancient and modern, depend on egalitarian spaces. This is a feature of the hierarchical class and status system of the United Kingdom. This was excellently demonstrated in the ceremonial surrounding the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. The body of the Queen became the space of the *demos*, as the crowds that massed to her funeral expressed for a moment a unity, a kind of public *communitas*, in which the socially separating hierarchizing differences of class, status, ethnicity and power seemed all but suspended. The ideological expressions surrounding the Queen's funeral demonstrated that an egalitarian ethos is necessary for the perpetuation of the monarch-headed hierarchy of the British social and political order (Rio, Kapferer and Bertelsen 2022). For Marx and Engels ([1848] 1971), the state, while the contradiction of an egalitarian society was nonetheless considered necessary to its formation, would ultimately be dissolved with the realization of the egalitarian ideal and the end of the dialectic. Ideologists of capitalism assert various kinds of legitimating egalitarian ethos with intense hierarchical consequence, which is certainly more than apparent in the contemporary historical moment (see Kapferer and Kapferer this volume).

Overall, the approach essayed here conceives egalitarianism and hierarchy as being in dynamic interconnection (rather than in an absolutist oppositional dialectic) in a virtually never-ending becoming of human being in which what is defined as egalitarian and hierarchy is relative (to context and history) and emergent. The former may be conceived as a destructuring force in hierarchy, whereas the hierarchical is structuring. It is this dynamic that is at the heart of Turner's approach to *liminality*, and which he presents as the crisis of anti-structure/structure. Accordingly, the anthropology of the small-scale and the so-called traditional achieved a relevance for the study of human being in general, and opened one way in which anthropology itself could break free from both some of its own self-imposed conceptual constraints and contribute to the understanding of human being as a whole in its theorizations.

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Exploring the Liminal: The Essays

The following chapters extend on Turner's approach to the *liminal* and the *liminoid*, and the direction for anthropology that he initiated. They present diverse concretizations of the largely abstract terms in which the foregoing discussion has been set, re-insisting Turner's strong ethnographic commitment, so much part of Gluckman's Manchester methodological situational analytical tradition, whose specific ethnographic, evidence-based perspective was intended to extend the field-based distinction of anthropology (established so strongly by Malinowski) and its general scientific contribution to the understanding of human being. The orientation was to the construction and generation of concepts that were from the ground-up (founded in the observation and understandings of practice and their practitioners), and which were applicable to human being in general. That is, the concepts were to be founded in practices that were pursued, if differentially, by all human beings (a significance of anthropological comparison embracing all humanity, past and present; see Kapferer and Theodossopoulos 2019) and which, furthermore, were not necessarily confined to particular cultural, ideological, or historical contexts or frames. Turner's radical approach to ritual, his liberation of it from an evolutionist vision together with a conception of ritual and the processes of ritualization as endemic to human beings per se, realized ritual (given his particular recognition of the conditions and formation of ritual and its dynamic) as a general ground for concept construction. Marx saw the political and the economic (especially class exploitation or, more generally, inequality) as the basis for his general conceptual and theoretical approach to capitalism and proto- or pre-capitalism. Turner was influenced in this direction (as was Gluckman and others in his tradition, e.g. in concepts such as arena, social field), thus, arguably, the approach in *Schism. The Ritual Process* as presented here does not abandon that perspective, which is apparent in the strong egalitarian ethos that underscores Turner's approach to ritual. The concepts of liminality and *communitas* are about more than change and process; they have a politics about them that continues a Marxist influence as well as an openness to a broader range of conceptual possibilities that extend beyond Durkheimian sociological constraints.

The chapters presented here offer critical extensions as well as qualifications on Turner's key concepts, which is only to be expected given the passage of time and the very different mood of contemporary global realities. The Turners wrote at a time of reformation and hope, Edith maintaining such spirit to the last. Perhaps the current historical moment is less positive although no less a critical transitional moment in history, despite the negative dimensions of what may have been positive seeming to be more apparent. Liminality as a moment of intense uncertainty and frequently of

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suffering has almost become a permanent, institutionalized condition for many (e.g. see the chapters by Gold and Iteanu). Ritual and dimensions of its aesthetic practice often associated with the dynamic of *communitas* are manifest in hierarchical structuring, where the individualizing separation of human beings, rather than an undifferentiated unity, is the effect as in the destruction of war, in torture and oppressive dehumanization (e.g. Friedson and Keeler this volume).

A reading of *The Ritual Process* should make it evident that Victor Turner was alive to the negative in the positive. The liberating movements of 1960s USA exemplify dimensions of his arguments, but he makes clear their negative possibility, an aspect that Sheldon Wolin (2017) has demonstrated in his discussion of the connection of the 1960s to contemporary corporatism and expanding inequalities. Such cycles of history are implicit in Turner's analyses (there is a Nietzchean twist in Turner,[16] see Kapferer 2005, as there is in van Gennep, see Thomassen this volume).[17]

The volume opens with Bjorn Thomassen's rich statement on van Gennep (see too Thomassen 2014; Szakolezai and Thomassen 2019). He makes thoroughly evident why Turner (and Gluckman) were attracted to van Gennep's work. Turner recognized the parallel, although, as discussed above, more as a performative (in the sense of J.L. Austin 1962). Despite the similarities in project, as Thomassen excellently demonstrates, Turner's approach converges with or shares much with that indicated by van Gennep without in-depth consideration. Ultimately, in later statements, the debt, if any, to van Gennep slips from view.

The volume closes with Robert Turner's extension of Victor Turner's ideas on liminality as relevant to research on the brain, and supported by it. His chapter takes off from what his father described as his most difficult essay 'Body, Brain, and Culture' (published after his death, 1983, republished in *On the Edge of the Bush*, 1985), in which Victor Turner sees ritual to be more than a process within a cultural system but also relates to the neurobiology of the brain. The chapter moves towards a reconciliation of ethological orientations with his hitherto sociological/phenomenological perspective, but an approach, I hasten to add, that avoids essentialism and its stasis. It is consistent with Victor Turner's opening up of anthropological thought beyond its social anthropological, social constructionist, social determinist insistence, and its extension and inclusion of other fields of understanding. Robert Turner extends a hypothesis (testable through technological advances in MRI brain imaging) that the ritual process both acts on cultural competences captured in the brain and also can transform the organization of the brain. This is so because of the plasticity of the brain in all creatures, from the simplest to the most complex human brain. Neurons, Turner develops, have the feature that they can record and conserve experience, which

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can also generate new connections between more distant neurons, changing the structure of the brain and creating new possibilities for behaviour and action. Turner argues that ritual as an intense aesthetic and communicational experiential process acts on what is recorded; and, critically, in ritual's liminal dynamic, it can disrupt, interrupt and suspend what is stored in the brain, facilitating its organizational modification. He focuses on situations of temporal and affective entrainment, behavioural and social synchrony. Turner considers these forms of entrainment to be particularly apparent in the liminal stages of rites producing reconfigurational effect on the brain, with consequence for a further understanding of the power of ritual as an instituted dynamic of reorientation and change.

Don Handelman's Afterword concludes the volume. His reflection on liminality takes the concept beyond the human: a truly betwixt and between phenomenon as he says 'a human yet not quite human formation', which is virtually cosmic in principle. Handelman realizes the strong implication of Turner's direction for anthropology. That is, if anthropology is to comprehend human being it must be a radically open discipline (far away from the sociological closure of a Durkheimian perspective), alive to the multiplicity of forces in which human existence is constituted and in which it also continually creates itself. Handelman conceives of liminality to be such a concept, virtually nomadic in a Deleuzian sense, and one that can break out of closed circles of anthropological sociological understanding concerning human action and its comprehension.

The bulk of the chapters set within the frame between Thomassen and Robert Turner/Handelman follow. They move from those that are primarily conceptual and methodological through to those that engage the concepts of the liminal and *communitas* to comprehend the transitions and transformations of contemporary sociopolitical processes.

The structure of this book follows the potentialities of Turner's argument, reflecting the multiple tensions within his work. This Introduction has attempted to identify an underlying thread that cuts across all contributions, while contextualizing Turner's work historically. In Part I, 'Liminality and Ethnography', the focus is on the critical role of liminality for anthropological work. This part emphasises the methodological contributions of the concept of liminality, not only in thinking about the human in abstract forms, but also in engaging with humanity in multiple contexts. Thus both Paul Stoller and Chris Taylor highlight liminality as critical to anthropological work. The anthropologist is presented as a marginal figure 'betwixt and between' different formations of thought and practice, decentring in agency and entering into new horizons of human potential. Stoller stresses the radical indeed egalitarian aspect of anthropological practice, without compromise, so that the potencies of difference realize their capacity in addressing common ex-

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istential issues, despite distinct frames or pathways of understanding. The universal is in difference rather than in homogenization into the same. Both Stoller and Taylor highlight the importance of Turner's stress on embodied knowledge and, like Turner, achieve their understanding through close association with healers and sorcerers, often marginals in their own realities. Taylor addresses the hierarchy (the shade of imperialism) that clouds and is a barrier to anthropological knowledge but that is opened when bridged, which is the point of Stoller's chapter as well.

The chapters that follow expand on Turner's approach. Dan Sherer and Martin Holbraad take up Turner's dramatological perspective in relation to liminality, looking closely at theatrical techniques. They take some issue with a common interpretation of Turner's liminal concept as being a condition of ambiguity rather than as a dynamic of transition. Their examination of contemporary theatre work stresses the rigour of the process attendant on the construction of realities and entrance within their experiential domain. This is certainly a feature of ritual processes whose transitional potency routinely depends on attention to the details and techniques of practice that are crucial in the passage from one condition or circumstance to another.

In the final chapter of Part I, Rohan Bastin pursues the dynamics of transition, and identifies a relation between Turner's notion of liminality and that of sacrifice. They share what Hubert and Mauss (1964) understand as the core process of sacrifice; regeneration through destruction, a dimension of the anti-structure/structure transitional process that Turner discusses, especially in relation to rites of initiation (see Turner 1967), or what van Gennep grasped as the 'pivoting of the sacred' in rites of passage. In this process, what may have been conceived as external to the sacred, the profane in Durkheimian terms, becomes sacralized – Princess Diana being one example that Bastin engages.

Part II, 'Multiple Meanings of Communitas', addresses the relationship between the liminal and communitas as a space of recreation of relations and subversion of hierarchy. These chapters deal with the tensions, contradictions and connections between the liminal space, often dangerous and ambiguous, and the space of communitas as a constructive moment. The liminal and the concept of *communitas* achieve different consequence and meaning contextually and situationally, as the chapters of Rory Turner, Ward Keeler and Steven Friedson exemplify. The emphasis has largely been on the positive, often in terms of markedly Western value, where the egalitarian aspect is asserted over and against the hierarchical (although Victor Turner indicates their mutual interconnection and implication). Such is qualified in these chapters.

Rory Turner presents the anti-divisive, experiential sense of *communitas* in a Baltimore music festival, but with a strong consciousness of a reality in

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which the spirit of the occasion is open to the support of the hierarchical and inegalitarian status quo. The intention of the organizers is to resist aspects of the structure in which they must act. His chapter expresses the tragic of the anti-structural against the overcoming force of the divisions of structure that was intimated in *The Ritual Process*, despite the hope of the time in which it was written.

Ward Keeler, concentrating on Buddhist practice in Myanmar, underlines the close connection between the Buddhist liberation of adepts from the determination of the self and the larger affirmation of the hierarchical order. Keeler sees an individualism in the practice in which he participated, but, if so, it is distinct from that of Western individualist value. Thus the practice corresponds with Turner's notion of *communitas* as a stripping down of the social person or self to create an existential unity of human being, prior to or outside the structures of the quotidian.

Steven Friedson's chapter addresses the potential for the positive of *communitas*, or the aesthetic that is frequently associated with it, the bonding power of music, for example, to be also destructive and humanly fragmenting. The apparent *communitas* in contemporary popular music concerts is not so much a being in time together as it may be an individualizing, an autonomy or individuating separation in the midst of others and apart from them. This is the direction also of Keeler's foregoing discussion, *communitas* achieving different effects relative to situation and ideology in its structuring in practice. What is liberating and unifying can be quite the reverse (see too Iteanu, this volume). Friedson discusses the life-affirming being-with-others of Vodu sacrifice as a contrast with the anti-ritual ritual of detention cells in Thailand and Guantanamo.

The chapters in Part III, 'Liminoid Spaces and the Politics of Liminality', take Turner's concepts and apply them to contemporary political crises, where liminality becomes a space of annihilation, from which there is no sense of communitas, or at least not for those who are forced into liminality. Indeed, notably, it is the liminality of 'the other' that generates a communitas among the perpetrators, as is the case of migration regimes. This part explores the liminal spaces in neoliberal regimes, as well as in state structures. The chapters expand on the changing circumstance and relevance of Turner's approach to liminality in large-scale 'liminoid' settings of contemporary realities where the situation of the liminal is institutionalized into a relatively never-ending domain within an encompassing systemic process. Thus the liminal or marginal operates in the interest of the reproduction of the order that it may otherwise threaten, as in the initiation rites that provided the inspiration for Victor Turner's (1967) understanding of liminal processes. This is an aspect of the shrine to Lord Ayyappan at Sabarimala in Kerala discussed by Dinesan Vadakkiniyil. Ayyappan is a liminal god and his shrine is

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a liminal domain at the edge of the hierarchies of the everyday world, a relative egalitarian space integral to a changing hierarchical order. Vadakkiniyil addresses a situation in which Ayyappan's shrine became the intense focus of contest over women's ritual rights, and this had major political significance for gender equality.

Istanbul's famous Grand Bazaar is an institutionalized liminal space at a major crossroads of history. Patricia Scalco describes it as a veritable 'hermeneutic chamber' for the contest and conversion of value. It is a centre for tourism, whose exotic attraction is in the skilful play of its bargaining that contrasts with controlled and relatively set values governing trade outside its walls, one of order and structure. The world of the bazaar is one of contest, of narrative skill and knowledge manipulation. Scalco concentrates on the trade in carpets, where the deal and value is woven in the creation of a social relation and the establishment of a meaning in the value of the deal struck.

John MacAloon's chapter, as Scalco's, focuses on the performativity of the liminal through which meaning and value are created. His discussion is grounded in the study of the Olympic Movement as born in the era of nationalism and the nation-state, but aimed at encouraging the values of common and universal humanity through the celebration of individual ability in competition, where difference and individual excellence generates an overall spirit of unity rather than war. MacAloon pursues critically Turner's distinction between the liminal and the liminoid, and the tendency for the concepts, especially that of liminoid, to lump very different symbolic formations together. He stresses the structural nesting of genres, and how structure can effectively derail the potential of the liminal. Thus he shows how the aim of the Olympic Movement in the increasing focus on spectacle is being lost, an effect of increasing corporate involvement (a political dimension of globalizing capital expansion, perhaps a passage from nation-states into corporate states; see Gold this volume).

The final chapters in Part III extend on the political within the dynamics of the liminal and the liminoid, the intimacy of the liminal with structure, and particularly its inegalitarian even oppressive potential arising in the changes in orientation that is facilitated in liminal dynamics.

Andre Iteanu examines French immigration policy, one which is broadly assimilationist in effect. The context upon which he concentrates is that of the *banlieue* largely occupied by immigrants from the Maghreb and West Africa. The ritual to which they are subjected has similarities with initiation rites (such as those discussed by Turner among the Ndembu) but in the complex realities of urban France, what may be regarded as the egalitarian reduction (that attacks their assumed communitarian 'holism') is intended to effect a transition into a French citizen of individualist value. The process is oppressive – an instance, paradoxically, of what might be seen as the hier-

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archical within a 'liberating' transitional dynamic. A new communitas is not achieved, rather an anti-communitas communitas.

Marina Gold in her chapter on refugees in Switzerland elaborates further on a similar line to Iteanu. She adds that in the contemporary context the situation of asylum seekers specifically is one of an almost permanent condition of liminality. Gold affirms Turner's argument that in the liminoid contexts of contemporary realities, the liminal is not so much a moment in transition but one that has been institutionalized, an almost continuing marginal condition. Here Gold argues for a reconfiguration of Turner's approach in contemporary and changing state orders in which, with regard to refugees, the liminal subversion of structure reinforces the values of dominant orders, even if redefined, and the potential of liminality is also realized as a mechanism for exclusion rather than incorporation and transformation. Moreover, the dynamic of structure/anti-structure that Turner emphasizes (but to which he indicates ambivalence in the contexts of the liminoid) is vital to the reproduction of the status quo.

Kirsten Bell examines open access academic publishing in the neoliberal context of the contemporary university. She describes a reality in which digitalization is a key factor in both expanding academic publishing and increasing the profit margins of publishers. The effect is that the rising price of books and journals reduces academic readership critical to academic careers. The open access movement is driven in such a situation, and was aimed at breaking through the wall of profit that blocked readership. Bell, developing on Turner's insights (the capacity of liberating movements of liberation to become totalitarian) discusses the virtually millenarian quality of some open access experiments, and their vulnerability to following in the path of that to which they are opposed: becoming dictatorial, captured to corporate and neoliberal interest. The chapter concludes with Turner's ambiguity, which is an openness. That is the dynamic of liminality, its destructuring/restructuring dynamic has multiple orientational potential that may or may not be liberating, and is often the inverse of intention.

The last empirically grounded chapters in the volume engage directly with what may be described as the crisis of contemporary state sociopolitical orders in situations of intensifying inequalities, to a large extent influenced by and reflecting global hegemonic shifts. Caroline Ifeka discusses growing class inequality in postcolonial Nigeria, the expanding underclasses in the process of the growing command of elites enmeshed in global capitalism, and what can be described as the corporatizing of nation-state orders (see e.g. Kapferer and Gold 2017). Ifeka concentrates on anti-state violence (specifically the Islamist Boko Haram), which is no less confronted by state violence. The situation is one of liminality in which traditionally liminal beings associated with sorcery and witchcraft exacerbate and refract the in-

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creasingly 'bare life' situation of Nigerian underclasses caught betwixt and between contending forces of power.

In the final chapter, Bruce and Roland Kapferer discuss the political phenomenon of Donald Trump and the violence at the Capitol that contested Trump's electoral defeat and attempted to subvert the transition to Biden's presidency. It was a critical moment in 'the pivoting of the sacred' of US democracy, a populist egalitarianizing event that exploited social divisions of class, ethnicity and race, and that flew in the face of liberal values, stoking the fears of a trend towards fascism. Trump, himself a marginal, though wealthy – an outsider/insider as it were – attacked ruling elites, while claiming to represent American underclasses (largely white) who felt shortchanged by dominant liberal values in the sociopolitical system. Trump's rise to power, as well as his fall, destabilized the orders of power leading to an extended period of liminality that is still continuing. The chapter suggests that the Trump phenomenon (including those who resisted him) is part of a larger sociopolitical transition (differentially apparent worldwide) towards stronger executive and authoritarian control, facilitated by digitalization, the Covid pandemic, expanding corporate intervention in government, and growing divisions between rich and poor. The United States in its history and contemporary dynamic indicates what might be regarded as a 'plane of immanence' in which there is a particular intensity of the liminal and the marginal, integral to its creative and destructive processes, perhaps its state of exception and a dimension of what de Tocqueville describes in *Democracy in America* (discussed in Sheldon Wolin's *Tocqueville between Two Worlds* [2001]). We note that it is in the context of the USA and at the height of its imperial power that Victor Turner pursued his concept of the liminal and the liminoid. It is its particular democratic and egalitarian individualist ethos contributing to the continuing diversity of possibilities, creative and destructive, that exemplifies what might be described as its 'plane of immanence' (see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1987]) and that is indicated in de Tocqueville's accounts of *Democracy in America*.

The Ritual Process opened new horizons of thought and understanding in anthropology. Not only was ritual re-centered in anthropology as a generative and ongoing dynamic in human practice but also, and more significantly, the concept of liminality carried major implications for a re-envisioned anthropology. In Turner's development the concept carries an egalitarian or egalitarianizing energy that creates a basis, a path or a transitional or refoundational, perhaps creative, moment which is redirectional (revolutionary or reactive) for human lives as for the histories of their life worlds. The concept of liminality in the direction that Turner pointed opens well beyond anthropology as a narrow Durkheimian social science in which all domains of human practice extend towards the understanding of human being as a whole.

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Some sense of this is apparent in the final essays of this volume included in the section Liminality and an Expanded Anthropology.

Bruce Kapferer is professor emeritus, social anthropology, University of Bergen; honorary professorial fellow anthropology, University College London; director, EU Advanced Project Egalitarianism; and professorial fellow, Cairns Institute. He has carried out fieldwork in Zambia, South Africa, India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, Australia and the United Kingdom, and has published widely on these areas. He is currently a roving ethnographer and anthropologist.

NOTES

1. Various other important books' reorientation of the subject were published in the postwar period (see Kapferer 2019); these include Edmund Leach's *Rethinking Anthropology* (1966), Levi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1966), Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (2002), and Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977).
2. We use the term 'equalitarian' to distinguish it from 'egalitarian'. As we develop the concept, egalitarian is a cultural or ideological concept concerning the order of human sociopolitical relations. We use equalitarian in a pre-ideological sense, an undifferentiated unity of human being that is non-relational. In our usage it is equivalent to what we present as Turner's concept of *communitas* as the essence or spirit of absolute universal equality, which continues through into egalitarian ideologies of human association.
3. Gluckman (1962) writes an important critical appreciation of van Gennep in which he recognizes the importance of van Gennep in the understanding of the ritual process while somewhat backhandedly commenting that he makes relatively dull reading. Gluckman suggests that van Gennep could have gone further into the dynamics of the ritual process, indicating that this is achieved by Turner (1962) who is also a contributor to Gluckman's edited volume. In his Introduction chapter, Gluckman accommodates van Gennep to Durkheim, which underplays van Gennep's marginality that Turner was later to realize far more.
4. A general stress in Gluckman's analytical perspective is to see all extant structures or systems of social life as both conditioned and changing in the circumstances of historical global forces. They are conceived as differentially located within such forces influencing their institutional order accordingly. In Gluckman's situational approach, different forms of life are situationally relative, an idea developed from Evans-Pritchard's Nuer studies. Thus, in Zambia, ethnic or tribal identity assumed distinct significance in rural village orders from that expressed in the mining towns. In rural villages tribal identity is not significant in everyday social action, rather kinship. However, in the towns, ethnic or tribal identity assumed everyday social significance, but not in a way reducible to its meaning or usage in rural areas. As Clyde Mitchell (1956) was to expand Gluckman's approach (see Gluckman 1960), tribal identity in the towns took its shape and significance in the situations of urban life.

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Thus, people who in rural areas would recognize distinct tribal memberships, in the urban context they would assume a common identity on the basis of similarities in language and custom that refused the differentiations of village situations. Furthermore, such urban-formed identity (that Mitchell described as categorical relations or tribalism, innovations of industrial society and urbanization) functioned in the formation of everyday social relations of inclusion and exclusion. Tribal identity in the towns had kin-like effects that they did not possess in rural areas – although, of course, urban-created values were to become increasingly important in the rural areas, especially in the political arena.

5. Crises (like conflict for Gluckman) are moments of new differentiation or spaces for creation and innovation for Turner, similar to that understood in Gregory Bateson's (1936) concept of schismogenesis, also recognized by Gluckman (1958: 64) as similar to his own perspective on conflict as differentiating.
6. Edith Turner (1985: 4–5) gives a vibrant account of Victor Turner's decision to adopt a dramaturgical approach to his analytical presentation of the events of crisis in the Ndembu village of his study. She gives a wonderful sense of the excitement of the Manchester research seminars at that time (a spirit that continued well into the early 1970s). Thus Edith Turner tells of the first occasion of Victor Turner's dramatological presentation and Gluckman's enthusiastic response: 'With controlled excitement he read the story of Sandombu: and he analysed its stages – breach, crisis, redress, reintegration – the social drama as the window into Ndembu social organization and values. Now you see the living heart. Max sat, his hands folded on top of his bowed bald head. When it was over, he raised his head, his eyes burning, "You've got it! That's it"'. There was a feeling of collegial unity in shared discovery in such seminars. Furthermore, they had an egalitarian sensibility (in which hierarchies of academic status were of little moment) compared with elsewhere in the United Kingdom at the time (see Epstein's comparison of his experience at the LSE prior to his move to Gluckman's department).
7. Clyde Mitchell once described (personal communication) Gluckman's own dramatic presentation of the bridge-opening in Gluckman's (1940 [1958]) path-breaking situational analysis paper as more of a gimmick than anything else. Mitchell's own work (1956, 1983) and Victor Turner's realized far more the analytical possibilities.
8. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 was a major event that influenced Turner's shift away from a doctrinaire Marxism represented by the Communist Party in England, which supported the invasion.
9. The concept of minor discourse is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1986), whose work on Kafka sets the tone for the understanding of the concept. Broadly it relates to literature that cannot be confined or subordinated to commanding or dominant modes of comprehending or interpreting literature. Minor discourse is at the borderlands of the dominant, resistant to its programmes, and in Deleuze and Guattari's notions nomadic, rhizomic, deterritorializing. Kafka's writing, for instance, overturns accepted conventions, and refuses well-worn categorizations and structures of interpretation conventional in dominant discourse. It opens to understandings that reveal possibilities that are outside, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the 'machine' that routinely defines 'great literature'. The idea of minor discourse has considerable relevance for the project of anthropology.
10. Max Gluckman initially took some offence at Turner's suggestion in *The Ritual Process* that he had somehow stood in the way of the exploration of ritual when in fact

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he had, with Turner, pursued an interest in ritual (see Gluckman 1962, Werbner 2020). Certainly some members of the Manchester group were critical at the time of what they regarded to be Turner's anti-materialist and mystical turn (see Frankenberg 2006). However, Turner's point is not that ritual was neglected but rather that the possibilities to which it opened were obscured or suppressed in the materialist, functionalist and structuralist interpretational conventions of analysis.

11. In Durkheim's orientation, the individual is prior to the social that transcends the individual. With Turner's concept of *communitas*, the individual is submerged, more a value that is emergent in structure rather than prior to it. Effectively, the individual loses all identity and is merely an individual among all others.
12. What is suggested here is that *communitas* is coincidentally generative of ritual or ritualization that constitutes a protective membrane, a moment outside quotidian space/time, enabling its actualization.
13. Werbner 2020 presents a reanalysis of the *Chihamba* rite in the spirit of Gluckman's argument for reanalysis, arguing that Turner's understanding would have been improved if he had proceeded more in line with van Gennep's perspective. I beg to differ. The comedy and humour that is a feature of the rite, upon which Werbner focuses, corresponds with the complex contradictory nature of *Kavula* and the ultimate tragic and sacrificial restitutive character of such a ritual that restores in a process that must fail, whose reconstitutive force is doomed to be momentary. *Kavula* is, perhaps, the 'joke' in the beginning or reconstitution of structure.
14. Edmund Leach in *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (2021) famously demonstrates the intimate relation of hierarchy with egalitarian processes. Louis Dumont argues more generally in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1981) that hierarchy is virtually primary in the formation of socio-moral value (as the encompassment of the contrary). He contends that egalitarian value is secondary to hierarchy, and has the hierarchical immanent within it. The intimation of hierarchy in the egalitarian is apparent in Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State*.
15. There is a certain similarity between Turner's approach and that of Louis Dumont (see 1981, 1986), who argues for a conjunction between what he discusses as hierarchy and egalitarianism. Dumont distinguishes between two notions of the individual: the individual as a unit of and for analysis, a taken-for-granted element of existence, a human being outside any particular value; and the individual as a being of value in cultural and ideological systems. This has some link to Turner's concept of *communitas* – that is as a collectivity of individuals who are associated on the basis of their commonality as human beings before the differentiations and values of culture and structure. Hierarchy, for Dumont, is structure/culture, the coming of the individual as a creature of value, which has diverse realizations in what Dumont addresses as the 'encompassing of the contrary'. Effectively, in Dumont, hierarchy is the prior form to egalitarian value that he conceives as being constituted in processes of secularization and the rise to dominance of the material and the economic, which are connected to modernity. This involves their separation out from their embeddedness within an arrangement of a complexity of values such as is apparent in many so-called traditional societies. Dumont approvingly refers to Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (2002) in this regard. In a way, both Dumont and Turner begin with the religious or ritual as the ground for their understanding. However,

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Turner tends to see egalitarianism in a much broader value and deconstructive sense than does Dumont (who limits it to contemporary egoistic individualism, or the individual as value) and as such vital as a transitional and transformational force across societies in a far more dynamic approach.

16. Turner never discusses Nietzsche in any detail. It is likely that he does not give mention to Nietzsche in *The Ritual Process* because of the opprobrium to which Nietzsche was subject as a result of his ideological use by Hitler and the Nazis. Considerable ambiguity continues to attach to Nietzsche (an aspect that is thematic in Stanley Kubrick's famous film '2001 Space Odyssey', which opens and closes with Richard Strauss's fanfare *Thus Sprach Zarathustra*; see Kapferer 2014). However, Nietzsche's highly acclaimed early essay, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the contrast between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, bears relation to Turner's conjunction of the egalitarian and hierarchial with a similar tragic sense. Such a Nietzschean dynamic is apparent in Richard Schechner's staging and film 'Dionysius 69'. This was presented at a Burg-Wartenstein Conference 'Cultural Frames and Reflections: Ritual, Drama and Spectacle', organized by Barbara Babcock, Barbara Myherhoff and Victor Turner in August 1977. I was an invitee to the conference. Much discussion centred on the negative capacity of ritual and spectacle, with particular attention being given to the Nuremberg rallies.
17. An application of the concept of liminality that methodologically accords with the perspective essayed in this Introduction is that developed by Orlando Patterson in Slavery and Social Death (see especially 2018: 45–51). Patterson acknowledges the influence of Victor Turner on his work (see Scott and Patterson 2023). Like Turner, Patterson is concerned to overcome what might be called the bloodless abstractionism of much abstract sociological theory and indeed is concerned with the existential dimensions of grounded existence/experience. Patterson's novels fill out the existential ground in which his abstractions (concerning slavery) discover their life. Furthermore, he finds a directional or redirection force that is virtually institutionalized in the liminal or in the liminal becoming effectively a liminoid condition of the once enslaved particularly relevant to those in the Americas. The 'social death' that Patterson develops is a liminal stripping process that has ritualistic properties that creates a particular institutionalised circumstance and situation.

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PART I

LIMINALITY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER 1



THE PIVOTING OF THE SACRED

Arnold van Gennep's Spatio-temporality of the Liminal

Bjørn Thomassen

> Life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and to rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross: the threshold of summer and winter, of season or a year, of a month or of a 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.
>
> —Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*.

While Arnold van Gennep is routinely referred to as the author who detected and named a seemingly universal pattern present in rites of passage, the larger process-oriented analytical framework within which he elaborated this insight has been largely ignored. Indeed, even Victor Turner seemingly remained unaware of van Gennep's larger oeuvre. This can partly be explained by the fact that van Gennep's work was – with the exception of *Rites of Passage* – never translated into English, and partly by the more general lack of reception of his work by sociologists and anthropologists, even in France.

In this chapter I will briefly try to situate van Gennep's larger approach, and in that context also rehearse his significant critique of the Durkhemian school of sociology and anthropology, a critique that allowed van Gennep to situate his own approach as belonging to the 'life sciences'.[1] As I read it, engaging this legacy would have helped Turner to sustain his own endeavours toward an anthropology of experience. My larger argument follows our recent attempt (Szakolczai and Thomassen 2019) to position Arnold van Gen-

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nep as a 'maverick anthropologist' of importance for anthropological and social theory writ large, today perhaps more than ever.

In the second part of the chapter, I will highlight the importance van Gennep attributed to spatiality in his very understanding of liminal rites and liminality as such, evident in his discussion of 'the sacred zones' and 'the sanctity of a passage' (*Les divinités du passage*). I would here like to call attention to the fact that in his famous book, *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep actually introduces another notion that in my reading is absolutely crucial if we want to understand the place of the liminal in the wider terminology he elaborated, namely the 'pivoting of the sacred'. This relates to the question of temporality as well, and what one could call van Gennep's spatio-temporal 'rhythmic framework'. As a conclusion I will tentatively suggest that it might even be possible to recast secularization theory in this light.

Rereading Arnold van Gennep

In 1960, when *Rites of Passage* was finally translated into English, very few people knew about van Gennep. To some extent the same could be said today. However, some previous attempts to take up and revalorize his work should be mentioned, as they in various ways speak to a central concern of this present book, which is how to capture the dynamics of transition and the role of power herein. In 1981 a workshop was organized in Neuchâtel, in recognition of Arnold van Gennep's pivotal role for Swiss folklore and ethnology. An edited volume (Centlivres and Hainard 1986) was published as a follow-up to that conference, with a collection of chapters with contributions from the then rather small group of van Gennep experts, including Nicole Belmont, who in 1974 had published a book in French on Arnold van Gennep as 'the creator of French ethnology', later translated into English (Belmont [1974] 1979). Bourdieu gave, for the purpose, a paper with – in my view – very unfortunate consequences for the wider reception history of van Gennep, as he attempted to inject an institutional power perspective into van Gennep's notion of rite of passage. I will briefly return to this below.

In 1982 a workshop was held in Jerusalem on 'Comparative Liminality and Dynamics of Civilizations', with Shmuel Eisenstadt and Victor Turner as the main protagonists. With hindsight, this can be considered a more productive event. Eisenstadt pushed his theoretical insights, as the dimension of liminality helped him to better conceptualize the jointly order-maintaining and order-transforming dimensions of culture (see Eisenstadt 1995); Turner, in his turn, was further stimulated towards an engagement with macro-politics, although he had little time to elaborate on it more thoroughly, as he passed away less than two years later.

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In 2009 a workshop on liminality was held at Cambridge, celebrating the one hundred years of AvG's *Rites de Passage*. This workshop led to a special issue in IPA, International Political Anthropology (2009), and then to the edited volume, *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* (Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra 2015). The book is an exploration of the potentiality of the liminality concept outside more narrowly defined ritual contexts, in many ways taking up many of the suggestions left behind in Victor Turner's work, in particular Turner's allusions to liminal situations at the macro level.

More recently, in 2016, again in Jerusalem, another workshop was held, this time focusing on the book itself, *Rites de Passage*, and how to reread it today: 'Reclaiming Arnold van Gennep's Rites de Passage'. This led to a precious special issue in Journal of Classical Sociology in 2018 (volume 18, issue 4), edited by Nitzan Rothem and Shlomo Fischer. What I argue in the second part of this chapter is inspired by discussions that took place at that workshop, and especially by the paper given at that occasion by Nicole Hochner, later published as one of the articles in the special issue (Hochner 2018).

Common to these endeavours is a recognition that van Gennep's work has been neglected for too long, a recognition behind many of the chapters of this book as well. Since relatively little is still known about van Gennep, and the reasons behind this neglect, let me briefly try to situate his life and work before I proceed with my own argument.

Arnold van Gennep and His Work: A Short Introduction

Arnold van Gennep was born as Charles-Arnold Kurr van Gennep on 23 April 1873 in Ludwigsburg, Württemberg.[2] When he was six years old, his parents separated and van Gennep moved with his mother to Lyons, France, where she remarried. In 1892, van Gennep moved to Paris and enrolled at *L'École des langues orientales* to study Arabic, and at *L'École pratique des hautes études* to study general linguistics and Egyptology, as he also had a passion for prehistory, a field that was just emerging at that time, and was surrounded with heated controversies. He also enrolled for lectures at *Sciences religieuses* where he studied primitive religion and Islamic culture. Here he came into contact with Antoine Meillet, a linguist and a member of the Durkheim circle, and Marcel Mauss, who was just one year older than van Gennep. Van Gennep graduated in 1896 from *L'École des Langues Orientales*, and initiated a career as a translator. One of his first translations, in 1898, was Frazer's immensely influential book on totemism.[3]

After a four-year stay in Russian Poland from 1897 to 1901, van Gennep returned to Paris. From 1901 to 1908, he was employed full-time as head of translations at the French Ministry of Agriculture. His linguistic skills were,

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by then, second to none. In an article from 1927, discussing the use of the subconscious in the study of living languages, he purports to master eighteen languages plus a number of their dialects, including Arabic, Finnish, and several Slavic languages (Belmont 1979: 7). Van Gennep's formal career was now unfolding outside academia. In addition to his ministerial position, he kept on translating and editing. For over thirty years, from 1906 to 1939, he edited the section 'Ethnographie-Folklore-Religions-Préhistoire' in *Mercure de France*.

Van Gennep studied *sciences religieuses* with Léon Marillier at *L'École pratique*, becoming part of that handful of young people who were later to become Durkheim's collaborators, among them Mauss, Henri Hubert and Paul Fauconnet. Upon Marillier's sudden death in 1901, Mauss became van Gennep's teacher and mentor. In 1903, Mauss proofread and thoroughly annotated van Gennep's thesis on taboo and totemism in Madagascar. Van Gennep's interests during the first decade of the century developed alongside those of the Durkheimians, and included the classical topics of totemism, taboo, the origins and nature of religion, magic, classification systems, and the relationship between myth and ritual.

In 1904 van Gennep published his thesis, *Tabou et totémisme à Madagascar: étude descriptive et théorique*. The book is dedicated to the memory of Léon Marillier, and in its preface van Gennep reserves his final thanks for 'mon ami Marcel Mauss' (van Gennep 1904: 2). Van Gennep here analysed totemism as a social system of classification, taking its role far beyond the narrow field of religion. In 1906 he published his second book, *Mythes et légendes d'Australie*, where he openly exposed the problems in Durkheim's work. In 1909 he published *Rites de Passage*, the work that was to become his post-mortem claim to fame. Herein, van Gennep proposed a conceptual classification of all existing rites. He distinguished between rites that mark the passage of an individual or social group from one status to another from those that mark transitions in the passage of time (e.g. harvest, new year), whereupon he went on to explore 'the basis of characteristic patterns in the order of ceremonies' (van Gennep 1960: 10). The sequential structure of rites is the central theoretical innovation of van Gennep. However, far from proclaiming originality, he is rather perplexed as to why nobody had before realized this simple fact, with Robert Hertz, the most important student of Mauss, being acknowledged as sole predecessor. The ritual pattern was apparently universal: all societies use rites to demarcate transitions. Van Gennep himself considered the book his breakthrough, resulting from an 'inner illumination' (Belmont 1979: 58). The conceptual framework guided everything he wrote thereafter.

In 1908, during his writing of *Rites de Passage*, van Gennep decided to quit his job at the ministry and to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to aca-

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demia, founding the scientific journal *La Revue des études ethnographiques et sociologiques* in which he would publish frequently, while serving as its director. Also in 1908, he published a book on Homeric poetry (*La Question d'Homère*) and the first volume of *Religions, mœurs et légendes: Essais d'ethnographie et de linguistique*, a collection of essays on religion, myth and ritual. In 1909 the second volume of *Religions, mœurs et légendes* was released, and the flow of van Gennep's articles, reviews and translations continued. The bibliography, compiled by his daughter Ketty, lists a total of 437 publications (K. van Gennep 1964).

In 1910 van Gennep published *La Formation des legends*, his seventh book. It was followed by two books in 1911: *Les Demi-Savants*,[4] and the third volume of *Religions, mœurs et légendes*. Van Gennep had, by then, become deeply engaged with general epistemological and methodological issues. Before the First World War he published a series of programmatic articles wherein he denounced problems in contemporary 'scientific' approaches, starting to formulate a methodological platform for the social sciences that he christened 'biological sociology'. In the same period (1910–11) he also carried out two rounds of ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria (see Sibeud 2004). Although this project – to study art forms – was only partially successful, several lengthy publications resulted from it, not least of which is his 1914 book *En Algérie*.

Despite his productivity, van Gennep never passed the threshold into French academia. Following unsuccessful candidatures at the Collège de France in 1907, 1909 and 1911, he decided to go abroad (Belmont 1979: 11). In 1912 he was offered the first (and only) academic position he ever held, as chair in Swiss ethnography at the University of Neuchâtel. Upon his arrival, he started to plan a founding event for the European social sciences: the major international conference held at Neuchâtel in the summer of 1914, weeks before the outbreak of the First World War. More than six hundred social scientists attended this, the biggest-ever networking event for European social scientists until then – and probably one of the most significant of such events ever, bridging across the social sciences. Topics discussed included basic terminological and methodological issues, as well as attempts to delineate boundaries to neighbouring disciplines. The goals of the conference were explicitly programmatic: what should the social sciences look like, which tasks should we set ourselves, and how are they to be carried out? Marcel Mauss was part of the French delegation, and gave a paper on taboo among the Baronga (Zerilli 1998). Durkheim did not show up, but he likely got a detailed resumé from Mauss, who together with his uncle was then working on a plan for ethnographic studies in France.

In October 1915 van Gennep was expelled from Switzerland because of his criticism of the Swiss government and its pro-German attitudes. Un-

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able to get an academic job in France, he was recalled by Raymond Poincaré (cousin of the famous physicist and mathematician, Henri Poincaré) to a post in the French Foreign Office. Still, he continued to advance his academic work. He wrote several pieces on the war, in a style that comes close to the war-writings of Mauss (van Gennep 1915). He only managed to finish the first of a planned three-volume series on nationalism, published in 1922, but actually anticipated an anthropological approach to the question of borders and boundaries as differentiating factors of cultural identity, later to be taken up by Fredrik Barth and others. On 24 January 1921, at the age of 47, Arnold van Gennep became *Docteur ès Lettres* at the Sorbonne. He presented two works for the title: his book from 1920 on totemism (*L'État actuel du problème totémique*) and *Rites de Passage*. He received a *mention très honourable* (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl was on the committee). These two books presented for the *Docteur* title are hugely substantial contributions. The book on totemism actually paved the way for Claude Lévi-Strauss's approach to totemic classification (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 35–36), and can indeed be considered a precursor to a 'structural' understanding of religion and society (Senn 1974); *Rites de Passage*, presented as a 'minor', is easily one of the most important anthropology books ever written.

In 1922, van Gennep was invited to give a lecture tour in the United States and Canada. This forced him to quit his job at the ministry, the last salaried full-time position he would ever hold. There seem to be no accounts testifying to his impact in America. Van Gennep actually did break another record for the time, as he performed eighty-six lectures within a few months – practically one per day across the entire continent. Upon his return from America, he fell ill. He decided to give up academic ambitions, and to settle down with his wife as a chicken-breeder in southern France. Yet his questioning mind could not rest, and within a year he returned to Paris. Van Gennep now turned to folklore, a discipline that he almost single-handedly built up over the next three decades, working unsalaried and alone in his home, an apartment in Bourg-la-Reine, until his death in 1957. Despite never holding an academic position in France, van Gennep would become known as the 'father of French folklore'. And while that is true, this reputation hides away his earlier attempts to give shape to anthropology and the social sciences writ large. This neglect of van Gennep's broader legacy has everything to do with his intellectual battle with Emile Durkheim.

Van Gennep's Critique of Durkheim

I rehearse all the above facts, in all their triviality, simply to indicate that we cannot limit van Gennep's contribution to his classification of rites. Today's

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reception of van Gennep is still influenced by the way in which his work was sidelined by the Durkhemians in his own lifetime, a misreading that has only been perpetuated throughout the twentieth century. The two most conspicuous examples of such misreadings are indeed Claude Levi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu. That belongs to a larger discussion, but my argument is that their misreading in both cases point not to shortcomings of van Gennep but rather to problematic aspects in their own theoretical approach. For the purposes of this book, Bourdieu's reception of van Gennep is the most relevant one (on Levi-Strauss, see Szakolczai and Thomassen 2019: 30–33). Bourdieu's misreading is most visible in his almost scandalous treatment of van Gennep in the 'homage paper', published as 'Les rites comme actes d'institution' in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (Bourdieu 1982) and reprinted in *Ce que parler veut dire*, and then translated into English as 'Rites of Institution', and published as a chapter in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu 1992: 117–26). In that famous paper, Bourdieu postulated that van Gennep had nothing to say about mechanisms of exclusion, and thereby intimated that his approach lacked a power dimension. While the latter may to some degree be sustained, it is worth underlining what van Gennep had himself written: 'The counterpart of initiation rites are the rites of banishment, expulsion and excommunication – essentially rites of separation and de-sanctification' (van Gennep 1960: 113). Those rites, says van Gennep, are essentially about the *setting apart* of objects or persons. Rites of passage can indeed create or recreate social divisions and inequalities, and it was very much implicit in van Gennep's framework, which contained an analytical openness towards rites of passage that Bourdieu's approach problematically narrowed down to 'social function' and institutional power.

Besides misrecognizing van Gennep's central arguments (which I seriously suspect Bourdieu never really read), in his own approach to rites, Bourdieu himself ends up on a rather deceptive mixture of Durkhemian functionalism and a Marxist-inspired reading of rites as mystification or 'naturalization' of power (Bourdieu 1992: 126). Rather than paying homage to Arnold van Gennep, engaging with his work from within, and taking seriously Victor Turner's elaboration, which by then had reached its mature stage, Bourdieu trashes van Gennep's fine-grained analytical framework into the dustbin of intellectual history, armed with Marx and Durkheim. He then reduces rites to the social structure they serve to maintain. It can be seen as a rather sad case of theoretical retrogression, returning to the Durkheimian premises that van Gennep himself had so carefully tried to move beyond.

But what was van Gennep's original critique of Durkheim all about? Let me state it in brief. In his 1906 book *Mythes et légendes*, van Gennep seriously questioned the adopted analytical procedure by which Durkheim positioned the Arunta (an Australian clan society) at a certain level or stage of

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'development', creating an analytical shortcut to the question of 'origins'. Whenever Durkheim recognized a change, over time, or between groups (in kinship affiliations, for example), he systematically prevented any real account of such a transformation, relegating it simply to the 'general needs of society' (van Gennep 1906: xxv). There was no grounding epistemology to tell us what such a 'society' *is* to be able to 'have' such needs. Durkheim operated a peculiar kind of 'métaphysique sociologique' (ibid.: xxiv), positing a metaphysical abstraction at the core of his argument, and then artificially 'animating' it. As van Gennep rather provocatively said, this is to resolve a problem *without having even managed to pose it as a problem* (ibid.: xxv).

However, in the context of this critique, he also raises the stakes. What is lurking behind Durkheim's problematic collectivism is something even more problematic, and reaches far beyond Australian kinship classification:

> We have seen how M. Durkheim explains social modifications by the 'needs of society' without indicating either the why or the where of those needs, and without justifying how exactly a 'society', however small, may have 'needs' in the first place. It is by an identical process of *animation* that they speak to us of 'the call of the fatherland', or 'the voice of the race'. M. Durkheim anthropomorphizes, even if this is what he pretends to defend himself from. (van Gennep 1906: xxxv, emphasis in the original, my translation)

According to van Gennep, Durkheim's sociology was not just flawed at the theoretical level; the entire epistemology upon which it built bore resemblances to and could serve to justify other and much more serious *political* essentialisms.

Van Gennep continued his critical engagement with Durkheim's work, most conspicuously in his review of *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2017). *Elementary Forms* is composed of two parts; one is general-theoretical, and the other is monographic. The latter, begins van Gennep, is the weaker part. He states quite bluntly that Durkheim demonstrates a complete lack of critical stance towards the sources, which were collected by traders, police agents and priests, and that he naively accepts their veracity. Durkheim overstates the theoretical potential of single facts, and interprets freely from dubious data. Durkheim also falsely attributes this 'fictional' procedure as the 'German' method.[5] The data and the whole procedure is thus simply unreliable:

> In ten years, his entire systematization of the Australian material will have been utterly rejected, along with the multiple generalizations constructed on the flimsiest foundation of ethnographic facts I have ever observed. The idea he has extracted from this ensemble of primitive man and 'simple' societies is simply misguided. (van Gennep 2017: 577).

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Here, of course, one could legitimately tender a defence of Durkheim: does his theoretical attempt not deserve to be taken seriously, irrespective of the flawed empirical material? Van Gennep agrees that Durkheim's general theories on religion deserve to be considered in their own right, as they are in fact full of 'solid truths' (ibid.). And yet, when Durkheim moves on to suggest his own theory (on the origins of totemic beliefs), no real theory is ever proposed. Durkheim proposes to see totemism as representing an anonymous and impersonal 'force'. This explains absolutely nothing. It also misrecognizes what van Gennep had specified as the essentially 'energetic' nature of religious conceptions (Mauss would again pick this up later).

Durkheim, says van Gennep, claims to have established the 'foundations of society' from a single religious institution (totemism), without realizing that this was just one very specific type of classification, peculiar to this not-so-simple society. The Australian Aborigines simply cannot be posited as a 'first' or 'elementary' building block upon which one can erect an entire edifice. The Aborigines (here again the Arunta) have complex matrimonial rules and totemic beliefs and practices; they cannot simply be taken to represent some kind of *Ursprung*.

In his insistence to throw in all stakes on the collective level, Durkheim categorically neglects the action of single, living individuals in the formation of institutions and beliefs: the very process and production that lies behind myth-telling and ritual acting is annulled.[6] Even in the most 'primitive' societies, van Gennep insists, individuals *do* act. Durkheim dreams of assigning society a natural reality, with its own laws of necessity, in a world devoid of concrete human beings. For the purposes of his theoretical construct, Durkheim artificially reduced Australian society to a 'mono-cellular organism', devoid of agency. Durkheim possesses only a metaphysic and scholastic understanding of the world; he constructs reality from preconceived words and concepts: 'Having no feel for life, no feel for biology or ethnography, he transforms living phenomena and beings (*vivants*) into scientifically desiccated plants arranged as in a herbarium' (van Gennep 2017: 578).

It is not simply that the data is wrong; it is not the flawed methodology; it is not even the circular, redundant theoretical style that is at issue: the problem, says Van Gennep, is that Durkheim lacks a *feel for life*.

Van Gennep's Rhythmic Social Science

It is useful here to briefly introduce the kind of life science that van Gennep himself was trying to build up, standing in contrast to that of the Durkheimians. Van Gennep would call this a 'biological sociology', a perhaps somewhat unfortunate term. It should in fact be considered a kind of 'rhythmic social

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science', which I have elsewhere argued bears similarities with the work of Gabriel Tarde (Thomassen 2012; see also Szakolczai and Thomassen 2011). To some extent van Gennep was indeed a child of French positivism. One central aspect of positivism has to do with the need for clearcut categories and classification. Van Gennep undeniably operates with divisions and categories. *Rites of Passage* is really all about categories and classifications. In his foreword, van Gennep starts by saying that it is high time to classify the vast number of rites that previous studies have discussed but never managed to present systematically; and this classification must be 'consistent with the progress of science' (van Gennep 1960: xxv). The opening chapter is entitled '*Classement de rites*'. Towards this aim, van Gennep introduces four basic oppositional distinctions, between sympathetic and contagious rites, direct and indirect rites, positive and negative rites, and animistic and dynamistic rites. Like a mathematician, he can then deduce that there are 'sixteen possible ways of classifying any single rite'.

Here again, however, we have to be careful. Van Gennep did not operate with categorization and classification in a spirit of naive positivism; and he fully understood that to analyse we must not only separate but also appreciate the larger whole. Van Gennep's understanding of social phenomena is complex, dynamic and energetic. It is, for example, true that van Gennep accepted the dichotomy between sacred and secular. This distinction was crucial for both Robertson Smith and Durkheim. However, unlike Durkheim, van Gennep does not understand the sacred as an absolute term. 'Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations' (ibid.: 12). Sacrality in this very generic sense is both relational and mobile. It does not exist in fixed spaces or predefined moments. Sacrality depends on the activity performed, on the people observing this activity, and on the point or moment in time of the activity. People (and objects) are sacred or secular relative to their situation and relative to the where and when in their passage from one place or position to another.

The kind of movement that is so essential to van Gennep relates in my reading to the 'rhythms' that exist in the different orders of reality. He refused to radically separate the study of society from 'nature'. This is best captured by a careful understanding of the last sentence of van Gennep's famous book:

> Finally, the series of human transitions has, among some peoples, been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets, and the phases of the moon. It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe.[7]

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Here again the contrast to Durkheim is categorical. For Durkheim, human beings bestow order on the universe via social classifications of their own making, a clearly neo-Kantian position that Durkheim, in the Introduction to *Elementary Forms* hubristically extends towards an empirical/social grounding of knowledge per se. To contrast, in *Rites of Passage* Van Gennep grounded the similarities in ceremonies in the very fact of transition: 'The universe itself is governed by a periodicity [that] has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity' (3). This rhymes perfectly with Tarde's discussion of regularity and repetition. As stressed by Hochner (2018: 304), 'the rhythms of the universe are rhythms that have social corollaries'.

In no way was van Gennep trying to reduce the social world to that of nature; there is no hint of sociobiology in any strict sense of that term. In van Gennep's reading, scientists of the nineteenth century had become overtly distanced from reality. They had started to adopt a language that had lost directness in relation to the world that surrounds us, and of which we are a part. Van Gennep was therefore searching for a science that could allow us to return to *life*, just as Dilthey and Simmel were attempting at the same time in Germany. Van Gennep's own approach was extremely methodical and concrete, and yet, always linked to a larger picture, in full awareness of the complexity and 'relatedness' of the single 'items' he singled out for discussion. Van Gennep passionately believed in science, but he was sceptical about certain usages of scientific positivism. The 'biology' or 'biological sociology' to which van Gennep referred was therefore not simply allusive to the authority and objectivity of natural science, rather indicative of the importance of *direct observation* and engagement with concrete lifeworlds. Van Gennep wanted social scientists to deal with *living facts*, rather than 'dead' and abstract facts. In fact, a more precise translation of van Gennep's *faits naissants* might be 'facts in their emergence', or 'things' or 'events' in their moment of 'coming into being' – an almost Nietzschean understanding of 'social facts'.

Van Gennep refused to see sociology, folklore and ethnography as radically separate disciplines. For him they were a single discipline with a shared methodology. It is within this horizon of genuine *life* science that the work of van Gennep belongs – as does the concept of liminality. A reappraisal of van Gennep's thought can in crucial ways assist contemporary Tardean-inspired debates to rethink our epistemology. Van Gennep's ultimate relevance is that his work needs to be revalorized as a stepping stone towards a genuine science of life or living experience, much in the spirit of the very last writing that Foucault published, the French version of his 1978 Introduction to Canguilhem's *On the Normal and the Pathological*, entitled 'Life: Experience and

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Science' (Foucault 1998).[8] This relates to the question of limits, and allows us to end on a reflection on sacrality.

Boundaries, Limits, and the 'Pivoting of the Sacred': Recasting Secularization?

In *Rites of Passage* van Gennep presents rites of passage in universalistic terms: 'Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence'; 'The life of an individual *in any society* is a series of passages from one age to another, and from one occupation to another' (van Gennep 1960: 3). The opening sentence of the book starts with 'Each larger society. . .' (*société générale*). Yet in the following paragraphs, van Gennep operates a broad distinction between 'modern' societies and 'less civilized' ones (we would of course use different terms today). What characterizes 'modern society' is that, since the Renaissance, the variety and strength of social divisions has been greatly reduced, so that the secular/sacred division remains as the only salient one, while in 'less civilized' societies one can note, says van Gennep, 'an ever-increasing domination of the secular by the sacred'. The secular/sacred divide does not disappear in the passage to modernity, quite the contrary: this divide, instead, gains higher significance compared to other societies where many types of passages between groups and between positions belong to the sacred realm. So, as the first sentence of the book continues, at 'lower levels of civilization . . . the differences among groups become accentuated and their autonomy increases'. The second sentence of the book continues: '[By] contrast, the only clearly marked social division remaining in modern society is that which distinguishes between the secular and the religious worlds – between the profane and the sacred'. The secular/sacred divide for van Gennep is not the same in various societies across time and space. Pressing the point, one could say that the secular/sacred divide as an absolute is peculiar to Western modernity, and cannot therefore be taken as a given.

My suggestion – that will surely need more substantiation – is that van Gennep potentially provides us with a different entry to the understanding of 'secularization' as a process. As seen via van Gennep, such a process is not primarily about what happens to 'belief' or a 'decline in religious practice' (it may of course also be that), but involves something much more fundamental, touching the basic question of limits and what happens to passage experiences across boundaries. From a van Gennep-inspired understanding, secularization can quite simply be defined as the de-sacralization of boundary-crossing. What is secularized is not – in the first instance at least – science or political rule; what is secularized is, at the deepest level,

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the movement between positions in space or time that is 'freed' from social conventions or ritualization. This would imply that the very importance of such changes in people's life is downgraded, devalued or simply dismissed. The examples of passage experiences and rites invoked by van Gennep himself are extremely illuminating in this regard: how to incorporate strangers; the loss of virginity; divorce experiences; movement between public and private spheres (crossing the threshold of the door of the household); the movement from villages into war zones; and the movement between village and market places (van Gennep 1960: 17–18).

The main quality of a boundary is its sanctity. That is why such limits need to be symbolized by members of a society, from the portals of a household to the landmarks between larger territorial units. The installation of such limit-symbols is always accompanied by rites of consecration (Gazit 2018). For van Gennep this is crucial. The sacrality of space rests upon a necessary recognition of boundaries, and the rites and taboos surrounding such boundaries. This also explains the crucial role played by what van Gennep calls 'guardians of the threshold' (*gardiens du seuil*), such as Hermes in Greek mythology, or Janus, the two-faced Roman god of warfare, who was also deity of doors and thresholds.

Scholars often refer back to van Gennep's classification of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal rites – this is his claim to fame, after all. Van Gennep recognized the transformative potential of rituals via the liminal. Liminality is indeed an irreplaceable term for the analysis of transition and social and political transformation (Szakolczai 2009; Thomassen 2013, 2014). Decisive events and formative ideas tend to take shape in figurations that are both spatially and temporally liminal.

However, it is crucial to remember that van Gennep distils this classification and introduces the notion of the liminal in the sections of a chapter on the territorial passage called 'the sacred zones' and 'the sanctity of a passage' (*Les divinités du passage*). It is also in this precise context that van Gennep introduces a corollary term, which is absolutely crucial if we want to understand the place of the liminal in the wider terminology he elaborated: the 'pivoting of the sacred'. In his handwritten notes to his own manuscript, van Gennep wrote 'bivalence' in the margins of the text, but without erasing 'pivotement', as if to render more clear what he meant by 'pivoting'. The pivoting, it seems, has to do with a double movement. Van Gennep writes that the 'magic circles' pivot. But this is more than simply a circular movement.

Although van Gennep never made such a discussion explicit, the kind of temporality that he captured here – his rhythmic framework – is indeed different from the temporality inherent to modernity: a temporality anchored in a narrative of revolution (as a radical break with the past) and evolution (as a continuous progress towards still higher forms). Van Gennep was scep-

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tical about both. He did not endorse evolutionism, found little use in theories of 'origin', and was highly critical of the idea of revolution as an event that could suddenly replace what had existed previously, installing a new social order. Van Gennep's temporality is different; and it was a temporality that he recognized as given. Sure, everything moves, but the world is not a chaos. Change is constant but within a larger order of sequences. Change and stability are not categorical opposites but poles of the same ordered system, with its inbuilt rhythms of birth, death and regeneration (see again the excellent discussion by Hochner 2018). It is in this sense, I believe, that the 'pivoting' is also a 'bivalence'.

It might again be possible to relate this to a Nietzschean reading of social life, although more in the sense of a correction, replacing the dichotomy between 'order' and 'chaos' with a tripartite sequence containing both in a balancing act. Van Gennep rarely if ever made analytical leaps to purely philosophical debates, always arguing from the grounds of available data. However, the only philosopher van Gennep mentions in *Rites of Passage* is in fact Nietzsche, in the penultimate paragraph of the book. This is where van Gennep compares rectilinear to cyclical patterns, noting how the circular order from life to death and death to life (the sequential order of the book itself) acquired a 'psychological significance' in Nietzsche's theory of the eternal return (van Gennep 1960: 194).[9]

The double stress on the materiality of the limit and movement is vital to van Gennep's entire approach. Human life always takes place in-between the bounds of the 'given', the natural, cultural and social restricting conditions, and the unbound and unlimited freedom beyond the limit. For van Gennep this indeed is a universal condition: to know about the limits that surround personal and social existence. His theory does not essentialize the boundary; unlike Lévi-Strauss, he is not fixating the mind in a universal structure of rigid laws. Change is inherent to the structure. Movement is part of 'order' in his cosmic vision. In rites of passage, human beings touch the 'prohibited' land of unbound freedom and danger. The pivoting of the sacred emerges in the constant movement between the limit and the limitless, and the familiar and the foreign; social life, conceived as such, is a constant movement of sanctification, de-sanctification and re-sanctification of the boundaries that are necessary to render human and social life both possible and meaningful.

Bjørn Thomassen is Professor in Global Political Sociology at the Department of Social Sciences and Business at Roskilde University, Denmark. Research areas include global religion, urban studies, identity and memory politics, nationalism, liminality and social change, revolutions, and the so-

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cial and cultural dimensions of globalization. He is the author of *Italy's Christian Democracy. The Catholic Encounter with Political Modernity* (Oxford UP, 2024, with R. Forlenza); *From Anthropology to Social Theory: Rethinking the Social Sciences* (Cambridge UP, 2019, with A. Szakolczai); and *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-between* (Routledge, 2016).

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter build on previously published articles (see in particular Thomassen 2012, 2016) and book chapters (see Thomassen 2014; Szakolczai and Thomassen 2019, Chapter 1).
2. This and the following section draw on Thomassen 2014, especially chapters 1–3; see also Thomassen 2016, and Szakolczai 2013.
3. Durkheim had himself hoped to be in charge of that important translation. In the spring of 1898, while Mauss was in London to study at the British School of Anthropology, Durkheim asked him to approach Frazer with this translation in mind – but it was too late, for the young van Gennep had already been offered the job (with A. Dirr). On 10 May 1898, Durkheim writes, seemingly rather annoyed, to Mauss: 'My project to have *Totemism* translated has gone down the drain. . . . You can tell Frazer that my intention was to have it translated' (Durkheim 1998: 136–37, our translation). Very likely this was the first time Durkheim ever stumbled upon the name of Arnold van Gennep (in the letter to Mauss he had referred to the 'two translators' of Frazer without mentioning their names).
4. This book was introduced and translated into English by Needham and published by Kegan & Paul in 1967 as *The Semi-Scholars* (van Gennep 1967). The book is a bitingly sarcastic description of the social sciences losing themselves in blindfolded specialization. After *Rites of Passage* in 1960 and *The Semi-Scholars* in 1967, no further works of van Gennep have been translated into English.
5. Durkheim had had a crucial stay in Germany in 1885–86, and liked to see himself as the transmitter of German empiricism and neo-Kantianism to the French universities.
6. In fact, the telling of myths is probably one of those activities that actually *requires* individual originality and impetus. Myths, like songs, poems and most art forms, simply cannot be produced by collectivities. They are *re*produced by collectivities – but that is a completely different matter.
7. In his own copy he eventually capitalized this last word into 'Universe' (van Gennep 1981, addendum).
8. It thus resonates with the kind of anthropological 'vitalism' promoted by Rabinow (Rabinow 2008), using jointly Foucault and Canguilhem.
9. In his critical review of *Rites of Passage*, Mauss makes mention of this. He says that van Gennep sees rites of passage everywhere, and that he forces this 'law' of ritual passages into a principle that governs all religious representations, underpinning the very structure of thought and philosophy, 'from the Greeks to Nietzsche' (Mauss 1910). AvG did not use the term 'laws', insisting rather on 'patterns', so it is something that Mauss – possibly through Durkheim – forces upon his work. However, Mauss himself (together with his friend Hertz) read Nietzsche with attention.

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CHAPTER 2



THE PARABLE OF THE FOOTBRIDGE

Creativity and Change in the In-Between

Paul Stoller

Like many spiritual sages, Sufi masters tell stories to convey the wisdom of their practices. One such story is the parable of the footbridge. On a windy day, as the story goes, an old man needed to visit a sick friend. To reach his destination he had to cross a rickety footbridge that spanned a deep gorge. As he walked onto the bridge the wind whipped him from side to side. Fearful, he held on and looked down into the void. His head spun. Behind him was his past, a known space from where he came. Before him was his future, an unknown place to where he was going. In an unsettled state, his mind suddenly cleared. Sparked with an unanticipated jolt of energy and creativity, he envisioned a new world filled with possibilities. For Sufi masters like Ibn al-'Arabi, the twelfth-century Andalusian mystic, the old man on the wind-whipped footbridge had experienced *barzakh*, that which connects two things that had been separate – health and illness, life and death, the social and spirit world. For Ibn al-'Arabi, crossing a footbridge that connects two worlds positioned the old man in 'the in-between', a place of existential risk that also inspires creativity and renewal, a space that ultimately provokes fundamental change.

In this chapter, I suggest that anthropologists use the creative power of 'the in-between' – the classic concept of the liminal – as one way to heal the wounds of contemporary social life. My central model for such practice is the sorcerer among the Songhay people of Niger in West Africa. The Songhay sorcerer is a liminal figure who is always already between the village and the bush, between health and illness, between life and death – a vantage that makes him or her a spiritual guardian. From the vantage of the between,

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the Songhay sorcerer becomes a keen observer of social relations, a person who dares to use the power of the between to transform social turbulence into social harmony. Like the Songhay sorcerer, or *sohanci*, immigrants, the chronically ill, and anthropologists have long and intense experience with liminality. Like the *sohanci*, they can also be keen public observers of social life who can use the insights derived from liminal experience to chart paths that lead to innovation, invention and a future of greater social harmony and social justice. Through narratives that highlight the creative liminality of sorcery, the immigrant experience, and illness, I attempt to show how the anthropologist can use the public sphere to produce knowledge that makes life sweeter in a contemporary world in which wisdom is in short supply. What could be more important for the future of anthropology? What could be more important for the future of us all?

Barzakh: Exploring the In-Between

When you study the anthropology of religion you are sometimes compelled to stretch your imagination to the limits of comprehension – and beyond. If you allow the imagination to stretch with experience, especially when confronted with the ineffability of something like Victor and Edith Turner's descriptions of communitas or a sudden confrontation with death, you often find yourself in what I like to call 'the between' – the space of imagination and artistic creativity. The philosopher N.J.T. Thomas (1999: 109) suggested that 'the principal reason that the imagination is thought to be particularly relevant to the arts arises from the ability of artists to see and to induce the rest of us to see aspects of reality differently or more fully than is ordinary – to see things as we otherwise might not'.

Such an orientation to the imagination is often linked to religious beliefs and to what William James first called 'radical empiricism' – the sensing of the unseen. The great scholar of Sufism, William Chittick (1989: ix–x), following the insights of William James, among others, wrote about the importance of the imagination in Islamic belief and practice: 'In putting complete faith in reason, the West forgot that imagination opens the soul to certain possibilities of perceiving and understanding not available to the rational mind . . . By granting an independent ontological status to imagination, and seeing the visionary realm as the self-revelation of God, Islamic philosophy has gone against the mainstream of Western thought'. The impulse of the imagination enables us to follow a path leading towards a truth of being, a space between things.

In Sufi thought, this space is often called the *barzakh*, the bridge or isthmus, that links two distinct domains – a place that is between things. The

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barzakh figures prominently in the works of Ibn al-'Arabi who wrote that the in-between is

> something that separates . . . two other things, while never going to one side . . . as, for example, the line that separates shadow from sunlight. God says, 'he let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a *barzakh* they do not overpass (Koran 55:19); in other words, one sea does not mix with the other . . . Any two adjacent things are in need of *barzakh*, which is neither one nor the other but which possesses the power . . . of both. The *barzakh* is something that separates a known from an unknown, an existent from a non-existent, a negated from an affirmed, and an intelligible from a non-intelligible. (Crapanzano 2003: 57–58; see also Chittick 1989)

Vincent Crapanzano (2003: 64–65) wrote evocatively about the cultural and philosophical significance of the in-between.

> If we take the imagination, as Sartre and in his own way Ibn al-'Arabi do, as presenting that which is absent or non-existent, we have to conclude that it is through an activity, which rests on the non-being of its object – the image, that we uncover those gaps, those disjunctive moments of non-being, that punctuate our social and cultural life. The imagination also provides us with the glosses, the rhetorical devices, the narrative manoeuvres, and the ritual strategies to conceal those gaps. We uncover, as it were, non-being through an act that postulates non-being, as we conceal that non-being through a non-being we declare, in ritual at least, to have full being – plenitude. What is more 'real' than objects of ritual? . . . Is it this paradox that leads to the continual (if repetitive) elaborations in ritual and drama, in literature and art, especially and most purely in music, of the asymptotic moment of crossing, that renders imaginative frontiers so menacing as they fascinate and enchant us? Such subterfuge, if one may call it so, is a source of unending social and cultural creativity – or is cessation – through repetition and the declaration of that repetition as ultimate truth.

Following this line of thought, the imagination, in its artistic exuberance, compels us to wake up and see the world from fresh perspectives. This notion underscores Victor and Edith Turner's thinking about communitas, and follows the sage advice of Jean Rouch who liked to say that the imagination compels us to tell stories, which give birth to other stories. As I once suggested, 'the imagination always brings us back to the story' (Stoller 2008: 170). These are sometimes tales about events that 'at least for the moment cannot be explained and can barely be described' (Rorty 1979: 370).

The key point here is that in the indeterminate space between things we often experience 'negative capability', the ability, as John Dewey (1929) explained, to creatively thrive in states of incompletion and contradiction. It is a reality that undermines our unending 'quest for certainty'. The difficult and

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risky reality of being between things can not only prompt a reconfiguration of being but can also chart a course towards reinvention.

Sorcery and the In-Between

Songhay elders like to say that if your path is a good, it will be a long and tall one that takes many years to navigate. That path continuously leads you to crossroads that separate one world from another. One of my Songhay mentors, the late Amadu Zima, spent most of his life wandering the spaces that stretch out between things.

During my time in Mehanna, a town on the west bank of the River Niger near the Niger–Mali border, I liked to visit Alfaggeh Abdoulaye, a Muslim cleric who spent much of his time in a small mud-brick room, the dusty study of his compound. He crammed into that room hundreds of books and maps. There we regularly debated the finer points of Muslim theology, the potency of herbal medicine and the limits of science. On my way to these regular visits, I would often see an old man standing near the crumbling wall of his compound, which was across the way from the cleric's house. I would routinely greet him, and he would always return my greetings with what seemed to me a noticeable degree of kindness.

How is your compound?
We are in good health.
How has your day been?
Not one problem.
Would you give my greetings to your family?
They will hear them.

Over many years we exchanged such greetings hundreds of times. Despite the warmth of the greetings, not once did the old man invite me into his home. Indeed, we never had a conversation, but I had no reason to suspect that he might be anything other than a very pleasant person.

One evening I once again saw the old man standing by his compound door, which had been fashioned from a sheet of corrugated tin. As had been our practice, we exchanged warm greetings. This time, though, he waved for me to approach. In his youth he must have been tall and strong, but age had bent him like a water-logged tree branch. Deep lines crisscrossed his square face. Yellowed from years of exposure to dust and wind, his eyes teared with irritation. Even in that dire condition, those eyes suggested a deep kindness.

You know I've been watching you, he said.
Watching me?

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You've come here for many years.
True.
And each time you greeted me with kindness and respect.
I nodded.
You never asked anything of me.
I nodded again.
I know your name, but you don't know mine.
A moment of silence filled the space between us.
My name is Amadu Zima . . . I like you.
Not knowing what to say, I remained silent.
Come into my house so I can tell you my story.

The old man invited me into his compound, which was barren – not a bush or tree growing, no chickens or sheep or goats – just sand, dirt, a few scattered tin bowls, a laundry tub, and an outdoor hearth, and three blackened stones forming a pyramid, on top of which sat a large cast iron pot. There was one rectangular mud-brick house for the old man's wife and daughter, who were not there. I followed the old man into his house, a conical hut with a mud-brick base covered by a thatch roof. The hut's thick walls kept it cool. Amadu Zima slept on a rusted metal bed frame with a straw mattress. We sat down on a frayed palm frond mat he had unrolled in the centre of the hut. Smooth and clean wadi sand made the hut's floor soft and cool.

Amadu Zima noticed that I was staring at what appeared to be a sorcerer's altar at the back side of the hut.

You know about that?
A little, but not too much.
We looked at one another and he gave me a warm toothless smile.
If you want to tell my story, you must get it right. Go and fetch your machine.

I ran to my house, packed my tape recorder in a backpack and made my way back to the old man's house. Here's what Amadu Zima told me about his life.

He was born an orphan on the Niger River island of Sinder. His father, a Wogo man (a Songhay-speaking ethnic group that lives on Niger River islands) died before he was born. His mother died when she gave birth. His father had no brothers or sisters and his mother's people lived far away. A noble family on the island adopted him as a captive, meaning that they clothed, housed and fed him in exchange for his services – work in the village. When he grew into a strong young man, he farmed, fished, and repaired mud-brick houses. Although his 'family' looked after him, Amadu Zima did not like the stigma of being a 'captive', a status not unlike that of a slave.

As a young man, Amadu Zima left Sinder and began to travel. He had no plan other than to walk and meet people. He made his way across the River Niger and walked west. In one village, a farmer hired him to work his millet

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fields. After several months, he left that village and continued west, finding another place to work as a farmhand. Eventually he came to Aribinda, a town in Burkina Faso where Kurumba people live. There he met an old man who no longer had the strength to farm his large holdings; his sons had left, and he had no one else to help him.

Amadu Zima went to work for this kind man. During the first planting season, Amadu Zima worked tirelessly. When he harvested what he had sowed, he produced more bundles of millet than the old farmer had ever seen. Amadu Zima lived with the old man for two years. In time, people told him that the old farmer, who seemed unremarkable, was, in fact, a great sorcerer who knew how to make crops flourish – even in conditions of drought. Asking nothing of the old farmer, he laboured for him for seven years. They loved one another like father and son. One day the old man approached Amadu Zima.

> Would you marry my daughter, and remain in Aribinda?
> I'm not ready to marry, Baba, he replied.
> Then what do you want?
> The only thing I want, Baba, is magic.

The old sorcerer told Amadu Zima to take his machete and walk to a tall termite hill that rose in the very centre of his millet field. 'Cut it down', he instructed. When Amadu Zima did so he saw a wide deep hole and heard movement from below. A python slowly emerged from the hole. Using the machete, Amadu Zima killed the python and, for good luck, cut it into seven pieces. He returned to the old man's house and showed him the fruits of his labour. The old man smiled at his fictive son, and said: 'Cook one piece of snake a day for seven days. With python in your belly, the magic words I'm about to teach you will carry power'.

Having taught Amadu Zima everything he knew, the old farmer sent his fictive son on his way. Amadu Zima walked south to the land of the Bariba in Northern Benin. There he found an old man who needed a strong hand to help him farm his fields. Amadu Zima's Kurumba magic produced remarkable crop yields – yields that in his long life, the old Bariba man had never seen. For seven years, he worked for the old Bariba man, who housed and fed him. One day Amadu Zima announced that we wanted to return home to Niger. 'What can I give you, my son?' he asked; 'Knowledge of healing plants and magic', he answered.

Amadu Zima continued his life of travel in the spaces between things. Following the seven years he had lived with the Bariba healer, he spent a year with a *sohanci* sorcerer and spirit-possession priest in Sangara, a village in Western Niger. Each of his hosts had wanted Amadu Zima to remain. Each time, he refused, preferring instead to leave with the magical secrets of his masters.

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Eventually Amadu Zima, ever an outsider in-between things, settled in Mehanna where his keen observation of human behaviour enabled him to become a renowned healer and village *zima*, the priest of the local possession troupe. Every year, he performed rites that protected crops from pestilence. Every year, he organized a *yenaandi*, the spirit-possession ceremony that ensured ample rains during the planting season. He married his first wife, and soon thereafter welcomed a daughter into the world. For the first time in his life, he had a family and a real home. Even so, he yearned for a son. His wife never again became pregnant. As the years passed Amadu Zima continued to serve the people of Mehanna, who liked and respected him. He knew more about them than they knew about him. That is the way of the sojourner in 'the in-between'.

One year his wife sickened and died. Grief sapped his energy. Then sickness grabbed the wandering healer and spirit-possession priest – a severe case of scoliosis. In continuous pain, he could no longer actively organize spirit-possession ceremonies. What is more, Islamist clerics had settled in Mehanna. In the past Sufi clerics had tolerated spirit possession and the old ways of healing people of village and bush illnesses. The new clerics condemned the old practices. They equated the old ways with *Iblis*, the devil.

Wandering his existential path in the in-between, Amadu Zima adjusted to a solitary life in his compound. People would sometimes visit to seek cures for their illnesses. In time, Amadu Zima had earned enough to marry again, but his new wife never became pregnant. Fewer and fewer people came to see him. Resigned to his life of isolation, he began to notice a white man who greeted him with respect. The white man asked for nothing in return. One day, seven years after he first exchanged greetings with that white man, he invited the anthropologist into his compound and told him the story of his life.

> Why are you telling me this?
>
> I would not tell my life to anyone, he answered. I like you. You like me. You want to learn my ways.

Amadu Zima taught me what he knew about the spirits, about plants, and about farming magic.

During one session, Amadu Zima pointed to a tin of Nescafe coffee.

That tin, he said, is for you. Open it.

Inside the tin I discovered a brown mixture – a resin that would, according to Amadu Zima, enable me to walk strongly on my path.

> You prepare hot coals in a brazier and sprinkle them with the powder and breathe in the smoke. Take it with you to America, he said, and tell my story.

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It has been a very long time since Amadu Zima rejoined the ancestors, and yet his memory is woven into my being. The Nescafe tin he gave me is positioned prominently in my study. From time to time, I open the lid and pinch the resins that he long ago gave to me. I remember the soft gaze of his cloudy eyes and the smooth tone of his voice, a tone that reflected both kindness of heart and sadness of spirit. He led a life filled with the thrill of risk and the despair of disappointment. In the indeterminate space between things, he became a keen observer of life, a custodian of knowledge who did what he could to sweeten the life of the people among whom he lived.

What is his legacy?

Amadu Zima confronted solitude and despair with patient grace. His path was long and tall. Even in the face of uncertainty and difficulty, he walked his path with dignity and determination. When he reached a fork on the road of his life, he took risks. He chose his new direction and accepted the consequences. Amadu Zima's life in the in-between suggests that sorcerers are not only keen observers of social life, but the custodians of knowledge. The orphan from Sinder spent years patiently acquiring knowledge, which he refined during his short time in the world. In time, he then passed it on to the next generation. As his story demonstrates, no matter the difficulties we face, when we tap into negative capability, we expand our imagination and create ways to ensure that knowledge is conveyed to future generations. That was Amadu Zima's path and his gift to the world.

Immigration and the In-Between

When people leave home and emigrate to a new land, they find themselves between the familiar and unfamiliar, between host and home country. Emigrants leave behind not just their languages and cultures, but the smells and tastes of being home-in-the-world. Then, as immigrants, they must adjust to new sets of alien circumstances – new languages, new customs, new rules and new regulations – and different and sometimes disagreeable ways of doing things.

Even after many years in a new host country, do immigrants ever feel at home? Do they ever fit it? Are they ever fully integrated as 'one of us'? Like the sorcerer wandering the dangerous spaces between the social and spirit worlds, immigrants find themselves always already in indeterminate spaces. Years after their arrival, many of them remain strangers in a strange land, wondering if they have said 'the right thing' or worrying about committing a behavioural faux pas that might reveal the depths of their otherness. Sometimes they fear they have crossed a regulatory line that might result in deten-

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tion and eventual deportation to a homeland that may have changed so much that they might feel lost in the country of their birth. Having lived in a host country, they, too, will have changed. Where is the immigrant's true home?

Boube Mounkaila, a Songhay merchant from Niger who sells 'leather' bags at the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market in New York City, thinks about these questions each and every day. Boube came to New York City in 1989 as a young man. When he arrived, an African cabby directed him to an address where he might find compatriots in Harlem. He easily found an enclave of immigrants from Niger who offered him a bed in a crowded, bug-infested two-room apartment – just upstairs from Sylvia's famous soul food restaurant on Martin Luther King Boulevard. He bonded with his flatmates and, being a particular quick-witted young man, easily learned idiomatic English. He had a natural ease with people, which enabled him to sell his wares – knock-off purses – at a brisk pace. He started selling bags on 34th Street in Midtown Manhattan near Macy's. In reaction to complaints from this up-market business district, then headed by none other than Donald J. Trump, the police dispersed the African street traders. Boube and his compatriots relocated to East 86th Street, and worked that busy street until the police moved in again. Finally, Boube moved up to Harlem's 125th Street, where his street table offerings attracted local Harlemites as well as American and European tourists. In time, the City of New York, citing health hazards, shut down that bustling street market and moved many of the merchants to land owned by the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque. Boube set up shop on 116th Street at the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market, where he runs his business to this day.

When he came to New York City, Boube left his wife and young child in Niger. He promised to send them money every month, and said that his time in America would be short and profitable. He predicted that he would return home in three or four years, and that upon his homecoming, he would have the financial wherewithal to provide a sweet life for his immediate and extended family. However, increasingly strict immigration regulations, which Boube and his friends studied, prevented him from visiting home.

To shorten a very long story, Boube remained stuck in between New York City and Niger for twenty-five years. In time, he knew enough about American finance to create a small stock portfolio. Living the metropolitan life in New York City, he moved in with a Japanese woman who became his common law wife. They had two children – a boy and a girl, who grew up learning Japanese, Arabic, Songhay and the particular kind of English that New Yorker's speak (Stoller 2002).

From his vantage in between host and home countries, among three languages (Songhay, French and English), and in between two modes of commerce (street capitalism and Muslim conventions of trade), Boube, like the

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Songhay sorcerers of Niger, embraced negative capability, which not only enabled him to take risks but to see clearly into his future. He transformed himself into a creative trader, a citizen of the world.

But life in the in-between can be filled with stress. He missed his wife and daughter. He missed his relatives in Karma, a village on the east bank of the River Niger. In the late afternoon, he missed the wind-carried aroma of grilled meat and savoury sauces. He missed the slow pace of life in which people took time to sit down and talk with one another. Boube also had to worry about his immigration status. If he visited his wife and daughter in Niger, would he be able to return to the United States, his business and his New York family?

After twenty-five years of longing for Niger, Boube finally visited his family in Karma, Niger. His family and neighbours greeted him like a conquering hero. He had had the courage to step out onto the wind-whipped footbridge. Against considerable odds, Boube had returned home. He built a new compound for his family. He purchased land for a riverside orchard of mango, lemon and guava trees. He acquired a small dry goods shop and asked his brother to run it. He had become a big man in his village, but he felt like an outsider. Life in Niger had changed. His life in New York City had changed him.

Ill at ease, he eagerly returned to New York City. When I saw him soon after his return, we discussed the fate of immigrants.

I thought I'd love it in Niger, he said. But I didn't. I couldn't wait to leave.

There's an American writer, I told him, who wrote a great book, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

That's God's truth, Boube said in Songhay. God's truth.

As Boube Mounkaila's story suggests, life in the in-between is not an easy one. It's not easy to live with incompleteness and uncertainty. It is far more comfortable to observe the wind-whipped the footbridge than to wander onto it and see clearly what the future might hold. Amadu Zima wandered onto it, as did Boube Mounkaila. In both cases, their odysseys have been filled with wonder and disappointment. Beyond the wonder and disappointment, their stories showcase the creative power of the in-between to precipitate degrees of positive change.

Illness and the In-Between

Serious illness is a challenge to our being-in-the-world. Most of the time we live in the village of the healthy. In that space, we rarely think long and hard about our health. If we get sick with the flu, we suffer aches and pains, take

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some medicine and, in time, return to our normal physical state in the village of the healthy. Some of us, however, have been consigned to the village of the sick, a space in which treatment brings us to remission rather than to cure. In remission, you are neither sick nor healthy. You are between health and illness – an indeterminate state from which there is no exit. You interact with people – even loved ones – who live blithely in the village of the healthy. They tell you to have a positive attitude. They say you must be courageous and strong as you wage 'war' against your illness. You know what they know, but they do not know what you know or what you experience in the village of the sick. Faced with mortality, how can they know what it feels like to think about your illness each and every day. You seek out other residents in the village of the sick. You may not know them, but without saying a word, they know what you know, and that shared connection gives you a measure of comfort.

The lethal insecurities in the village of the sick can be bleak. Even so, there can be many existential surprises in these indeterminate spaces. Being continuously between health and illness can sometimes bring insight and unimagined revelation. Like the old man on the wind-whipped footbridge, the cancer patient may well experience an epiphany, an existential clarity that compels profound and productive change.

I have long lived in the village of the sick. Diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL), an incurable blood cancer, I have been in remission for more than fifteen years. When I first endured chemotherapy and immunotherapy treatments, the prospect of a premature death propelled me to think clearly about my life. Given the pressing finitude of my state, what changes should I make? How might I best use the time I had left? What would be my legacy?

As an anthropologist I had been very much concerned with my scholarly career. I have written scores of 'proper' research proposals as well as a series of essays and books. Like most of my colleagues, I hoped that my work would refine disciplinary thinking and bring me a modicum of disciplinary recognition. Prior to my diagnosis, treatment and remission, I never wondered why I was doing anthropology. Cancer changed my professional priorities. Caught in a space in between health and illness, I thought it important to write more narrative ethnographies, memoirs and fiction – all in an attempt to reach a broader audience. As you can tell from this chapter, I drifted more and more towards storytelling in order to create a connection between myself – the anthropologist-writer – and a broad-based audience of readers. If my stories were well told, they just might make a reader think a new thought or even feel a new feeling. Following the example of the Songhay elders who taught me so much, I also came to understand the importance of mentorship. Like Amadu Zima I realized that I, too, was a

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custodian of knowledge. Was it not now my obligation to pass on what skills and knowledge I had acquired to the next generation of scholars? With the value of hindsight, I understood that this sense of obligation conformed to the Songhay theory of learning. As the Songhay elders like to say: the most important task of the master sorcerer, master blacksmith, or master weaver is to pass on her or his knowledge to the next generation who, in turn, will use it in their own way. They, in turn, would then pass it on to successive generations. At that existential point in between health and illness, in between life and death, I walked onto the wind-whipped footbridge – the *barzakh*, a space where I might understand my past and imagine my future (see Stoller 2004, 2008, 2014).

Anthropologists and the In-Between

Anthropologists have long been wanders in the spaces between things. We continuously live among languages, cultures and worlds. As scholars who engage in long periods of fieldwork, we become experts at 'being there'. Then for even longer periods of time, we return 'home' to a state of 'being here' (see Geertz 1985). Indeed, some of us find ourselves in the nether state, following Merleau-Ponty (1964), of being everywhere and nowhere, which powerfully defines the imponderable qualities of *barzakh* – being between two separate entities.

Being between things shapes anthropological practice-in-the-world. Given its centrality, it is important to refine our thinking about being in between things. Clearly, there is a long disciplinary history of writing about 'the in-between', especially from the analytical perspective of Victor and Edith Turner and their notions of liminality and communitas. 'Liminal entities', Turner wrote in his classic work, *The Ritual Process*, 'are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed custom, convention, and ceremonial (V. Turner 1969: 98). In that same essay, Turner described the traits of people who find themselves in liminal states. He suggested that they tend to be humble, and willing to uncomplainingly submit to orders. Sometimes, they might submit to painful processes – ritual scarification, tests of endurance, or chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The Turner model of liminality showcased how processes of transformation propel the passage from one status to another, from child to adult, from single to married, from novice to master.

For Songhay sorcerers, immigrants, cancer patients or anthropologists, liminality is usually a state without resolution. When cancer patients are in remission, they are permanently stuck in between health and illness. Even if immigrants are well established in their new situation, they continue to

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find themselves between host and home countries. In continuous liminality, which is the lived reality of the Songhay sorcerer, the immigrant, the cancer patient, and the anthropologist, you are always in the in-between, and can never return to your previous status. Being continuously liminal means that people may well essentialize you as an apprentice sorcerer, an immigrant, a cancer patient, or an anthropologist. It is often a state that gives rise to a sense of social connection so powerful that it can undermine previously noticed differences in age, gender, social class and ethnicity. Victor and Edith Turner referred to this state as communitas. In 2012, Edith Turner wrote that communitas 'occurs through the readiness of people – perhaps from necessity – to rid themselves of their concern for status and dependence of structures, and see their fellows as they are' (E. Turner 2012: 1). She goes on to critique an anthropology that diminishes the importance of communitas in human experience:

> Anthropology has given the world a great store of scientific understanding of society, its bones and muscles, its illnesses, but it has not allowed itself to get mixed up in such matters as person-to-person feeling unless they are analysable and unless the analysis shows some kind of objectivity about human identity and consciousness. This book, however, tackles communitas, togetherness itself, taking the reader to the edge of the precipice of knowledge – and beyond, over the barrier of the scientists' analysis and into experience itself. Light draws on what the real thing is, and we feel lucky it exists. Then we can make discoveries.

In communitas, which results from being in a position of liminality, we step out onto the wind-whipped footbridge and experience the trials, tribulations and revelations of *barzakh* – of being always already in between things. What can our anthropological vantage in the in-between contribute to public discourse?

Creativity, Invention and Public Anthropology

We live in a world filled with seemingly insoluble problems. Carbon emissions have increased at such alarming rates that climate experts have had to push forward their dire predictions of ecological devastation. In the face of climate change denial, feckless politicians, especially in the United States, do nothing to confront the most important issue of our times. Instead, they roll back previously insufficient environmental regulations. Our air is getting dirtier. Our water, which is in increasingly short supply, is less safe to drink. Droughts and floods disrupt our supply of food, which, given decreased health regulation, is increasingly unsafe to eat. The future looks even bleaker if you add to this list an ever-expanding income inequality that is in large

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measure linked to widespread political dysfunction. From the creative vantage of the in-between, what can we do, if anything, to change a pattern that leads us towards eventual extinction?

One strategy is to more fully develop a media-conscious public anthropology. Among many others, I have long advocated a more fully developed public anthropology in which we extend slowly developed insights into media-saturated fast culture. Such a practice would be a form of 'guerilla anthropology', a term coined by Bruce Kapferer at the outset of his ongoing cross-cultural project on human inequality. In an interview for the University of Bergen Magazine, Kapferer said:

> To me, in a sense, guerilla anthropology is anthropology. Anthropology stands outside of all disciplines. To put it crudely, most of the disciplines practised at universities have been born in the nineteenth century and in the history of nationalism, which began the modern state . . . Many unexamined assumptions regarding the nature and possibility of human beings were present that required challenge. Western philosophy offered a radical critique but it, nonetheless, could not escape the limitation of many assumptions that were culturally and historically embedded in it . . . But anthropology also took seriously other systems. These other systems were not necessarily bound by the same principles or frameworks of understanding that our own worlds were. Anthropology is a guerilla discipline in the sense that it comes from outside a largely Western comprehension of things, and challenges ruling assumptions . . . The critical guerilla anthropological perspective will lead to important reassessments of conceptual and theoretical perspectives that are still dominating discussions on problems associated with inequality. (Kapferer 2018)

Most of the guerilla anthropologists I have met understand, I think, that the old colonialist ways of solving social problems or understanding the world do not work anymore. Our various systems of politics, economics and scholarship have become ineffectual and counterproductive. In this context, the guerilla approach to anthropology, which emerges from long-standing experience in the in-between, is perfectly suited to living in, coping with, and understanding contemporary social worlds. In my work as a public blogger, I have attempted to present an anthropological perspective on contemporary social and political issues. In that work I often extend the wisdom of the aforementioned Songhay people (an exercise in guerilla anthropology) to the pragmatic analysis of our social, political and existential issues.

But is public anthropology public enough? Are our slowly derived insights reaching narrowly defined audiences. Even if a greater number of scholars have become the masters of expressive accessibility through narrative ethnography, documentary film, drama, poetry and media installations, who is consuming what we produce? In the widespread discussion about digital media and public anthropology, one element is often overlooked:

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the power of the story and storytelling. Indeed, powerful experiences like communitas defy denotation; 'communitas can only be conveyed through stories' (E. Turner 2012: 1).

Jean Rouch understood this principle. During the 1980s, I spent time in his ramshackle projection room, which was just upstairs – some very creaky stairs – from his ramshackle office in the Musee de L'Homme. Bringing their films to Rouch's projection room, young filmmakers sought commentary from the master of the documentary. Rouch would usually ask the same set of questions:

> Is the story a good one? Does it work?
> Will the story connect with the audience?
> If the story doesn't work, how can a better one be imagined?

From my perspective, which has emerged from experiences in the Songhay world, the world of cancer, and the world of anthropology – worlds very much in between things – the capacity to understand and transform the social world emerges from the story. Narratives can compel people to imagine their future. Given the overwhelming technological changes that have transformed contemporary social life, it is easy for anthropologists to forget Jean Rouch's central question: where is the story? (Stoller 2018).

As the old man in the Sufi parable came to understand, the existential realities of the footbridge sharpen the past and foresee the future. From the vantage of the in-between, we are better able to find the story and foundation for social change.

If we find the story, we also find ourselves.

Paul Stoller is professor of anthropology at West Chester University, Pennsylvania, and permanent fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Friedrich Alexander University (FAU), Erlanger-Nuremberg. In his more than thirty years of anthropological research and writing, Stoller has focused on the Songhay religion in Niger and the life of West African street traders in New York City. His work encompasses the study of economic exchange, religion, ethnographic film, and the human quest for well-being in turbulent times. In his most recent work, he investigates how indigenous wisdom can not only enhance social well-being but also help to heal a troubled world. To date, Stoller has published sixteen books, including ethnographies, biographies and memoirs, as well as three novels. Since 2010 he has been blogging regularly on culture, politics and higher education for *The Huffington Post* and *Psychology Today*, and has become an advocate for a more public and engaged anthropology. In 2013,

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King Carl Gustav of Sweden awarded him the Anders Retzius Gold Medal in Anthropology. In 2015, the American Anthropological Association presented him the Anthropology in Media Award.

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CHAPTER 3



SEARCHING FOR MY BROTHER

Liminality and Blood Brotherhood in Rwanda

Christopher C. Taylor

If notions of kinship involve sentiments of 'diffuse, enduring solidarity' (Schneider 1968), it must be admitted that for many ethnographers, one's ties to one's interlocutors during fieldwork and after it are more likely to be diffuse rather than enduring. We are rarely in the field long enough to become one of them and we rarely succeed in insinuating ourselves very profoundly into their personal and social lives. After a relatively short time, a year, maybe two, we return from the field and are rudely reinserted into the vicissitudes of the academic machine –the writing of dissertations, articles and books, and the jockeying for jobs. For most of us, our careers take centre stage, and our fieldwork acquaintances recede into the background. In many cases, those to whom we owe our careers gain very little from the experience of having known us, despite giving us more than we could ever hope to repay.

Aware of the potential for exploitation in the ethnographer–informant relationship, I began my fieldwork in Rwanda in 1983 determined not to fall into the mould of the parasitic ethnographer (see Deloria 1969). I was determined to relate to Rwandans without prejudgement. I hoped that they would reciprocate in kind. Little did I know at the time that this would require more than just my good intentions. Indeed, it was clear to me almost from day one that Rwandans were very used to relating to Europeans and Americans who happened to be living there. We owned cars. We lived in houses with electricity, running water and flush toilets. We never had to worry about where our next meal was coming from. We neither farmed nor did much in the way of manual labour, with the exception of some Western-

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ers who were there to provide vocational training. We usually had Rwandan servants to do the cooking and other domestic chores. Most of all, we had money. Often when a Rwandan related to a European or an American, he or she wanted something tangible from the interaction – a job, a ride, a favour, or money. In addition to the economic disparities between Rwandans and Westerners, there were political ones as well, and these too influenced my relations to Rwandans as an ethnographer (Rosaldo 1989). Despite all this, it remained possible to sustain relations that were more egalitarian and disinterested, but these only tended to emerge after months of interaction, and with a special few.

In my case, interactions with Rwandans became less fraught with such difficulties over time. In this chapter, I will discuss one such relationship, a relationship with a healer named Baudouin with whom I performed a blood brotherhood ceremony. After frequent visits to this healer in which I observed his divination and healing techniques, inquired about them, and asked many questions of his patients, he said to me:

> Christopher, when you first began to visit me, you wanted information. Now you come to me as a friend. I too consider you to be a friend, a good friend. In former days when a man became good friends with another man, they would go through a little ceremony, called *kunywana amaraso* (to reciprocally drink blood) and they would become brothers. I know that you could not possibly go through with such a ceremony because you are an *umuzungu* (white person), and *abazungu* (white people) do not consider such things to be of importance.

My reaction to this was contrary to the healer's expectation: 'I am very pleased, and of course I will do it'. Besides being very touched by the healer's invitation, I saw it as an opportunity to shed some of the burdens of 'whiteness'. I will no longer be simply an *umuzungu* in this part of Rwanda. I will no longer be a liminal being. We performed this ceremony in 1985. I returned to Rwanda in 1987, saw him again, and corresponded with him from my return to the United States until October 1990, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded northern Rwanda from Uganda. I returned to Rwanda in 1993, hoping to find him. I did not succeed; Rwanda was at war. I tried again in 2005 and again in 2009, but to no avail. To this day, I have no idea what became of him. In this chapter I will discuss this healer's practice, the blood brotherhood covenant, and Turner's notions of liminality and communitas.

What Is an *Umuzungu*?

The broadest definition of *umuzungu* is someone who comes from outside Rwanda. In practice, however, the term is never applied to Africans from

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other countries, seldom if ever used to refer to people from the Middle East or North Africa, nor to Indians or Pakistanis, and never to Chinese, Japanese or Koreans. It is not used to refer to African-Americans, nor to other black people from Europe. While in Rwanda I only heard the term used in reference to white people of European or American origin.

Ordinarily, the term is not derogatory nor pejorative, and Rwandan children often addressed me in that way. They would joyfully call out '*umuzungu*', and then come up to shake my hand heartily, trying to be friendly. Occasionally, however, children were afraid of white people and would scurry away when they saw one. Parents might have told them stories that the *umuzungu* might carry them off or eat them if they did not behave properly. Such stories were commonplace, but most children older than five did not seem intimidated by white people.

In other contexts the term can be derisory, something akin to 'whitey' or 'honky'. For example, during my several stays in Rwanda, it was not uncommon for someone to call out to me with the words: '*Umuzungu*, ca va?' (a mix of Kinyarwanda and French), which translates as: 'Hey, white person, how goes it?' Quite often when this utterance was spoken, it was followed by some snickering from those within earshot. From the tone of voice and the laughter, I could tell that my interlocutor was not really interested in enquiring about my health and well-being, he was simply trying to goad me a little, perhaps even to provoke me to anger, so that I would look ridiculous in front of a small audience of Rwandans. It was a way of verbally aggressing the white person so addressed, to poke fun at him or her, a kind of weapon of the weak being used against someone perceived to be more affluent and privileged. Although I never responded with angry words or gestures to these challenges, they always annoyed me a little. Why should I be addressed by a term that is a racial category? Whether a shadow of displeasure ever briefly traversed my face, I do not know, but it usually seemed as though my aggressor was content to have added a tiny note of unpleasantness to my day.

The term '*umwirabura*' is not derogatory. I learned it from a Rwandan interlocutor who had used the term while enquiring of me whether there were any black people like himself in America. I had answered that, yes, there were. The new word gave me an idea. Now whenever any Rwandan said '*umuzungu*, ca va?' to me, I responded with '*umwirabura*, ca va?', which could be translated as 'Person of color, how goes it?' My thoughts were, if you are going to address me with a racial term, I shall respond in kind. After all, Aesop's moral at the end of the fable about the fox and the crane was: 'One good turn deserves another'. This response made other Rwandans laugh if they happened to be listening, and that turned the tables. My aggressor would be the one laughed at and not me. Sarcasm, repaid with countersarcasm in Kinyarwanda and spoken by a white person to boot, rarely failed

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to amuse those present. Because of their own history of social position based on ethnic difference, Rwandans were particularly sensitive to utterances referring to ethnicity.

The subject of ethnicity is a classical one in anthropological and social science discourse. Theories about it run the gamut from primordialism, whereby ethnic differences are perceived to be primarily of a bio-genetic nature, to constructionism, where ethnic differences are depicted as historically contingent, malleable, and fashioned according to the political exigencies of the historical and social context (Eriksen 1993). In the more extreme versions of primordialism, behavioural, intellectual and moral traits correlate closely with ethnic differences. In the more extreme versions of constructionism, ethnic differences seem to be reinvented almost from one day to the next. For the most part, anthropology has rejected primordialism almost entirely in favour of more constructionist views. If the anthropologist can show that the ethnic differences in question are constructed entities, it is hoped that the differences can be deconstructed as well, and that people of various ethnicities – once made aware of the adventitious nature of their categories – will cease to find them salient in their political and social lives. However, when there are pronounced somatic differences between ethnic groups, the salubrious effect of deconstruction is less apparent.

During my periods of fieldwork in Rwanda, I always felt that my lack of melanin was a handicap. How could I be anything other than an *umuzungu* to the people, and tainted with all the negatives associated with whiteness? White Europeans and Americans were responsible for the enslavement of Africans, then colonialism and neocolonialism. Was it not to be expected that I would have to endure the logical consequences of the 'white man's burden'? As William Faulkner once said, 'The past is not dead. It's not even past'. In earlier times, and in other ethnographic areas, anthropologists have often had to confront their irrevocable markers of difference and their host communities as well. Very often the latter have responded positively to the situation by bestowing a new name on the anthropologist or by formally adopting him or her into the group (Kan 2001). Anthropological accounts of adoption into native American groups are not uncommon (ibid.), but this is much less the case in Africa. Sometimes adoption is performed out of perceived mutual economic interest; sometimes it is done out of affection, sometimes a mix of the two. I have no idea if this healer's intentions were purely disinterested when he invited me to become his blood brother, but I had very little to offer him and his family in return. I was a graduate student at the time with very limited means and an unknown future. I had to take his statement seriously about our friendship and its evolution over time. If anyone needed something, it was more me than him. I needed a healer to cure me of my whiteness.

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Curphametra, Butaro and Baudouin the Healer

I began fieldwork on Rwandan traditional medicine in 1983, and became affiliated with the Centre Universitaire de Recherches sur la Pharmacopie et la Medecine Traditionelle (Curphametra). They were an academic division that was part of the Universite Nationale du Rwanda, and were based in Butare, southern Rwanda. Their interest in traditional medicine arose from a desire to valorize it and to determine if there were pharmacologically active substances contained in the plants used by healers and herbalists. They had both Rwandans and Belgian 'cooperants' on their staff – biologists, pharmacologists, biochemists and medical doctors. They possessed a relatively well-equipped laboratory where they would pulverize medicinal plants, extract the biochemical substances, and then test (in vitro) varying concentrations of the substances against pathogens to determine their efficacy as therapeutic substances. Their goals included the discovery of new and effective remedies that could replace those that were presently being imported from other countries and sold in pharmacies at prices that average Rwandans could not afford, the founding of a local pharmaceutical industry, and the potential export of medicinal substances to foreign countries.

As their interest in traditional medicine tended to focus on pharmacology rather than on magico-religious representations, they were pleased to have an anthropologist willing to investigate the more humanistic side to traditional Rwandan medicine. At the beginning of my research, I spent several months interviewing patients and healers who came to the Curphametra's dispensary in Butare for traditional medicine. They also introduced me to several healers and ritual specialists outside Butare. Because I had expressed interest in a traditional local religion called the 'cult of Nyabingi' practised in northern Rwanda, they agreed to have one of their researchers accompany me to the commune of Butaro, in what was then known as Ruhengeri Prefecture.

The first thing we did when we arrived in Butaro, which was then a difficult five-hour, kidney-jarring drive from Kigali, was to enquire at the local administrative office. We did not get to meet the burgomaster as he was absent, but we did happen to meet one of his assistants, a tall, well-built man of about 35 years of age. He said, yes, studying *umuvuzi wa Kinyarwanda* (traditional Rwandan healing) was a good thing to do in Butaro as it was an important part of life there, and yes, it was good to study the cult of Nyabingi as well. There were numerous *abagirwa ba Nyabingi* (Nyabingi priests or priestesses), but people in Nduga (central and southern Rwanda) tended to look down on the cult, and to fear Nyabingi as a harmful spirit. She was not that, he explained, and there was no reason to fear her, as she was simply an intermediary to *Imana* (God). As to healers in the commune, he regret-

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ted that he could not, in good conscience, introduce us to the most reputed healer in Butaro commune, because if the healer did not like me, as I was an *umuzungu*, he might decide to kill me by mysterious means and no one would ever be able to determine who had committed the crime.

I found a place to stay near the commune's administrative centre, and set about trying to find *abavuzi* (healers), *abagirwa* (Nyabingi priests and priestesses) and a research assistant who could help me with the linguistic side of things. My Kinyarwanda at that time was passable but not great, and the language spoken in Butaro had the added complexity of sometimes being more Rukiga than Kinyarwanda. After a few days, I found and hired an assistant who could speak Rukiga, Kinyarwanda and French. He accompanied me on visits to healers and Nyabingi priests and priestesses, and one day suggested that we also visit his uncle, Baudouin, who he said was a frequently consulted healer.

Next day we set out from the Butaro communal office and drove to the 'centre commercial', Gatsibu, a drive that took us over a number of rough mountain roads, sometimes crowded with cattle, sheep and goats. If one were to walk to Gatsibu it would take about an hour and a half if one knew the various *inzira za kinyarwanda* (Rwandan footpaths), but by car it took a little over twenty minutes. Once we had arrived, we hung around a small drinking establishment where I met quite a few of the locals, including the 'conseiller de secteur' (the lowest level of elected office in Rwanda); he was a pleasant middle-aged man, whom I found to be friendly and helpful, but I wondered about his sincerity. Was his apparent kindness just self-interested amiability? Later, I would learn that it was not – he was simply a friendly, engaging person. I also met a healer there with whom I talked about Rwandan traditional medicine. He told me that he would teach me everything he knew about traditional medicine if I could obtain a sufficient number of bags of dry concrete for him to finish a building project. I said I would look into the cost of cement in Kigali and figure out if I could do it. This was more like it, I thought to myself, 'I'll tell you anything you want to know, *umuzungu*, as long as there is something in it for me'.

After imbibing a few cans of sorghum beer, we decided to push on. There was no sense getting to Baudouin's place in mid-afternoon, as he preferred to work with his patients later in the day and until late into the night. It was all uphill from Gatsibu as we scaled hills of varying steepness. We followed the '*inzira za Kinyarwanda*' that course over practically every one of Rwanda's numerous hills. Rarely do they take a direct route from base to summit, instead they follow the contours of each hill. We passed many people tilling their fields as we hiked, and to each we would say, '*Mwakoze*' (You've been working?). Each person responded with '*Yego*' (yes). [In central and southern Rwanda, one says '*Muraho*' (Are you al-

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right?) rather than *mwakoze* in similar circumstances.] The ascent to Baudouin's household took about an hour, an aerobic workout that many found arduous. But at the end of our hike I was pleasantly surprised by Baudouin's compound, which was composed of several fairly well-constructed houses, fashioned with pillars and beams made from the local trees of appropriate size, flat planks for siding, plywood, and corrugated iron roofs. How did they get this material up here, I wondered. One dwelling on this compound, about twenty or so feet uphill from all the other houses, was circular rather than rectangular. It was of daub and wattle construction, employing only the local saplings, and with a thatched roof. This was Baudouin's mother's house. She was in her early seventies, and preferred to live in a house that was 'traditional' in all its aspects. She spent a good deal of her time seated on a stool right outside her entrance, watching the activity below. Baudouin was clearly very attached to his mother, and grateful that he could have her living in close proximity. Along with my assistant, we walked up to her house and paid our respects.

Baudouin had five wives ranging in age from late twenties to early fifties. Each had her own dwelling space, and all but one had children. The eldest wife had two adult children, a man who was in his early thirties and a daughter who was a few years younger. All told, there were at least a dozen children present at each of my visits. I found Baudouin's large household to be remarkably harmonious despite the five co-wives and numerous children, although about two years after my last visit to him in 1987, he told me in a letter that his youngest wife, who was from Burundi, had decided to return there. The younger children played together and I seldom witnessed strife among them. Chickens roamed about looking for insects, and there was a mutt who did his job as a watchdog very well, barking when people came close, but demurring when it was clear that they were welcome. Baudouin was not a doting father, but whenever a young child would come up to him, while we were all seated around a fire in the hut where he received patients, he would gently listen to the child with his hand on the child's shoulder. They stayed away when he was working with patients.

A Twa man also resided at Baudouin's compound and acted as a kind of domestic servant. Baudouin might send him to Gatsibu or elsewhere on occasion to accomplish some errand. He would also trek into the forest between Rwanda and Uganda, about an hour's hike away, to procure medicinal substances. My assistant told me that the Twa have special knowledge of the forest and that, in essence, he was not a simple servant of Baudouin's household, but something of a partner to him. Baudouin could not practice traditional medicine without the Twa's help. Despite this, the practice of *kuneena batwa* was observed in the household. The Twa man would receive food and drink there, and would be present while others were eating or drinking, but

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separate containers and bowls, specifically for him and any other Twa that might be present, were always used.

Baudouin could perform several different techniques of divination, and his knowledge of medicinal plants was extensive, but his most frequently demanded therapeutic procedure was *kuraguza amahembe* (to divine by horns, 'talking horns'). Healers in the Butaro region who practice *kuraguza amahembe* have a less than clear status with regard to the local notions of good and evil. The use of *amahembe* (horns) is ambiguous because the 'horns' can be used to cure a sufferer of his affliction, or to send an affliction against someone else or even kill him. In this latter instance, the practice is called *kwohereza amahembe* (to send horns) rather than *kuraguza amahembe* (to divine by horns). *Kuraguza amahembe* is widely practised among healers in Butaro, as well as in other parts of northern Rwanda and in southern Uganda. Healers who perform it (often called *abacunyi*, sing. *umucunyi*) suffer a certain notoriety, for it is believed that they can cure or kill. It was for this reason, as it turned out, that the administrator whom I had met in Butaro at the communal office had warned me against going to see the most powerful healer in the area. He was talking about Baudouin. But I never perceived anything in Baudouin's demeanour that suggested aggressivity. On the contrary, I found him sensitive, intelligent and friendly.

The procedure for employing the *amahembe* in curing varies somewhat from healer to healer, but tends to follow a definite pattern. First the healer determines whether his patient's problem is the result of an *uburozi* (poisoning, spell). If the patient has already consulted another diviner and poisoning has been confirmed, the healer proceeds directly to *kuraguza amahembe*. If poisoning has not yet been determined, the healer may employ a separate divinatory procedure to establish the nature of his patient's disorder. Baudouin employs a weight wrapped in a piece of cloth called *ihiriza*. He asks a 'yes' or 'no' question, then shakes the *ihiriza* inside an animal skin pouch and throws it upon a circular basket-woven utensil that is ordinarily used to toss grain into the air to separate it from the chaff. If the weight comes to rest in an erect position, the answer is 'yes', if it comes to rest in a reclining position, the answer is 'no'. Sometimes healers will also administer an emetic as both a divinatory and a healing procedure. If the patient vomits within a few minutes of ingesting the medicine, he is considered to have been the victim of a poisoning. If the patient does not vomit, it means the medicine has not found any poison in his body.

Kuraguza ihiriza is but one method of preliminary divination; others may also be used before resorting to the *amahembe*. If preliminary divination yields an unfavourable result, the patient may decide to do *gushikisha* (to have divination done by the 'talking horns'). The object of sending the *amahembe* is to capture the voice of one's persecutor (or the object of one's

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desire or curiosity) while he or she sleeps at night, and to bring the voice back so that the healer and his patient can interrogate it. The aural aspect of the method has earned it the jocular title by which healers sometimes refer to it, *telefoni y'ikinyarwanda* (Rwandan telephone).

To perform *gushika*, the healer invokes the *amahembe* spirits and instructs them to seek out the enemy of his client. Usually there is a pause at this point, for the horn must be allowed time to find the enemy. As the latter may reside far from the healer's residence, in another Rwandan Prefecture, for example, or even in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania or Zaire (now DRC), this pause may last over an hour. Often the healer occupies himself with other matters during this time, sometimes he goes into temporary seclusion, though frequently he waits with his clients, talking, joking and drinking with them.

The *ihembe* itself consists of a horn taken from an *inzobe* (Limnotragus spekii), an antelope that lives in swampy areas, or from an *impoongo* (Tragelaphus scriptus). This antelope is also found in low-lying areas, and is frequently seen walking in water. It is said to drink water through its legs. Rwandans say that it does not need to lower its head to drink. It only has to enter the water, and it becomes, in a sense, continuous with it. Another type of horn, less frequently employed, is that of a blind cow that has given birth to both a male and a female calf. Perhaps the reasoning behind this usage is that such a cow has been a fertile being, having given birth to calves of both sexes. The quality of being blind (i.e. the inability to perceive mundane reality) may be associated with the ability to perceive extraordinary reality, a capacity to 'see' into a person's heart. I asked Baudouin about this but he was non-committal: 'Maybe yes, maybe no', he said. He was not exactly a Muchona the Hornet, like Turner had known, though in many ways his character and intelligence resembled that of Muchona (Turner 1969).

Possessing one of these horns is not, in itself, sufficient to exercise the power to perform *gushika*. This capacity must be acquired from someone else who possesses it. The healer must purchase it, as well as the necessary medicines, to make the *ihembe* work. The healer must also make frequent sacrifices to his ancestors and to Nyabingi so that they continue to protect and aid him in his endeavours. Another healer in the Butaro area, named Albert, explained to me that his *ihembe* had not been functioning well. He attributed this to an adulterous wife in his household who had inspired the enmity of Nyabingi and Albert's ancestors. This episode in Albert's life disturbed his relation to the spiritual world and diminished the effectiveness of his *ihembe*. Now he was temporarily abstaining from performing *gushika* and was waiting until he had sufficient money to purchase a goat as a sacrifice to his ancestors, and a bull for Nyabingi. This action, he claimed, would put him back in good graces with the *amahembe* spirits.

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Baudouin, explained to me that one requires the aid of spirits besides one's ancestors (*abazimu*) and Nyabingi to perform *gushika*. These spirits he termed *imandwa*. One such spirit is called *Nzamuzinda*, a spirit who speaks at night and especially about problems concerning *abazimu* or Nyabingi. Baudouin explained that because this spirit cannot speak in the presence of fire, he could not employ him as his personal *ihembe* spirit, for Baudouin always had a fire burning in the hut where he consulted his patients and performed *gushika* for them. Instead, Baudouin called upon a spirit called *Munihuzi* to aid him in doing *kuraguza amahembe*. Baudouin purchased the power to communicate with and employ *Munihuzi* from another healer in the south-eastern Rwandan region of Gisaka. Without *Munihuzi*'s spiritual aid, Baudouin would be unable to perform *gushika*.

Kuraguza amahembe is performed inside a hut, either at night or in darkness behind closed windows and doors. The client spits on the *ihembe* horn, then hands it back to the healer. The client's spittle is referred to here, and in most divinatory circumstances, as *imbuto*, a word which in other contexts means 'seed', 'child' (in relation to his parents), or 'sperm' (Jacob, III: 147). The healer takes the *ihembe* and places it in a small sack made from the pelt of an animal called *intutuzi*. The sack is attached at midpoint to a spear, which is inserted into the ground with blade upward. The healer asks his client to state his name, the nature of his problem, and what he desires to learn from the *ihembe*. If someone has sent an *uburozi* (poison, spell) against the client, the *ihembe* will be asked to seek out the poisoner. When the *ihembe* returns with the voice of the *umurozi* (poisoner), the healer and his client will ask him or her what poisons s/he used, what the motivation behind the malevolent act was, how the poison(s) can be neutralized, what other members or properties of the client's household – wives, children, livestock, fields – have been touched by the *uburozi*. In some instances, the *ihembe* retrieves the *uburozi* itself. In these cases, the poison is later found somewhere within the healer's *urugo* (living compound, enclosure).

When the *ihembe* returns, either with the enemy's voice or the poison, many healers claim to see a streak of light that places itself in the *intutuzi* pelt. Another way of discerning its return is the sound of an approaching motorbike, but which cannot be seen. Sometimes it is only a squeaking sound that alerts the participants to the *ihembe*'s return. This squeaking sound is said to be the voice of one's enemy, captured in the horn. The patient and the healer interrogate the voice and together they interpret its squeaky replies. An interrogation session may last up to an hour or two. The voice never poses questions of its interrogators. The price of this treatment varies, but it can cost up to 2,000 Rwandan francs (RWF) (about $20) or more, with an average fee of about 500 RWF (about $5). If the healer's ministrations resolve the patient's problem, the latter is expected to pay another visit to the healer and

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reward him more generously. Patients tend to respect this stipulation, for I often encountered people whose problems had ameliorated and who were merely visiting the healer a second time to bring him a gift of felicitation. Judging from the number of people who sought his services and the material quality of his life, Baudouin was well off for a Rwandan peasant in that area.

Baudouin's practice straddled two moral universes, one good – moral, moist and fertile – and the other evil – immoral, desiccated and infertile. He was a perennially liminal figure. Even his homestead was spatially liminal as it was unreachable by car, and was a long, hard hike away from Gatisibu. People respected him and they may even have enjoyed his company, but they also feared him. For example, before setting off on the long hike to his compound I would always park my VW bug a bit off to the side of the 'centre commercial' Gatsibu; sometimes it was left there for a couple of days. Once I asked my research assistant if the car would be alright there. Would not someone come by and steal the rubber from the windscreen wipers, or unscrew the wing mirrors, or try to steal the fuel? These were all things that I had endured elsewhere in Rwanda. He laughed. No one would try to do any such thing, he explained, because they would know that I was a friend of Baudouin. If someone caused me or my car any harm, he could do *kuraguza amahembe* and determine the culprit. Then he would probably follow that up with *kwohereza amahembe* and the perpetrator might very well find himself either very ill or very dead.

Baudouin, I believe, saw me as an *umuzungu* unlike others that he had met in the area. There were priests and nuns from Europe and Canada who lived permanently in the nearby mission, and occasionally there were 'cooperants' (development workers) from Europe and the United States. But these others did not spend nearly as much time with Rwandans as I did. They were not interested in things like *ubuvuzi bwa kinyarwanda* (traditional Rwandan medicine). They rarely ate, drank or socialized with Rwandans. They never stayed overnight in Rwandan dwellings. And my purpose in being in Butaro was not to tell people how to do or change things, such as their religious, farming or healing practices. Rather I was there to learn about them and the way that they thought about and did things.

Moreover, Baudouin knew that I was a student. I had told him that the first time we met. I was unmarried, had no children, and not much in the way of a solid social insertion in the land that I had come from. Like him, but in a different way, I was a betwixt-and-between person. Along with my curiosity about him and all the things that he knew, we appreciated each other's humour. I sometimes made him laugh, and vice versa. I could imitate the sound of a trumpet and pipe out a few well-known Rwandan folk songs. That always provoked a great deal of laughter from him and any others who might be there at the time. And I could speak some Kinyarwanda. He probably saw

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in me a person, *hors categorie*, a liminal being like himself. That might have been part of the reason why he treated me with affection and proposed the blood brotherhood ceremony.

Kunywana Amaraso – to Reciprocally Drink Blood

It was just a few months before my scheduled return to the United States in 1985 that Baudouin proposed the idea of performing the blood brotherhood ritual called *kunywana amaraso*. I had known him and been visiting his compound for almost a year by then. When there I was often given hot food to eat, something rather unusual. It was quite common when I visited healers or other Rwandans that I would be given something to drink, but rare that I was given something to eat. Also, on occasion, I stayed overnight at Baudouin's. There was a room to the side of one of his wife's houses that had a couple of beds, each consisting of four wooden posts, cross pieces, and a surface of woven reeds. There were also some blankets; no pillows or sheets but comfortable enough to sleep on if sufficiently tired.

At first I was perplexed by Baudouin's unusual generosity. What was in it for him? My very first interaction with him was when his nephew brought me to his compound. A bit fearful because of the warning given me by the burgomaster's assistant, I found Baudouin to be charming and affable. I stayed a few hours with him, had a very interesting conversation, and then as we were taking our leave, I gave him about 5 dollars in Rwandan money, basically the fee he charged his patients to do *gushika*. He looked at the money, a bit perplexed, and then handed the money to my research assistant, his nephew. It was as if he did not really want or need it. On subsequent visits, I brought gallon jugs of sorghum beer, bottles of Primus (the local brand of pilsner beer), or sometimes, a bottle of whisky. We would drink it together and others present would share in it as well. His daughter conducted a business in the sale of bottled beer and Ugandan Waragi (a distilled spirit made from plantains), and was sometimes present when she was not out hawking her wares elsewhere on the hillside. Sometimes I would buy a few bottles of her beer or a bottle of Waragi to share around. Baudouin did not seem to be interested in me for pecuniary reasons, although the frequent presence of an *umuzungu* at his compound may have enhanced his reputation.

Then one day I had an idea – why not ask him if he would like me to take photographs of his entire household, get them developed, and give him the prints. He very much appreciated that idea and so one day I took pictures of all his children together, then one of each of his five wives, a picture of them all standing side by side, pictures of them with their children, pictures of his Twa helper, and pictures of his mother. I was unable to return to his house-

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hold for several weeks as my VW bug was under repair and I was stuck in Kigali; but when the car was fixed I returned to Butaro with Baudouin's photos. He was very happy with the results, especially so because his mother had passed away in the intervening time, and now he at least had photos of her.

There were other healers, diviners, and Nyabingi *abagirwa* that I frequented while in Butaro. I enjoyed visiting and talking with them. Occasionally I would see them by accident on market days close to the Butaro communal offices. I would usually invite them to a place where sorghum beer was being sold, and buy them a few drinks. It was an excellent method for becoming friendly and loosening the tongue. With Baudouin, however, it was different. I visited him at his compound, stayed for hours, sometimes a couple of days, and ate and drank there. On one occasion I brought him two young women from Kigali who were interested in his services as a healer. We stayed for two days at his compound and then I brought them back to Kigali. They had sought his help because they were looking for employment and were finding it difficult.

During one of my visits, while we were chatting about his healing practice, he told me about blood brotherhood, *kunywana amaraso*. He suggested that we do this ceremony. I accepted and then he said he would give me a bull. What would I give him in return, as *kunywana amaraso* requires an exchange of gifts. The gifts should not be the same things and no account was going to be made of their comparative value. I suggested that I bring some cases of Primus beer and a couple bottles of whisky. He agreed and we set a date.

When the day arrived, I went to Baudouin's with a few others, including my research assistant. All of us were carrying some of the drinks that I had promised to bring. When I got there, I was completely amazed. There must have been close to a hundred people present. Some were Baudouin's relatives and friends from nearby Uganda, some were from Butaro, both men and women. All the women were dressed in their finest attire, African *kanzus*. Some of the men were wearing African attire as well. Others were wearing what African men usually wore, namely Western clothing that had made its way to Rwanda via the used clothing trade. But they were carefully dressed, and no one was wearing work clothes.

A Ugandan relative of Baudouin spoke to the assembled crowd, explained the occasion, and showed everyone the bull that Baudouin was going to give me. It was a young bull about three years of age. Standing next to the bull, I stroked its flank. It seemed quite docile and friendly, but I wondered what I was going to have to do with it. Then I gave a short speech in Kinyarwanda. I told everyone how happy I was to see them there, that this was a very touching occasion for me, a tribute to Baudouin's warmth as a person, and I thanked them for their kindness in welcoming me into their midst. I asked

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them to pray that circumstances would work out properly so that I would be able to come back to Butaro after first returning to the United States to finish my work there. At the end of my short speech, people clapped and cheered, and women ululated. I was quite overwhelmed. I had not expected anything like it. Then a man stepped forward. He had a small razor blade in his hand. He made a small nick on Baudouin's abdomen and passed it to me to lick off the blood. Then he made a nick on my abdomen with the razor blade and Baudouin licked it.

After that we went inside one of the houses on the compound. One of Baudouin's Ugandan relatives was a man who spoke good English and seemed fairly well educated. He explained to me what was going on and what I was expected to do. He said that I must have done very well to become integrated into this community, and that now I was considered one of their kin. Baudouin made some comments about what blood brotherhood was all about and I made some comments. I did not really know what to say so I just made it up as I went along. We then went to another room in the house, we stopped at the threshold and Baudouin reached with his hand above the door jamb to pick up a bit of dust. He touched me behind the ear with his hand and then said that this was now my house too. I could come whenever I wanted, and stay for as long as I wanted. But I should observe discretion when talking about other members of what was now my family as well as his. He then lay down on a bed in that room. I was told to lie beside him. He put his arms to my shoulders and I was told to do the same. Baudouin then proceeded to say that we could never have jealousy between us. If I slept with one of his wives, there would be no animosity between us because of it. Similarly, he could sleep with any of my wives. At the time, he had five wives and I had none. I thought to myself, he is really getting the bad end of the deal here.

Then we all relaxed and began to drink sorghum beer, bottled beer, and some took small shots of whisky. We sat around and chatted. I then walked around the compound some, and one of his wives asked me to buy a few cigarettes for her, which I did. She was now, in a sense, my wife, and I had better do what her other husband would do. Then the newly elected *conseiller de secteur* came up to me and asked me to pay a tax. I was startled by this. I have to pay a tax? Whatever for? My research assistant explained to me that whenever there was a transfer of wealth in cattle, a tax had to be paid to the commune. I found this to be a little crazy, but someone else explained to me that bovine wealth was different from other forms of wealth, as in a way it was thought of as belonging to the entire community, so any transfer of bovine property had to be accompanied by sharing a bit of that wealth with the commune. I paid the tax. The *conseiller de secteur* had a packet of receipts. He wrote something on one of the receipts, tore it off the pad, and handed it to me. It was proof that I had paid the tax.

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The celebration continued, and people seemed to be having a great time. Women danced, sang and ululated. Some of the men joined in the dancing. Many of the dance steps were moves that I had only seen *intore* dancers do. One man played a drum. He was an astonishingly good drummer, providing the beat that people were dancing to. This was an amazing moment of communitas. I had indeed experienced a 'rite de passage' in the fullest sense of the term. I was no longer the same person, the perennially liminal *umuzungu*. People present came up to me, clapped me on the back or shook my hand. It was all very moving and far beyond what I had expected it to be. I felt that I owed something to Baudouin that I could never repay. This was the man who was supposed to kill me if he did not like me. Yet he proved to be one of the most generous and expansive people that I had ever met in my life. Nothing in my life, before or after, has come close to that experience.

I thought long and hard about all this. Maybe I should just stay here in Butaro. Why go back to the United States and face all that one has to do to finish a PhD, get a job, and so forth? Weeks later, Baudouin and I would talk about this; 'Just buy some land', he said. But for now there were other things that needed to be accomplished.

My Departure from Rwanda, and My Return

Just a couple of months after performing *kunywana amaraso* with Baudouin, it was time for me to go back to Charlottesville and begin writing my dissertation. Before my departure I noticed that many in Butaro knew about the *kunywana amaraso* ceremony. Many now referred to me as '*umumwanyi wa Baudouin*' (Baudouin's blood brother). I was no longer simply an *umuzungu* to them, and no one ever addressed me as such. On one occasion a woman approached me, said she was a relative of Baudouin's, and asked me to do a favour for her, which was to get her husband out of jail. I told her that I was not sure I could do that, but would do what I could. A day or so later, I asked Baudouin about it and he laughed heartily. Yes, the woman was related to him, but not all that closely. And her husband was not the best person in the world and probably deserved to be in jail. He found it amusing that she had asked me to intervene on her husband's behalf, because there was nothing I could do.

Later I asked him what he thought I should do with the bull, which one of the local herders was keeping for me in exchange for a nominal fee. Baudouin suggested that I sell the bull in the market place and use the money to help defray the cost of my ticket back to the United States. With some of the proceeds of that sale, I bought a sheep and brought it to him a few days later. He thanked me, but did not slaughter it at that time as he had already slaugh-

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tered a goat, because he knew I was coming. We had goat meat kebabs and, of course, *ikigage* (sorghum beer). I took my leave, and several days later I was back in Charlottesville.

I corresponded with Baudouin after my return to UVA, the University of Virginia. A little over a year later (1987), I went back to Rwanda to see if some of my hypotheses about Rwandan traditional medicine could be confirmed. I also found a VW bug to rent from the Catholic missionaries' Economat General in Butare. With this, I was able to visit Butaro. I found a place to stay and then went on to Gatsibu. I was surprised by the number of people I knew from before, and by their enthusiastic reception. Several of them came up to me and shook my hand, *Umumwanyi wa Baudouin*! I was an old friend that they were surprised and happy to see. It was very moving. From Gatsibu I made the trek to Baudouin's compound and found things very much the same as when I had left him in 1985. I was able to visit Baudouin several times during the summer of 1987. On one occasion I brought a Belgian woman who was married to a close Belgian friend of mine, a surgeon who worked with the Belgian 'cooperation' (development group). Baudouin gave her a chicken, which she brought back to Kigali.

I returned to Rwanda again in 1993. At the time I was employed by Family Health International as a behavioural researcher. My job was to study Rwandan sexual networking with a view to lowering the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. I had continued to correspond with Baudouin every so often during the intervening time but only up to 1990. I received his last letter in the autumn of that year, while I was employed as an instructor at the University of Chicago. I responded but did not receive a reply. That October I was having a small morning snack when a University of Chicago graduate student saw me and told me about what he had just heard on the news: Rwanda was at war. A large group of Ugandan soldiers had deserted the Ugandan army and invaded northern Rwanda – it was the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1993, after the Rwandan government had been at war with the RPF for three years, the two sides arrived at a truce, the Arusha accords. In the autumn of 1993, the truce was still holding.

Baudouin's part of Rwanda had come under the control of the RPF. It was for this reason that he had been unable to correspond with me after October 1990. But now I was living in Kigali, Rwanda I thought I might be able to obtain permission from the two antagonists, the RGF and the RPF, to traverse the demilitarized zone between them and enter Butaro. But that proved to be impossible, only a privileged few who were living in Butaro, some of the European Catholic priests, for example, were able to do this. Then a friend of mine who worked for the International Red Cross and whose job involved visiting the camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) told me that he was aware of a camp where many of the IDPs had come from Butaro. We could

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visit this camp and maybe I would find my *umumwanyi* there. So one Saturday this friend and another Rwandan, who was Tutsi, decided to visit the camp. When we arrived a small mob of people who were living at the camp surrounded the car. We were nonplussed but we asked if anyone present had come from the *Kindoyi Secteur* of Butaro. One of the men came forward and we explained to him that we were looking for Baudouin the healer who lived in that sector. Yes, the man knew him. I explained to him that I was Baudouin's *umumwanyi* and that I was trying to find him. Yes, Baudouin had indeed taken refuge at this camp shortly after the RPF incursion. But after a few months, RPF associates had come to the camp and told people that they could return unmolested to their places of residence in Butaro. One of the people who had taken them up on this offer was Baudouin. The man explaining all this was not in any way menacing, but we were not sure about the others, whose numbers were increasing by the minute. We were becoming nervous, especially my Tutsi friend, because we could not tell whether the intentions of the small mob around us were peaceful or not. We gave several people some money, passing it through the open window and drove off.

I returned to Rwanda on subsequent trips in 2005 and 2009 to help my wife, who was Rwandan, with affairs related to her parents, who had been killed in the genocide. On both occasions I was told that it was unsafe to visit Butaro because of strife there. Had Baudouin, who was already in his fifties when I knew him in the 1980s, been able to survive all that had occurred in that part of Rwanda until then? It was very unlikely, but I never learnt what became of him.

Turner's Ideas of Rite De Passage, Liminality and Communitas

Turner's ideas about rites de passage, liminality and communitas were inspired by Arnold van Gennep and Ferdinand Tönnies. Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1909), among the hundreds of books that he putatively authored based on observations of rural France, is his only contribution to anthropological theory. Despite this, it was an extraordinary contribution. His model has proven to be applicable to many ethnographic areas all over the world. In this relatively short book, van Gennep sketches out the three stages of a rite de passage, and introduces the concept of the limen and liminality. Turner's work concentrates especially on the middle stage of the rite de passage, the period of liminality. From Tönnies (1963), Turner expanded upon the idea of gemeinschaft. Simultaneously affective and social, gemeinschaft refers to the sentiments that cause social units to cohere and perdure in time. Tönnies uses the family as one of his core examples. Ideally, members of a family share a warmth of sentiment that keeps them committed to their spe-

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cific family, and differentiates them from other families. Gemeinschaft can also characterize other more encompassing social groups that individuals become a part of. Periodically, gemeinschaft requires revivification. Ceremony and ritual provide the means by which members of a family or a larger social group rekindle the sense of 'belonging-ness'. Clearly Turner expands upon the notion of gemeinschaft as the underpinnings of his thoughts on communitas.

During a rite de passage, the period of liminality is characterized by what Turner called 'anti-structure'. Customary social roles are put into temporary suspension, hierarchy is attenuated or disappears, and the individuals who are undergoing the rite de passage meld into a group, where individuality, selfishness and competition are suppressed. In some instances, anti-structure entails the complete reversal of ordinary social roles and identities. The high and mighty are humbled, the lowest become the highest, and gender roles are reversed or rendered ambiguous. Group consciousness prevails over consciousness of self. Some critics of Turner have pointed out that this may be an over-idealized view of the liminal state and of communitas. When Tönnies used the example of the family to illustrate gemeinschaft, he was quite knowingly using a social institution characterized by hierarchy. It is possible to have gemeinschaft of the type that Turner emphasizes, egalitarian gemeinschaft or communitas, but hierarchical gemeinschaft is closer to Tönnies' original idea. Critics of Turner's ideas on liminality have pointed out that rites de passage do not always produce selfless communitas, but may instead reinforce hierarchy and social differentiation. Anti-structure may merely be the temporary pressure release valve that enables structure to reassert itself more strongly in the end.

Turner's tendency to extend his model of liminality and communitas to other ethnographic areas besides Africa has also left him open to the criticism that he essentializes both concepts. But Turner does not, in my view, reduce these concepts to essences. Liminality and communitas, are open-ended and variable in Turner's model. They cannot be defined by a list of fixed traits and characteristics. That would be a static way of defining these concepts and would seem to be antithetical to Turner's avowed project to portray social and cultural phenomena, not so much as Durkheimian 'social facts', but as processes being worked out over time in the ebb and flow of social life. If there is error here, it is more on the side of imprecision than on the side of misplaced concreteness. What is inside liminality? How is it defined? These seem to be concerns that would empty Turner's work of its dynamism were they to be pushed too far. But there may be merit to the criticism that he over-universalizes his concepts. Liminality, anti-structure and communitas may be very common in rites de passage and in many different ethnographic areas, but are they necessary concomitants of all rites de passage?

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What I find most interesting in the case study presented here, in which I could be said to have been both subject and object, is Turner's emphasis on the idea that the temporary suspension of structure can be emancipatory, sometimes in a lasting way. It can free ritual participants of a burden, the burden of an ascribed social category that they no longer wish to embody. That is what this has the potential to do for individuals. As for the other members of the social group, liminality, anti-structure and communitas have the potential to demonstrate to them that their own categories are often arbitrary, and can be impediments to alternative ways of imagining their social being and the social being of others. Liminality can change the ontological underpinnings of both individuals and social groups (Kapferer 1988). In my case, becoming a blood brother to Baudouin freed me from the ascribed category of *umuzungu*. It freed those who witnessed the ceremony or who heard about it later of their propensity to think of me solely through the lens of one of their established social categories, that of *umuzungu*. At the very least, they could entertain the idea that not all white people were alike. Could that have led some to reflect upon their other established ethnic categories, particularly those of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa? Maybe. Maybe not. But it is certainly not far-fetched to advance that idea as a hypothesis. Although I remained an *umuzungu* to some Rwandans elsewhere in the country, that term was never again used in my interactions with people in Butaro.

I cannot generalize from my experience of communitas during the *kunywana amaraso* ritual to every instance of rites de passage out there in the world. But I can affirm that the sense of liminality that I felt during my early fieldwork in Butaro was diminished by virtue of my having undergone this ritual. I was not the same person after it as before it. During the *kunywana amaraso* ritual there were many signs from Baudouin's entourage that their feelings were sincere about my becoming part of their social group, and part of a Rwandan family. I was treated that way for better and for worse. It definitely changed the way that other people in the Butaro area related to me. The communitas that I experienced came very close to Turner's depiction of it. It was egalitarian gemeinschaft, not hierarchical gemeinschaft.

Those of us who have done anthropological fieldwork of the old-fashioned kind (i.e. actually living with people for extended periods of time and conscientiously trying to diminish the enormous social distance that separates us from our interlocutors), realize that our assumptions about the world are placed in abeyance. We are in a sense entering a liminal state

without full consciousness of this. If fieldwork succeeds in teaching us something, it effects an almost teleological suspension of the axioms of our own culture about civilization, morality and the nature of reality. When we have to return to our own societies, as most of us do, we return as transformed people. We no longer embody the unstated idioms, the tacit mean-

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ings, and maybe even the unconscious structures of our natal cultures in the same automatic and uncritical way. We are no longer members of our cultures in the same way that we once were. A change in cosmology may accompany the performance of fieldwork, especially when we undergo a rite de passage such as the one that I experienced. And when our cosmologies change, we become liminal beings of another sort.

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Christopher C. Taylor is a retired anthropology professor who was employed by the University of Alabama, Birmingham, until 2009. He has extensive experience of Rwanda, starting fieldwork there in 1983 and returning several times. He was there in April 1994 at the outset of the genocide; at the time he was working on an STD/HIV prevention project with USAID, and had to be evacuated. He last visited Rwanda in 2009.

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CHAPTER 4



THE RIGOURS OF THE LIMINAL

Effecting the Real in Theatrical Labour

Daniel Sherer and Martin Holbraad

Introduction

The notion of liminality is mainstay to the ever-growing interdisciplinary literature seeking to articulate the particular characteristics of theatrical creation. From its original formulation by Victor Turner in his studies of the intersection of ritual and theatre under the sign of 'social drama' (Turner 1982, 1990), and through to the academic literature in the broader field of performance studies that grew (partly) out of it (e.g. Schechner and Appel 1990; St John 2008), the idea that theatre is liminal has acted as an example of itself, fertilizing reflection at the interstices of academic and artistic production. That this should be so is hardly surprising. A 'hippy' notion, as anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano remarked (1984: 475), the idea of a socially realizable realm of 'a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities ... striving after new forms and structure' (Turner 1990: 12) chimes beautifully with what one might think makes the theatre itself beautiful. In particular, the notion of liminality speaks to the two features of theatre that most seem to make it special: firstly, that its form is to be, precisely, *special* – which is to say, different from the run of everyday life, set apart from its mundane rhythms, beyond the 'threshold' (indeed, *limen*) of ordinary reality; and secondly, that the formal separation between the ordinary and the special is a function of a basic difference in the *content* of life on stage and life off it. *Qua* liminal the special character of the theatre turns on its worlds being populated by the luminosity of the betwixt and between – 'ambiguous ideas, monstrous images, sacred symbols, ordeals, humiliations,

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esoteric and paradoxical instructions, the emergence of "symbolic types" represented by maskers and clowns, gender reversals, anonymity, and many other phenomena and processes' (Turner 1990: 11).

Our aim in this chapter is, in a sense, to intensify this insistence on the idea of the liminality of the theatre. Suitably located ethnographically as a key element in the process of theatrical creativity, and considerably sharpened analytically, the idea of liminality can indeed capture much of what is distinctive in the way the theatre, and its peculiar claim to reality, 'works'. Indeed, the critical traction of our argument relates to our interest in what we call 'the work' of the theatre, by which we mean the intense, meticulous and highly precise activities in which participants in theatrical productions engage when preparing a show. In fact, the impetus of our argument stems largely from the rather blatant mismatch, as we perceived it ethnographically as anthropologists of the theatre, between commentators' emphasis on liminality as a byword for ambiguity, betwixt and betweenness, freedom, endless possibility and so on, and the ethnographic impression that, when at work, what practitioners of the theatre are overwhelmingly concerned with, and insistently focused upon, is precision – or, in the word of our title, 'rigour'. So, in effect, in this chapter we wish to articulate a more rigorous understanding of the work liminality, suitably understood, does in and for the theatre. Far from free and hippy, we wish to show that liminality 'works' precisely because of the rigours it imposes upon the work in which practitioners of the theatre engage.

As we will seek to show, the rigour of the liminal is key to understanding the peculiar character that theatrical reality acquires – namely, what we call the 'hyper-real'[1] quality of theatrical artefacts. While the notion of liminality typically connotes a realm that is somehow 'less' real than the mundane world of everyday life – 'the 'subjunctive mood of culture', as Turner called it (1990: 11) – what the 'as if' of liminality engenders in theatrical work are what we are terming theatrical artefacts or objects (characters, scenes, beats, plots, emotions, etc.) whose 'special' nature can be said to reside in the fact that they are *more* real than 'real life'.[2] The excess of reality, as it were, in the theatrical product is, we suggest, a function of the role of liminality in the process of its production.

Our argument is built upon our ongoing ethnographic engagement with processes of theatrical production. Having worked for over a decade in the anthropology of ritual and indigenous cosmology (e.g. Holbraad 2012), Martin Holbraad has in recent years been conducting ethnographic research on theatrical productions in the United Kingdom, first with the London-based physical theatre group Frantic Assembly, charting ethnographically the production of the devised play *Stockholm* (written by Bryony Lavery and premiered in the UK in 2008), and more recently with Dan Sherer's own

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company, whose work provides the main ethnographic foundation for the present chapter. Sherer, on his part, has been working as a director and playwright for the past seventeen years, and is now conducting doctoral research as an anthropologist, focusing ethnographically on the processes of theatrical creativity as manifest in the work of theatre groups in the US as well as the UK. The research presented here, however, draws primarily on Sherer's collaborative auto-ethnographic foray with Holbraad, documenting the production of his own company, the work of which will be described in more detail in what follows.

Before embarking on our argument about the rigours of liminality and its effects in theatrical labour, we comment on our choice to focus ethnographically on Sherer's company – here called simply The Company[3] – a group whose work is specifically oriented towards processes of devising to generate its plays. While 'devising' is but one approach to producing theatre, focusing on the specific way in which The Company approach devising is particularly appropriate for exploring liminality ethnographically. This is because the objective of Sherer's theatrical methodology is to render the workings of liminality as open and transparent as possible within the creative process. For this reason, it provides an optimal ethnographic setting for our study, the argument of which relies precisely on rendering ethnographically explicit the inner workings of theatrical liminality. Sherer's theatrical work, therefore, serves as something of an ethnographic laboratory for exploring our anthropological concerns. Indeed, as we will show, the conclusions we draw from our study of what is a devised theatrical practice provides insight into forms of theatrical creativity more broadly (i.e. not only devised work), including, say, an RSC production of *Hamlet* at Stratford, or indeed the production of a hit musical on Broadway.

The way in which The Company renders the inner workings of liminality explicit serves as such a test case because it is directed towards solving what is perhaps the abiding problem for Western traditions of theatre: namely, the question of how to generate theatrical artefacts that are believable, compelling enough to be experienced as 'real' – or, in Sherer's terminology, 'real enough'. We begin our ethnographic account by positioning The Company's theatrical methodology in relation to this problem.

The Problem of Effecting the Real

The problem of how to generate theatrical artefacts that can be experienced as real – the problem of, as it were, suspended disbelief in the theatrical product or, as we may call it, the problem of 'effecting the real' – is central to articulating the power of drama, and the practices through which it is engen-

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dered. While it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to review the full range of responses that theatrical practitioners and theoreticians alike have given to this problem (from Aristotle on tragedy onwards), it is indicative that the problem lies at the heart of Stanislavski's famous 'System' – arguably the prime reference point of Western theatrical modernity; indeed that which Richard Schechner describes as 'still the most influential school of modern acting and directing' (Schechner and Appel 1990: 41). In essence, Stanislavski's system is based on the idea that the power of drama depends on actors' ability to behave 'as if' the on-stage circumstances – Stanislavski's term for all the narrative events and details that make up the conditions of the play – were real; or, to make Sherer's procedural leap, 'real enough' that they engender the actor to behave in a continual conjunctive phase of the 'as if'. Despite the inherently repetitive process of rehearsal and performance (so conducive to unreality), and despite even the basic fact that everything that happens on stage is, by and large, predetermined by the script, and in a particular sense, is always constructed, actors nevertheless must experience the events that they enact on stage as if taking place now, for the first time, night after night.

So, for Stanislavski, the task of making theatre that is real is translated as a challenge for the actor: 'How am I supposed to pretend not to know what happens next, when actually I do?' The System casts the solution to this challenge as a matter for the actors' imaginative capacities: live the circumstances demanded of you by the play 'as if' they were real. Provided these circumstances are fully articulated within the parameters of the imaginary mode of the 'as if' – embodied simulations of the real – they gain a reality of their own, which is experienced as 'real enough' by the actor such that they instigate the actors *real acted* (so performed) behaviour, and is similarly mimetically experienced by the audience. Stanislavski's System, then, consists of an integrated practice of techniques that allow the actor to achieve this.

The Company's approach is rooted in Stanislavski, insofar as their method also translates the general theatrical problem of effecting the real into the actor's technical problem of foreknowledge – that is, of having not to know what one already knows. However, rather than essentially placating foreknowledge through only the imaginative apparatus of the 'as if', The Company effectively seeks to minimize the effects of foreknowledge, as their methodology for generating theatrical artefacts is concertedly oriented towards minimizing the need for actors to orient towards the future, and so, in a sense, to 'pretend' at all.[4] This is achieved by orchestrating the process of rehearsal (and indeed, ultimately, performance too, although this chapter does not finally engage with The Company's work in performance) in ways that place the actors amidst 'circumstances' that are continually new, and thus are experienced for the first time, each time. In other words, The Company's methodology reframes the actor's challenge: 'How do I pretend not

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to know what is going to happen next, when I do?' becomes 'What if I *don't* know exactly what is going to happen next?'

The group's core task, then, is to create the conditions under which the actors, quite literally, do not know what will happen next. This involves, for them, putting in place two crucial conditions for the actors. First, to shift actors' attention away from what will happen (e.g. as dictated by a script), in order to focus their activities only on responding to circumstances as they emerge at any given moment. Adopting an essentially improvisatory stance, the actor is not required to play out a predetermined sequence of events (even if there is one, as given in a script), but rather to respond only to the immediate and preceding circumstances as found – and above all to the similarly improvised behaviour of the other actors participating in the scene at that time. So, what will happen next is no longer the relevant question. The actor only needs to be concerned with what *is* happening *now*, including the circumstances that led up to it, in order to be in a position to respond directly, and to offer their behaviour.

In order for this to be able to occur, however, a second condition needs to be put in place; namely, each actor has first to inhabit the character whose position their responses are meant to embody. The character, according to this approach, acts as the imaginative resource, or lens, that guides the actor's improvisatory responses. The 'truthfulness' of an actor's real-time responses on stage, therefore, turns most crucially on their detailed and intimate grasp of their character, through which they can channel their own behaviour. Again, the image of lensing is helpful: each actor passes their own behaviour through the imaginative constructed lens of their character's circumstances. After all, the actor's job according to this methodology is not merely to act out what, say, Hamlet is supposed to do in a given scene, but rather to respond to the circumstances of that scene *as* themselves in Hamlet's circumstances. In order for this basic shift in the conception of the actor's task to occur, The Company's entire methodology is oriented towards building up sufficient imaginative resources for each actor to be able to inhabit an imaginary self (the character), essentially by generating a back story of circumstances for their life trajectory, and so creating that lens.

To ensure that this imaginary self is experienced sufficiently as to generate the ultimately necessary acted behaviour, a crucial element of The Company's methodology is that that the actors *themselves* generate each detail of their characters' lives through improvisation. The actor builds the lens up. The fact that the characters and their behaviours originate from decisions the actors themselves make in the construction of those characters, as well as through subsequent improvisation, is fundamental, as it is meant to establish actors' agency and consent in the process, and hence the legitimacy, for the characters they come to embody. This process of imaginative construction,

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then, is supposed to render the actors 'owners' of their behaviour, continually empowered and free to change it in response to changing circumstances, as these unfold in the improvisatory/responsive modality of the process of rehearsal, as well as performance.

The Company's signature focus on actors' capacity to generate their own vast imaginative resources in order to achieve acting that is immediate and responsive in the Stanislavskian sense also explains The Company's predilection for devised work. While, as we will see, The Company's improvisatory techniques can be used to produce an existent play, the process of devising a new play from scratch is very much suited to their creative methodology. For just as the vast imaginary worlds that the actors create allow them to generate characters that can respond truthfully in the 'present', so they also provide the raw materials from which a new play can be built. Indeed, the fact that The Company's devised work is primarily built from materials generated by the actors through the process of character construction and improvisation (as explained in more detail below) only enhances actors' 'ownership' of the characters from whose position they 'respond' during rehearsal and performance. In a sense, the 'devised' script that Sherer develops from these materials comes to act more as a *record* of the actors' behaviour (scenes, beats, lines, gestures, thoughts, etc.) than as a guide for it, as conceived in more traditional processes of theatrical productions in which actors are expected 'only' to 'deliver' the lines of the script and enact a physical score.

Thus, in Sherer's conception, when the actors are called upon to create in their on-stage work the circumstances, words and behaviours indicated in the script, the result is not so much one of repetition or representation, but rather of what we might term 're-presentation'. Having created the imaginative circumstances that instigated their behaviour in the first place, the actors effectively re-improvise it 'for-the-first-time-again' in front of the audience. To give a sense of how this complex methodology for generating theatrical reality is put into practice by The Company, we now provide a broad account of The Company's approach in producing their plays, from initial concept to the finished, stage-ready play. This account provides the basic ethnographic coordinates for our subsequent discussion of the role of liminality in The Company's creative process, in which we also present more fine-grained ethnographic accounts of The Company at work, based partly on our ethnography of key stages of the development of a production.

The Company as Method

The Company's productions typically begin with an initial narrative idea, conceived by Sherer, The Company's director, in collaboration with Anna

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Bewick, The Company's creative producer (at the time of the fieldwork they were married). Once the initial concept of the play is sufficiently developed for Sherer and Bewick to have a clear idea of its shape, actors are cast. In light of The Company's approach, casting requires that the actors selected both match the characters as envisaged at this stage of the play's development, and also that they are suited to the improvisatory techniques integral to The Company's work. Casting, therefore, is treated as a particularly important element of the creative process.

Once the cast is in place, each actor begins a prolonged period of 're-hearsal', during which imaginary characters and their supporting imaginary worlds (i.e. the characters' entire backgrounds, families and life histories) are constructed. Typically at this stage each actor works individually with Sherer for a number of weeks in regular meetings of a few hours. Gradually each actor constructs a fully functioning character, which Sherer refers to as their 'imaginary self' or 'lens'. Each comprises a life-trajectory, starting with the character's first memories, through to the present, as understood within the imaginative frame of that life – all of these details are recorded by each actor in a notebook, which increasingly becomes a major point of reference as their character develops. Working with a number of actors at the same time during this period, part of Sherer's task is to act as a go-between, ensuring that the imagined worlds being made with each of them are consistent with each other.

Sherer then gradually incorporates the characters' lives into a single imaginary universe, bringing actors together by making them 'meet' through shared improvisation, unifying their individual characters' life trajectories into a shared chronology of a now singular imaginary world. This 'incorporating' phase of the process takes place in a larger rehearsal studio, over a number of consecutive days – usually between eight and fifteen, depending upon resources. Working now as a group, the actors are encouraged to interact through various techniques of improvisation. These improvisations typically draw upon circumstances that have already been established in the preceding independent periods of work, effectively weaving them together. Throughout this process each actor keeps their own relationship with their character private, recording in their individual notebooks elements pertaining to their character as they continue to emerge. 'You only know what you know' is the mutually agreed principle with which they work. This mutual opacity is particularly important, because it constitutes a prime condition for the responses between actors to emerge in the process of improvisation.

The objective of the group rehearsals, then, is to render improvisations self-generating, as choices are made that bring about new improvised events. Gradually, these improvisations are meant to constitute the shared imaginative world for the actors involved, and become the raw material of

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the play-to-be. Sherer's role in this period is to compose the improvisations into a logical narrative structure. Indeed, much as with the requirement for mutual and agreed opacity between actors during improvisation, Sherer's capacity to shape the play's development throughout this process turns on a fine and ever-negotiated balance between his own foreknowledge of what might happen and a deliberate lack of foreknowledge of what might happen.

On the one hand, in order to gain a vantage on the emergent materials that improvisation generates, Sherer must keep a firm eye on the guiding narrative idea on which the still-evolving play turns. In particular, as Sherer sees it, this involves maintaining a handle on what he calls the 'inciting event' of the narrative – the event, as he explains, 'of which all other potential events are repercussions'. For example, in the case of *The Return*, The Company's at-the-time in-development production upon which this research is focused, the inciting event is a decision made by two of the characters, a married couple, 'Caitlyn' and 'Jimmy', to leave their imaginary newborn child behind when they flee to America from England. This is the event that Sherer hopes to engender, with the actors coming to that decision themselves, based upon the logic and pre-existent experiences of their imaginary lives, and from which the narrative should take off. On the other hand, allowing the improvisations to unfold as the generative source of the play's development means that Sherer must concertedly avoid pre-empting any of the repercussions of such inciting events, allowing instead the space for their consequences to emerge through the process of improvisation.

So, to return to the example, although Sherer knows what the inciting event of the play is supposed to be – that Caitlyn and Jimmy leave their child – he deliberately avoids planning either what the specific details of that event should be, or what the consequences of that event may be. Instead, following the methodology of The Company, Sherer abdicates final agency to the actors, trusting that their decisions will make both logical sense with regard to their characters' intentions, and will instigate further narrative events that can be improvised.

In this way, the narrative of the play effectively constructs itself, with each improvisation instigating further improvisation, and this process slowly comes to form the substance of the play being developed. The material thus generated is recorded on camera and documented in note form by Sherer, in order to be subsequently transcribed, written up, and refined into a script. This script is then taken into more formal rehearsal in the traditional sense, as The Company prepares for public performance – a phase of production that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Having described in broad stokes the process through which The Company devise their plays, we now provide account of the process of 'warm down', which is what The Company call a series of preparatory exercises

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and procedures with which each working day of their rehearsals and performances begins. In doing so, our main aim is to show how this work is abidingly focused on engendering what we identify as a state of liminality, which, as we will explain presently, constitutes a necessary condition for the creative operations that the subsequent work of rehearsal involves. Contrary to common associations of liminality with ambiguity, free and profligate creativity and a general atmosphere of mystique (as in some aspects of Turner's account noted above), our major claim here is that engendering states of liminality in theatrical rehearsal is a process that is deliberately and meticulously structured, and is characterized by rigor, precision and attention to (and control of) detail.

In particular, as we wish to show, this work turns on the use of deliberate forms of what might otherwise be described as 'ambiguity' (were it not for the precision this actually involves), in order to render participants open to a range of creative possibilities that are then actualized in the work of theatrical creation, as will be discussed in the next section.

In the context of The Company's work, the first move towards the liminal is the focus of 'warm-down': a prolonged process oriented towards achieving a state of 'concentrated relaxation', as they call it by way of contrast to the standard 'warm-up' which is sometimes assumed to be oriented towards a deliberate agitation. The warm-down is carried out before every session, and is conceived in the group's method as structuring, supporting, and making possible the subsequent work of the creative imagination. In what follows we present Sherer's own account, as director of the group, of what this involves.

> The warm-down takes place at the beginning of each day of rehearsal, often also after lunch, and, equally importantly, before each performance once the finished play is actually running. It lasts for about fifteen minutes to half an hour. For The Company, the warm-down is a measured attempt to engender a safe creative state, both physically and imaginatively. In a sense it is also a process of 'letting go', in order that the actors' subsequent creative choices and theatrical inventions can be fully explored, without embarrassment, physical tension or over-intellectualization – all obstacles that might otherwise get in the way of effective imaginative work. It is an attempt to open up creative possibilities, rather than close them down.
>
> As I lead the exercises that make up the warm-down, I also provide a commentary of the logic behind the exercises, thus establishing a regular language and soundtrack to the warm-down that becomes familiar and then intrinsic.
>
> The warm-down begins with me asking each actor to position themselves in the rehearsal room in a space that can be their own – each temporarily apart from the others. I begin to walk between them, asking that the actors' attention first be

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drawn to their experience of the current working space. I ask that stimuli, noise from outside, the hum of the air-conditioning, the sound of my voice, footsteps, not be blocked out, but rather, be consciously registered – that in this context everything is something to respond to, even if that response is virtually invisible; a tiny move here, a physical adjustment or thought there. I suggest that their task as actors is to become sensitive, physically, emotionally, to what is going on, so that they are able to respond to it – not to what they want to have been going on, nor to what should be going on; but to what is actually happening *now*.

By now the room is quiet. Each actor – very familiar with the warm-down – takes up their space, eyes closed, concentrating. I ask the actors to isolate specific muscles in their bodies, and to begin to articulate them, finding the limiting parameters of the movements they are able to make. This is a challenge of mental control and attention to a physical operation. I ask that the actors try to surprise themselves, by making movements that are not habitual, or surprising, and that 'break the habit of the body'. I suggest to them that it is habitual tension that blocks their ability to always translate the impulse for behaviour into behaviour itself. I say that we want to be able to go straight from impulse *to* expressions so that something *happens*, however small, and the actors instinctively respond with physical action: 'Your impulse finds physical manifestation; you don't fail to respond because you are too tense'.

The actors then typically begin to make a series of irregular movements, each apparently in their own interior world. Time passes in this activity. I then ask that they draw particular attention to different parts of their musculature, starting at the top of the head and working systematically downwards; and in the process of that attention, allowing each muscle to relax and become responsive. I suggest, following a Stanislavskian principle, that it is only from a position of muscular physical relaxation that the body truly becomes sensitive and able to respond.

More time is spent doing this. As muscles are released, I ask that the actors begin 'to change their tensions from their own to those of their imaginary lives' – that they start to adjust their physicalities to adopt those of the characters that have been created for each actor up to this point (as per The Company's creative method described in the previous section). The actors' physicalities begin to shift slightly: shoulders lift or drop, fingers clench or start to twitch, weight is redistributed through legs and hips. At this time, I ask that the actors concurrently begin to incorporate their imaginative work, their characters' back stories, into and through their physical adjustments. This is meant to instigate a conflation of physical adjustment and imaginative labour. I ask that they work through their chronologies until the chronological present (i.e. up until the most recent moment that had been created through improvisation in the previous session) in order that they are able to enter that moment directly once the warm-down has concluded. Once again time is spent doing this. When each actor has made it clear that they have reached that chronological present, and that they are comfortable, I ask that, from what we call a 'monitored position' – namely, a position of simultaneously inhabiting the imaginary life and being able to observe it with third-person objectivity – each actor spends a period of time reviewing his or

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> her notebook. (As previously discussed, these notebooks are a prime tool in the process of character creation, containing all the details of each actor's imaginative work up until this point, the minutiae of the back stories, etc.)
>
> The warm-down now complete, the actors are (hopefully) sufficiently relaxed and open enough to inhabit their characters – or lens themselves through them, if you prefer – and are thus more able to create new theatrical artefacts effectively and comfortably.

A first point to note in relation to this description of how liminality is engendered in the warm-down is that this process is deliberately given the form of intense and focused *labour*. In stark and obvious contrast to the connotations of chaos, looseness, or 'play', which the notion of liminality so often carries, The Company has to *work at* achieving the liminal state of 'warmed-down' readiness, wholly focused on the task over a determinate period of time. Note, for example, how often in the description above it is considered relevant that time is passing, or even being *spent*, during each 'exercise' (a synonym of labour, note also). So the liminal state that the warm-down is intended to induce is not achieved automatically or arbitrarily, nor is it imagined as taking the form of merely stepping over some notional threshold or 'limen'. Rather it is dependent upon a concentrated and precise methodological procedure, namely the sequence of events and operations that the director instigates for the actors: designed articulations of the body; verbal messages and orientations; requests for imaginative undertakings; and practical operations, such as reviewing and writing in the notebook (see also McAuley 2012).

Indeed, observing the warm-down as a spectator, as Holbraad did repeatedly during rehearsals of *The Return*,[5] the sense of labour involved in the group's concerted collective focus, with each actor being 'alone together' (*sensu* Turkle 2011 – alone, that is, with their imaginary lives), is overwhelming. Communicated to the actors though a series of normative injunctions delivered in the imperative voice during the warm-down itself ('now try to. . .', 'imagine that. . .', 'write down. . .' etc.), Sherer's normative offers for exertion set the tone of the whole procedure. One might even say that, apart from (though of course also in the service of) its overt function as a manner of transposing actors from 'real' to 'imaginary' selves, the warm-down constitutes an enactment of a work ethic that brings the whole group to the task of rehearsal for the day. The actors confirm this sense of exertion, being not only involved in the exercise but also part of its *point*. As Jot Davies, one of the group's long-standing actors (also assistant director in *The Return*), put it pithily, commenting more generally on his collaboration with Sherer, 'Dan's work is labour, and to work with Dan is necessarily to be caught up in this labour'.

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Moreover, amplifying the contrast with anthropological stereotypes about liminality, it is also significant to note that the manner in which warm-down is meant to coach actors into activating their selves *qua* characters is decidedly *not* to counterpose these imaginary selves to 'reality', the 'mundane', 'everyday life', and so forth. Far from a rupture with the real, the desired state of liminal readiness for the imaginative work of rehearsal is gradually and meticulously crafted, element by element, through a systematic – indeed rather forensic and analytical – attention to emblematically *real* objects: the physical body and the phenomenological environment in which the actors actually find themselves. The entire focus of the warm-down, in fact, is on 'what is really going on' – its labour residing largely in the work of bringing 'the real' into intense focus for the actors. The liminal, one might say, is confectioned not despite – and much less against – the real, but *through* it.

That the process of warm-down focuses so overwhelmingly on the body and actors' directed experiments with it is particularly telling in this connection. Indeed, we would suggest that the concerted attentiveness to particular muscles' states of tension and relaxation is not only basic to, but also metonymic of, the particular way in which liminality is imagined and given form in the group's methodology, namely what they call 'concentrated relaxation'. In a very literal sense, after all, a tense muscle is an *unready* one: it is already committed to – indeed *actualized as* – a particular state, and in order to perform any action that may be required of it, it must first relax. A relaxed muscle, on the other hand, is one of maximal potential: in response to a given stimulus it is ready potentially to *contract* in any required way.

So the idea of liminality as a manner of engendering actualizable potentials is instantiated in the process of warm-down in the most literal way: in its play with the functionality of bodily musculature. Quite literally, in order for an actor to be able to respond *actively* to circumstances in ways that will generate the behaviour necessary for the creation of theatrical work, the muscles of the body have to be physically relaxed, or 'open'. Muscles have to move from impulse (the acknowledgement of stimuli) to expression (the manifested response to stimuli) without hindrance. The emphasis on disrupting the habits of the body during the latter stages of the warm-down is therefore precisely the work of relaxing muscles, and breaking habitual tensions that the actor ordinarily holds in 'the everyday', in order that the body becomes literally able to respond to stimuli.

So, the labour of articulating the body that the warm-down involves is meant to cast the actor in a liminal state of heightened responsiveness *and so inventiveness*, 'opening up the actor', as Sherer put it when asked to explain the purpose of the exercise, so that they are ready to respond creatively to the creative stimuli of rehearsal, be these imaginative or physical. It makes

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sense, therefore, that during the warm-down the incitement to imaginative labour with which the process ends (e.g. 'start to build your imaginative lives'), and the adjustment of physical tensions that goes along with it, only occurs *after* the body is suitably relaxed. In the logic of The Company's methodology, prior to that point the imaginative work would be ineffectual inasmuch as the actor is not at that point fully open – not yet in the liminal state of responsiveness – and so is not fully disposed to undertake creative operations. Indeed, this also explains the group's emphasis on 'concentrated relaxation'. The idea that concentration might be achieved through relaxation turns on the notion that relaxation (including most basically bodily relaxation) engenders the capacity to respond to, to be open to, disparate forms of stimuli that may demand the actors' focused attention as the day's rehearsal unfolds. In this respect, concentrated relaxation is both a mark and a metonym of the actor's liminal state of readiness, as achieved through the warm-down, which serves also to lend the day's work its tenor from its outset.

The Work of Abduction

If the role of liminality in the process of theatrical production is to render participants 'open' to the range of creative possibilities, then how do these possibilities get deployed in the acts of imaginative creation that take place during the work of rehearsal? In this section we draw on our ethnographic research with The Company in order to show in detail how the openness towards imaginative possibilities that the liminal work of the warm-down instantiates, subsequently enables the actors to create 'real' theatrical artefacts through a particular form of creative work.

For reasons that we will explain, we will call this form of work 'abductive actualization'. Our suggestion is that, in its essential formal features, abductive actualization is operative at all scales of theatrical creation, from the minuscule decisions actors themselves might make in how to pursue a particular intention of their character in a given theatrical 'beat' somewhere deep inside the play, or the choices the lighting director might make as to the mood of a particular scene, to the broad topic and arc of a play's evolving script in the kind of work The Company does. Indeed, we would go as far as to speculate as to whether abductive actualization might not capture the core formal structure of *all* creative work, beyond the theatre, including also that involved in producing the kind of anthropological argument our notion of 'abductive actualization' itself instantiates.

In order to articulate this notion through all of its formal detail, however, we focus on a brief but ethnographically revealing extract from The

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Company's rehearsal of *The Return*, in which the formal properties of abductive actualization, and their operative relationship with the pool of creative possibilities that the work of the liminal engenders, can be rendered transparent. The moment involves Sherer and Ben Caplan, an experienced actor with whom Sherer, at this point of rehearsal, has already spent four months developing the character 'Jimmy', whose journey from England to the United States together with his wife Caitlyn constitutes a key point of departure for the play's narrative. Sherer and Ben Caplan are sitting opposite each other at a low table at the centre of the rehearsal space. They are imaginatively working out what Jimmy's emotional reaction to Caitlyn's recent pregnancy might be:

SHERER:
Would it be impossible that, and from a purely hypothetical point of view because nothing is fixed down, genuinely, if it came down to a choice between a child and Caitlyn, you would always choose Caitlyn?

CAPLAN:
(Caplan laughs) Would it be impossible? No.

SHERER:
Ok. Imaginatively what would have to happen in order that that would be the case (imaginatively and within you)?

CAPLAN:
Let me think about it for a moment. No, it's not at all impossible. I mean, all these things are possible. (*Pause*) It is already there. Caitlyn is everything to Jimmy.

SHERER:
Is that clear?

CAPLAN:
Yes.

SHERER:
Are you sure?

CAPLAN:
Yes.

Now, the first point to note here is that this kind of detailed imaginative work is trademark to Sherer's specific creative methodology as developed with The Company. As described above, key to its rationale is the idea that, by engaging in this kind of imaginative improvisation, actors (in this case Ben) come to 'own' the characters they play (in this case Jimmy), as the lives that form the characters' imaginative substance are genuinely created by the actors themselves. The basic tenet of Sherer's method is precisely that if Ben

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is to be able to 'act' Jimmy truthfully, his actions have to be informed by a series of events, thoughts, desires, intentions and so on that Ben has already imaginatively configured, as Jimmy, during the long process of the play's development in rehearsal. According to this approach, then, it would be no good for Sherer simply to dictate that Ben play Jimmy as if the latter were more invested in his relationship to Caitlyn than to their unborn child. It is Ben who has to make that decision, for only if it is genuinely his, and only if he is able to incorporate it into the infrastructure of his character's imaginative life, can the decision act as a motivator for the character's subsequent development and behaviour, not only as the play unfolds during the work of rehearsal, but also, ultimately, in the play's performance as a finished theatrical artefact.

Our main interest here, however, is in the form that this manner of creative authorship takes – its social form, if you like, as a particular manner of action that takes place within the time and space of rehearsal. In particular, we may note the peculiarly back-to-front character of the imaginative (and creative) leap that Ben is invited to perform in our ethnographic snippet. For reasons that at this point in time remain apocryphal to Ben, Sherer puts to him Jimmy's preference for Caitlyn over the child as a possibility for him to consider. That is to say, he presents Ben with a particular way in which Jimmy *could be*, provided Ben is able to assent and consent – a possible 'actualization', as we might say, of Jimmy's character in relation to his pregnant wife. From Ben's point of view, such an actualization effectively comes from nowhere: while he, as actor, is charged with personifying and embodying Jimmy as a character, the prospect of Jimmy putting wife before child is one that had not, at this point, formed part of who Jimmy is – nor, up to now, had this even been entertained by Ben as a prospect of who his character might be. Hence, in fact, Ben's laughter when Sherer enquires, suggestively, whether Jimmy's being thus might 'not be impossible'. 'Would it be impossible?', Ben wonders, 'No' – effectively creating time for this novel emergent possibility to be aligned in his imagination with what he already takes Jimmy to be like. The work being done here between the two of them begins, in other words, as what one might call an (as yet) 'unmotivated actualization' of what Jimmy might be – an image of Jimmy in search, if you like, of a justifying rationale.

It is this priority of the creative result over the reasons that might justify it – or, more broadly speaking, of the effect over its causes – that makes us call the form of such acts of creation 'abductive'. Borrowing the term from anthropologist Alfred Gell, who in turn draws it from its technical usage in formal logic, semiotics and cognitive science (Gell 1998: 14–16; cf. Boyer 1994: 147), we take abduction to refer to forms of thinking that turn on the apparently back-to-front operation of positing antecedents (causes, reasons,

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justifications, etc.) on the basis of their putative consequents (effects, results, consequences, etc.). The general form of such 'abductive' ways of thinking goes something like this: 'What would need to be the case, or to have happened, for *x* to have come to be as it is?' So by presenting Ben with an apocryphally derived actualization of what Jimmy might be, we suggest, Sherer is effectively setting up the first step of an abductive sequence. Namely, the consequent state of Jimmy, which Ben is then called upon to *author* by abductively providing the requisite antecedents that would render such a state theatrically reasonable.

Indeed, the fact that the work of creation is supposed to take the form of abduction is entirely transparent in Sherer's work, and is illustrated explicitly in our ethnographic extract: 'Imaginatively what would have to happen in order that [your choosing Caitlyn over the child] would be the case (imaginatively and within you)?', asks Sherer, effectively inviting the abductive process. And this is just what Ben provides: 'Let me think about it for a moment', he says, before declaring, first tentatively ('No it's not at all impossible. I mean, all these things are possible') and then, following a pensive pause, more conclusively, 'It is already there. Caitlyn is everything to Jimmy'. In fact, at a later point we had the opportunity to quiz Ben about what he actually had to do in his mind during that crucial – indeed, abductively pregnant – pause of his. What, we asked him, made him ask for some 'time to think' when confronted with the possibility of Jimmy choosing Caitlyn over the child.

> First of all I need time to compute the enormity of the ask – this was a major realization, and this on two fronts. First of all, I had to think myself to into a position from which thinking in this way might make sense to *me*. What would I need to get myself to become for me to even think of turning my back on my child? What kind of person would that make me? And what would my wife have to be? [Note that, in his own life, Ben has only recently become a father.] And then there's Jimmy and his own logic. We'd been building him up for months but not until that point did I realize that all the facts and events he had experienced would lead up to him making such a choice. [Q: Are these things you were specifically thinking about at that moment?] Yes, I was scanning the Jimmy I knew from the work before, and making it fit with this realization [viz. that he would choose Caitlyn]. You know, all the things that make Jimmy just that kind of person [e.g. his unreliability, the fact that he was previously in love with another woman whom he'd abandoned to his cost, that he was gambler and saw himself as rootless and unreliable]. But what's interesting is that once you realize that him being this way makes sense, then he just *is* that way – you can no longer imagine why there might even be any doubt about that.

Here it is worth highlighting three points that allow us to flesh out the notion of abductive actualization in the direction of our broader argument

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about the rigours of liminality in the work of the theatre. The first has to do with the *generative* role of liminality in this process. As we saw in the previous section, a necessary condition for the kind of work in which Sherer and Ben engage in our ethnographic extract is that participants are concertedly rendered 'open' to the imaginative possibilities that are subsequently explored in the creative work of rehearsal. Induced through a state of concentrated relaxation, as we saw, this openness can be characterized as liminal partly because it involves a meticulous attempt to overcome the limiting barriers that participants' ordinary life habits and predispositions impose on their capacity to participate in the creative process of rehearsal. The liminality of theatrical work, in this sense, consists of its orchestrated openness to a broader range of potential behaviours than everyday life would allow for.

We may note, then, that it is just such an openness that is at stake in Ben's abductive work in our ethnographic extract. After all, one of the more obvious ways in which Sherer's suggestion constitutes an abductive challenge is that it blatantly contravenes the kinds of normative expectations that ordinary moral intuitions would set up. If not quite 'impossible', the idea that someone might choose their spouse over their future child is certainly morally uncomfortable – potentially abominable even. So for Ben to arrive at a position in which just such a conclusion might make sense he needs to be able to draw on an expanded range of possible ways of conceiving Jimmy's character. Indeed, Ben's own account of the abductive adjustments Sherer's suggestion prompted in his imagination bear out the idea that liminality, understood as a concerted expansion of imaginative possibilities, is crucial in the operation of his creative imagination. The abductive actualization of Jimmy as someone who would choose Caitlyn over the child is a function of Ben's meticulous 'testing' of a variety of possible alternatives, such that the actualization suggested by Sherer finally might emerge as nothing short of *obvious* to him ('It is already there', as Ben himself eventually puts it).

The second significant point in this connection has to do with the precision of this imaginative work. While, as Turner also points out in his aforementioned definition of liminality, there is 'nothing random' about the assemblages to which the work of the liminal gives rise, it is also somewhat misleading to talk of the liminal as 'a fructal chaos, a fertile nothingness', or indeed as merely 'a storehouse of possibilities'. Rather, as Ben's reflections on what he had to do in order to author Jimmy in the way that he did, what is at stake when the liminal comes into play is a meticulous – in a sense ruthless – attention to detail. Indeed, one might say that the work to which the liminal realm of possibility becomes subjected in the process of abductive actualization is overwhelmingly focused on *eliminating* possibilities through the meticulous 'testing' of each of the possibilities entertained, in order to be left with an actualization that is as clear in its rationale as possible. And

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again, it is worth noting that this emphasis on clarity (as opposed to ambiguity, as so often associated with the ideal of the liminal) is made explicit in Sherer and Ben's exchange. Having settled on Ben's actualization of Jimmy, Sherer enquires of the actor: 'Is that clear?' and then again, 'Are you sure?' Furthermore, the fact that providing the leanest possible rationale for the actualization is what is at issue in this process is quite clear in Ben's own commentary on how he arrived at it in this instance. As he explains, abduction is a matter of 'scanning' possibilities and 'making them fit' into a character that can then make sense internally. At issue, if you like, is a process of stress testing – given what I know about Jimmy, how far can I incorporate the suggested actualization? What would Jimmy now have to be for this to make sense?

This brings us to the final point regarding the relationship between abduction and liminality in this context, which has to do with the correlation between the creative work of abduction and the nature of the 'everyday reality' to which it is often counterposed. True, as we have already seen, the operative role that liminality plays in these creative procedures comes down to a controlled transgression of ordinary normative habits and expectations, expanding the pool of possibilities from which creative practice can draw.

What we also saw in the previous section, however, is that 'real life' itself acts as a very important resource for this process of expansion. Here we may also note a second way in which reality informs the creative process liminality enables. For the logic of real life also provides a kind of compass, one might say, which serves to orient the meticulous deliberations that abduction involves, judging one possibility after (and over) another, in order to arrive at a theatrical rationale that might render any given actualization theatrically robust. Note, for example, Ben's reconstruction: while the specific imaginative life that Jimmy has had created for him up to now provides one frame of reference for Ben's abduction, equally crucial, as he explains, is his own sense of *himself* as a father and husband. To imagine himself into Jimmy's shoes involves interrogating himself, as *Ben*, what kind of person he would need to be to make a similar choice. Only once this begins to become conceivable to him personally can it also begin to become imaginatively incorporated into Jimmy's theatrical personality and, most crucially, be subsequently used by Ben as an imaginative resource for improvisations from this point forward – it being, now, a fact of Jimmy's life.

Effecting Hyperreality

This point about the generative role that 'real life' comes to play in the abductive procedures of theatrical creativity speaks directly to our overall

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contention in this chapter about the rigorous character that liminality acquires in the theatre. As we noted in the introduction, the tendency in the Turnerian tradition has been to emphasize the potentials of liminal times and spaces to be less constrained, and in that sense less serious perhaps, than the ordinary life from which they are structurally distinguished – the liminal (in this case the theatre itself) as somehow 'less than real' life. By contrast, our attempt to unpack the rigorous manner in which liminality operates in theatrical creation shows that in a crucial sense the artefacts that are engendered through this operation, and that make up the theatrical production, are best conceived as *more* real than the real-life counterparts to which they refer. In inverting Turner's characteristic of liminality, therefore, such theatrical artefacts constitute a reality that might be considered, in a sense, hyperreal.

This hyperreal quality, we argue, is a function of the liminally conditioned process of abductive actualization itself – in fact, it is *effected* by it. For, as we have illustrated, the process of abductive actualization turns on what is effectively a testing of possible 'back-to-front' causal sequences that might motivate particular artefacts (e.g. in the instance above, Jimmy's newly adjusted character). But, as we saw, what is being tested in this process is not simply the plausibility of a suggested actualization (Jimmy's choosing wife over child), but what we might call its consequentiality; that is, the test meticulously 'selects for' theatrical artefacts that are most replete with meaning and are therefore as 'consequent' as possible in instigating (as well as being instigated by) the action of the play. Each abductive actualization must answer the question: 'What is the most effective, and most motivating, actualization?' All redundancy – anything that has no apparent point in relation to the action of the play – is discarded. In this way these artefacts become more robust than their real-life counterparts – because, in effect, they *are*. They are imbued with *only* the most meaning, with the most capacity to further motivate subsequent robust artefacts; there is, as it were, only the consequent – perhaps even an excess of the consequent. Indeed, seen in this light, the entire theatrical production (the summation of all the artefacts that make it up) is itself deliberately orientated towards the 'consequent'.

The net effect of this process, we suggest, is a kind of 'up-scaling' of the theatrical product, such that what goes on stage appears to contain only consequential elements, which are in that sense 'richer' and more 'meaningful' than everyday life. The everydayness of life, after all, consists precisely of its free admixture of things that are significant with all sorts of things that do not matter at all. In generating a spatial and temporal frame that is filled *only* with artefacts that are consequential – made to brim with meaning due to the careful sifting out of redundancy – the process of abductive actualization yields theatrical performances as forms of life that appear to contain more

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reality, more of that life itself, than what goes on outside the frame of the theatre, in the everyday world.

Conclusion

We suggested at the outset of this chapter that the particular modus operandi of The Company can serve as an ethnographic laboratory of sorts, inasmuch as the group's particularity lies in the fact that it renders explicit core characteristics that are integral to processes of theatrical creativity more generally. Abstracting away from the particular manner in which these processes are enacted and rendered explicit in The Company's manner of working, we would like to conclude by indicating how our central claims regarding the rigours of liminality and the creative operations of abductive actualization may have a wider purchase, giving rise to a more general understanding of how much of theatrical creativity operates.

Take an imaginary production of *Hamlet*, involving a hypothetical actor – call him Imaginary David Tennant (IDT). Given the role of Hamlet, IDT must, in the most basic sense, behave as Hamlet behaves by imagining himself into Hamlet's circumstances. We suggest that, just as occurred in our ethnography, IDT will do this through a whole series of abductive actualizations, at different orders, all generated through confrontation with the 'problems' laid out in the script. As was the case in our earlier ethnographic example, all of these problems are ultimately best conceived as iterations of the basic problem that IDT is precisely *not* Hamlet in Hamlet's imaginary circumstances, and that therefore he is required to behave in ways, and say words, that are not his own. In this sense, *every* element of the script (be that back story, time, place, etc. through to each spoken word) constitutes a problem – a required but as yet unachieved actualization – to be confronted, and so each instigates the back-to-front logic equivalent to Sherer's 'would it be impossible. . .' Indeed, the chief difference from our original ethnographic example is that in this case the script itself takes the place of Sherer, presenting the actors (along with everyone else involved in the production, including the director) with a series of artefacts that have already been 'selected for' by the playwright, providing the pregiven starting point for the process of abductive actualization through which they will come to life on the stage.

So, in each confrontation with the text, IDT must 'select for' effective actualizations (essentially potential solutions to each problem) out of myriad possible actualizations, and then test them, both against their plausibility in the real world, the logic of the rest of the play, and also against his own experience. Should those actualizations be deemed rigorous enough – that is, they most effectively motivate what the script requires Hamlet to do – IDT

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incorporates them into his Hamlet's theatrical personality, and utilizes them to inform the behaviour of his character; the particular consequentiality of each artefact thus rendered effecting the performance's hyperreal character on the stage.

To take a specific example from the script, we know that Hamlet has romantic feelings towards his mother Gertrude. Hence the script sets up the potential actualization, or problem, that IDT has to confront and realize. Therefore, from a position of engendered liminality where multiple actualizations are *in potentia* – IDT effectively *asks himself* 'would it be impossible that Hamlet has romantic feelings for Gertrude?', to which his answer must be 'no': it is, after all, in the script. At this point the abductive operation is effectively initiated – the necessary outcome has been determined – and so IDT must subsequently ask himself, 'what do I have to do to make that possibility true for me, as the actor?' So just as in our ethnographic example with Ben, IDT must test the potential actualization for its robustness, against both the benchmark of 'real life' from which the possibility of the actualization is drawn in the first place, and also against his own experience – just as did Ben, in relation to his position as a husband and father with regard to Jimmy's choice: wife vs. child. IDT will then either successfully complete the Copernican move around the problem in order that the necessary possibility *is* actualized (just as Ben managed to do in our ethnography), or he will not. If he is successful, IDT will be able to utilize that 'new' artefact in his formulation of Hamlet, and so act effectively 'as if' Hamlet had romantic feelings for Gertrude, thereby justifying the action of the play, and in a sense, making that artefact really 'real'.

The logical end-point of this argument is to suggest that abductive actualization may operate at every scale of theatrical creativity, from the writing or creating of a script, through the actor 'effecting the real' with regard to their on-stage behaviour, through to the (apparently) simplest of tasks of speaking a line. In each instance, it is the confrontation with the not-yet-actualized (so, the 'not impossible') that instigates the peculiar, liminally conditioned, back-to-front operation that we take to be fundamental. One might even wonder whether this form of creativity – for what we have sought to elaborate here is indeed just a matter of a particular *form* of creative operation – might not, in fact, be limited to the theatre at all. That is, perhaps it is precisely the confrontation with the 'not impossible' – whatever its source, so in its widest definition confrontation with the problem of alterity itself (cf. Holbraad 2012) – that constitutes creativity in the first place, with creativity thereby taking the form of the Copernican back-to-front logic of abduction towards possibilities not-yet-actualized. If that were so, we might entertainingly (but boldly nevertheless!) be able to characterize any creative activity, as inherently theatrical.

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Dan Sherer is an acting teacher at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, where he leads the teaching of Stanislavskian Active Analysis at MA level. He is undertaking a practice-led PhD through University College London, under the supervision of Martin Holbraad, on the possibilities and implications of doing ethnography within the imagined world of a theatrical play.

Martin Holbraad teaches social anthropology at University College London. He is the author of *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (2012); co-author of *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (2017) and *Anthropologies of Revolution: Forging Time, People, and Worlds* (2020); and co-editor of *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (2007) and *Framing Cosmologies: The Anthropology of Worlds* (2014). His research interests include Afro-Cuban religions, revolutionary politics, and, more broadly, the relationship between cosmology, politics and other forms of social invention.

NOTES

1. Note our use of the term 'hyper-real' is in no way meant to allude to the condition of post-capitalist modernity as described by Jean Baudrillard, but rather refers to the particular character of theatrical artefacts as laid out in this chapter.
2. In a sense the theatre has always been concerned with instigating itself as 'more real' than real life: from Aristotle's analysis of tragedy (and implicitly therefore the playing out of those tragedies on stage) as exposition of the human condition in its most extreme and heightened form; through Artaud's 'Theatre Of Cruelty', challenging theatre-makers to deliberately heighten the audience's sensory experience far beyond that of the everyday; to Brecht's call that audiences see through the theatrical artifice of the stage to the 'true reality', a structural reality if you will, of socio-economics, which underpins the behaviour of his characters.
3. The Company is a pseudonym for the theatre company that Sherer ran from 2006 until 2014. The Company was paused and formally disbanded in 2019 following changes in Sherer's personal life. This chapter is based upon fieldwork conducted during a ten-day period of formal improvization in January 2012 at the Mercury Theatre Colchester, and at the Lakeside Theatre Essex, for The Company's then-in-development play, here entitled *The Return*. For ease of reading, this chapter assumes a present tense in its description of The Company.
4. Note here, 'pretend' ascertains particularly to the sense already discussed of predetermining what you are going to do, as an actor, moment to moment – as opposed to denying the theatrical frame itself. At all points the actors in The Company are working within a theatrical and thus a fictive frame – a frame that is clearly acknowledged and established by The Company.
5. At the time of the fieldwork, Sherer had been working with the actors for a number of weeks in his capacity as director/playwright, with Holbraad joining The Com-

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pany for the first three days of formal improvisation. By that stage, actors had already created their characters, and were now beginning to interact with a view to generating material for the narrative. As well as Sherer and Holbraad, The Company of actors (four of them – Ben Caplan, and three others) the room also included Sherer's long-term collaborator, Jot Davies, who was assisting him, and Anna Bewick, The Company's producer.

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CHAPTER 5



SACRIFICE, SOVEREIGNTY AND THE DYNAMICS OF STRUCTURE AND ANTI-STRUCTURE

Rohan Bastin

> 'One is tempted to speculate about the relationship between the hippies and the Hydrogen bomb.'
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

Victor Turner (1969: 148) highlights the spirit of the times when he identifies the threat of a new mass-death event as a powerful factor behind the effervescent 'happenings' of the hippies in the 1960s. By framing such excursions into 'anti-structure' in the hope of remaking the world in relation to the more routinized elaborations on communitas found in non-modern or what Turner calls tribal societies, Turner not only eschews the primitivism of the hippies but also identifies the similarities with modern forms of practice. As a genuinely comparative study, *The Ritual Process* thus stands with its contemporary publications *The Savage Mind* (Lévi-Strauss 1966; now republished as *Wild Thought*) and *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 1966) as landmark works that extend with both rigour and intent the project of anthropology. In the shadows of the mass-death events of the twentieth century, the new academic disciplines exploring alternative ideologies in hand with the critique of the roots of these disasters captured the minds of many, myself included.

A major point of *The Ritual Process* is, then, that there are many things to learn about and from non-modern societies and the non-modernism that persists in all societies, but going primitive was not one of them. For com-

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munitas occurs not only in the interstices, but also on the margins – the sites of social exclusion for outsiders and inferiors. Histories cannot be rewritten by donning a feather, especially when that feather is actually a debutante's *cotillion*. Liminality and its communitas relate specifically to the threshold – a separation-in-transition. It may be a border that relaxes to become a point of entry – or, importantly, it may not. The condition may, therefore, be liminoidal in the sense of having the attributes of the liminal without any clear entelechy other than itself. Or possibly a broader function – a neocolonialism perhaps – about which the hippies were seemingly ingenuous or fed by the same duplicitous romanticism of previous generations recalling Winnetou and Old Shatterhand with psychotropic additives.[1]

The hippies are, then, noted at several points in *The Ritual Process* but described as contemporary examples of spontaneous communitas or anti-structure outside the normative and ideological variants of that phenomenon. This feature of the social movements of the time is then compared with antecedents such as the Franciscans, whose founder was also enjoying renewed interest in the shadows of mass-death,[2] to raise the question of what kind of structures are around the corner and what kinds of ritual contribute to their dynamics. For the key to Turner's approach is the sense of the dynamics of structure and anti-structure, the relationship between being and becoming, as these form and reform in the ritual process. Here, moreover, resides the main difference between Turner and Lévi-Strauss and Douglas, who focus on cognitive systems and social morphology as relatively more static forms than what Turner's dynamic approach explores. In this way, Turner's structuralism never loses sight of a sense of process or history; an orientation to practice at once characteristic of the Manchester School and, in its attention to ritual, moving in new directions (Evens and Handelman 2006). But more than simply pursuing new directions of thought informed by changing social theories and historical circumstances, the anthropology of ritual developed by Turner taps into the dynamics of ritual itself. Central to these dynamics is the liminoidal, or better the virtual, as the condition of possibility that can open new directions (Kapferer 2004). Where the liminal marks the interstice, the virtual acknowledges its innovations and opens up an even more powerful dynamic for both the anthropology of ritual and for anthropology more broadly.

This chapter addresses these innovations by considering the role that ritual sacrifice plays in the dynamics of structure and anti-structure in a more recent 'happening' – the *début*/royal wedding of Harry Windsor and Meghan Markle in 2018. Through a consideration of that event, the chapter addresses both the relationship between liminality and sacrifice, and a further reflection on the era of *The Ritual Process* and what the effervescent 'happenings' of that era achieved. More specifically, the chapter takes up Bruce Kapferer's

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observation regarding how, for Turner, 'structure/anti-structure have a life/death resonance, an endless cycling of renewal and decline, and then rebirth full of new potential' (Kapferer 2019: 1). This remark ties with a significant analytical point that Kapferer (1997: 185–220) makes in a lengthier discussion of sacrifice in the Sinhala Buddhist anti-sorcery rite known as the *Suniyama*, where he describes sacrifice as '*the* total act which condenses or has immanent within it qua act the generative processes of human beings and their life worlds' (ibid.: 187 original emphasis).[3] He then suggests that sacrifice should be regarded as lying at the core of what anthropologists routinely describe as ritual, not because sacrifice is violent or somehow a deferred violence but because at its heart is the concern with the unmaking and remaking of the world. This suggestion resonates with a comment by Turner in *The Drums of Affliction* that Ndembu blood sacrifice symbolically constitutes 'at once the end and the beginning of cycles of social development', with the actual sacrifice seldom concluding a ritual performance rather than occurring somewhere within it (Turner 1968: 276). Turner continues: 'The sacrifice, then, represents "the high spot" rather than the termination of a ritual. It is a "spot" where, in native belief, the visible and invisible components of the cosmic order interpenetrate and exchange qualities' (ibid.).

Sacrifice and the liminal are thus intertwined, and it is telling in this regard that Turner includes a classic instance of a *rite de passage* – ritual circumcision – among his examples of sacrificial 'high spots', declaring circumcision 'as a species of sacrifice' (ibid.). This is not simply because of the blood but rather the 'life/death resonance' that rites of passage in general display with neophytes acquiring the character of victims who are, as it were, put to death and reborn. While not necessarily as extreme, brutal or indeed dangerous as a circumcision or some other forms of initiation, wedding ritual of the kind explored here nevertheless displays the same logic of life/death resonance, and, thanks to Turner, these points are well understood and frequently documented (Grimes 2002).

Sacrifice and Sovereignty

What follows, therefore, is not simply another study of a rite of passage but a consideration of the lifeworld in which a particular rite of passage occurred, and the kind of 'happening' or critical event that was enabled. In particular, by examining a royal wedding, the chapter will consider the relation between sovereignty and sacrifice by posing the questions as to why royalty, kingship or, more simply, sovereignty is so ritualistic, and why this ritualism, the theatre of statehood, so often involves status reversal, comedy and other forms of egalitarian transgression, including but not limited to the violence

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of contest, hunting and sacrifice. These are of course well-trodden paths in the study of ritual, but like Roman roads, they all-too-often appear to track towards a clearing where scholars and theorists imagine primordial humanity to reside in the nakedness of its pristine desires, drives, and feelings of inadequacy or mimetic rivalry (Girard 2005). My hope is to avoid such an explanatory regression to pristine human nature, not because it is wrong necessarily but simply reductionist. Following Turner's dynamics approach, I would suggest that it is a style of reasoning internal to the logics of sacrificial liminality itself.

A vast literature attaches to the pristine human nature or the 'all-roads-lead-to-man' perspective, much of it preoccupied with the work of René Girard (1986, 1987, 2005, 2011) and to a lesser extent Walter Burkert (Burkert 1983; Burkert, Girard and Smith 1987; Bloch 1992). A broader survey and discussion of this literature is warranted, albeit elsewhere.[4] For now, I will simply note how ritual transgression has long formed a distinct intellectual problem for scholars who isolate the transgressive, some would say Dionysian, features of ritual in terms of a primordial imaginary informing a speculative account of human nature. Desire and its concomitant lack are too readily identified as projections of this nature, which is all too often an economistic individualism that simply reduces ritual to a so-called hierarchy of needs, ranging from male autopoiesis (Jay 1992) to power and status (Bell 2010; Bloch 1992), with varieties of functionalist utilitarianism in between. In this way, sacrifice becomes an inherently flawed undertaking and hence a modernist problem (Zachhuber 2013), becoming a discrete phenomenon with a distinctive history separate from the study of ritual, with much attention centring on its violence and, concomitantly, its relation to primal scenes of killing. It becomes, in other words, the 'hot spot' of ritual studies at the expense of what surrounds it.

In some ways, sacrifice has been the poorer for this special attention, where liminality is identified more neutrally as a ritual phase – a necessary interstice between existential states remarkable for its parallel articulations of symbols that breakdown, recombine (often bizarrely) and refresh ideas and orientations to the world (Turner 1967: 106). In my perspective, however, this is precisely the nature of sacrifice and, more importantly, the dynamics of structure and anti-structure in the ritual process. Closer attention to the liminality of sacrifice would, then, gesture less aggressively in those explanatory directions, and note other and arguably more important features such as the prevalence of substitutes and simulations as the communication of *sacra* in sacrificial and other rites of passage rather than as expressions of deferral and transference or repression of primordial desire. This is not to say that such features do not exist but rather to suggest that we should avoid such reductionist explanations, the roots of which are firmly embedded in

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modern utilitarian ideology (Dumont 1977, 1986). Such ideology struggles with anything but the pragmatic value of ritual, and so strives to identify functions of varying degrees of latency where the underlying principle is the sense that at the heart of all ritual lies a pathological lack, a sense of human fallibility in the face of the world. Treated less pathologically, sacrifice and its inherent liminality can be viewed as having the power not only to reposition individuals in the world, but also – to borrow Lévi-Strauss's concept of the totemic operator – to 'detotalize' and 'retotalize' these worlds (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 146–47).

More than intertwined, sacrifice is then the liminal par excellence, and as such it forms one of the most fertile grounds of human creativity at the interface of life and death. Describing the features of the liminal phase, Turner noted the often-monstrous nature of its ritual symbolism as a form of communication that 'breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation' (Turner 1967: 106). By placing a man's head on a lion's body, for instance, one can speculate about humans, lions and their shared world, which now becomes a world of analogical or polythetic possibility in which the threads connecting and forming semantic domains depend as much on their differences as their similarities. Substitutes are then kinds of monstrosity in the sense of portending, albeit not necessarily something dire in the conventional sense of the monster as the sum of all fears, but instead something that is exotic and at the interface of being and becoming.[5]

The Old Chestnut of the Nuer Cucumber

Fearsome monsters as sacrificial victims do of course exist and, like the Tarasque water monster in the church feast of Tarascon (Dumont 1987), their sacrifice acquires moral dimensions associated with taming, capture and the conquest of evil. But other substitutes lack such association. The famous Nuer cucumber,[6] for example, that is cut lengthwise in twain as a substitute for an ox, is hardly frightening. Nevertheless, it is a sacrificial offering that enables in its simplicity a speculation on the double-orientation of offerings both upwards to higher beings and outwards to the wild in the manner of the Biblical scapegoat – hence the nature of that lengthwise cut and its resonance with the proper orientation of the animal victim's fall (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 211). Moreover, the cucumber is, like the ox when sacrificed, called a cow '*yang*' (ibid.: 203). More than monstrous, the cucumber as a sacrificial substitute thus becomes a complex symbol, a portent or becoming. Its simple form not only belies but also enables its polysemic and speculative possibilities.[7] It may be the poor alternative, less effective than the real thing, but so too is the ox, which is, I suggest, itself a substitute for

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the real sacrificial prize – the cow – that was far too economically valuable to be sacrificed but was instead continually reinstated by its surrogates.[8] The cucumber-as-*yang* may thus lack economic value and never itself be substituted by an ox or any other animal in the hierarchy of offerings, and nor can I imagine any great feast of cucumber being anticipated other than in the expectation of the animal sacrifice that would eventually replace it. But one should not be confused by a 'poor cousin' perspective that imagines the abstract totalities of complex symbols as necessarily valuable in material economic terms, when their value is precisely *symbolic* and, concomitantly, hierarchical in the Dumontian sense of an 'order resulting from the consideration of value' that is 'an integral part of representation in holistic ideologies' (Dumont 1986: 279–80). For such objects may just as easily be 'priceless' as they can be worthless, and it is in this way that they may become 'total services' – gifted objects and actions, the value of which is always greater than their economic worth (Mauss 1990: 12).[9]

Perhaps more famous than his discussion of the sacrificial cucumber is Evans-Pritchard's characterization of Nuer society as stateless (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1970). But sacrifice also throws doubt on this idea because it enables one to think of the cow as the Nuer sovereign being. Of course, it was the ox that stood atop the rankings of sacrificial creatures, just as it was men who commanded the social field, but in the hierarchy of value it was the cow that commanded the semantic domain, doing so in its twinned domestic and wild forms, and their associated biopolitical and necropolitical attributes. These attributes stem, according to Nuer cosmogonic myth (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 49), from the primal murder – the killing of the mother of the first cow and the first buffalo by men – and the feud that ensues where Buffalo attacks men whenever it finds them in the bush (the wild where it dwells), while Cow remains among men causing them to fight and kill each other through a mutual parasitism arising from Cow's voluntary surrender to being the source of the perpetuation of human life. For it is cattle that create society, and this is evident, for example, in the role of bride wealth in creating paternity not only for men but also for women and the dead (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 109–11). Such bride wealth is intimately entangled, moreover, in compensation for homicide (blood wealth) often serving a double function. The 'cattle complex' is thus archetypal in the sense that, like Jungian archetypes, it dwells at the interface of life and death, the essence of the human/animal (structure/anti-structure) relation. It thus shares biopower and necropower – the full sense of sovereign being as the hierarchical life/death relation made possible by ritual.[10]

In my scheme, therefore, this is the heart of sovereignty and its relation to sacrifice – the king's first body, as it were, that enables the second body to be filled by a human being, albeit not necessarily.[11] By their very stateless-

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ness, the Nuer thus reveal the essential features of the state. The Nuer cow is comparable to the sacrificial, albeit human sovereign being of the eastern neighbours of the Nuer, the Shilluk (Evans-Pritchard 2011). Put differently, where the Shilluk have a human king whose life and death follow a sacrificial path, the Nuer have cattle – Cow – with whom they will 'cease together' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 49). Instead of depicting the two groups dichotomously as stately and stateless, hierarchical and egalitarian, I prefer to characterize the Nuer society as being grounded in the practice of sacrifice, where that sacrifice has not been captured hierarchically (embodied) other than by all men, and so remains through its multiplicity of substitutes a society in which sovereignty is not absent but deeply embedded and widely dispersed. Put differently, I am suggesting that the egalitarianism of the Nuer is intimately connected to the power of their ritual and their mutual parasitism with their cattle.

Moreover, I would say that the embeddedness of sovereignty in Nuer society arising from its sacrifices also resides in its onto-cosmological concepts of kinship, which identify the Nuer self as an emergent property of what I will call 'haemopoiesis' or blood-making.[12] Such haemopoiesis is founded on the uniquely social character of blood (*riɛm*) as one of the three 'cardinal principles of life' (Hutchinson 1996: 75), evident not only in male initiation but also in its female complement in childbirth (ibid.: 190) as well as in the ready distinction the Nuer make between the social and biological father made possible and mediated by 'blood' and, of course, cattle.

The social nature of blood is evident, moreover, in the Nuer concept of homicide as the capture or entrapment of the foe's blood, and how acts of killing inform the nature of feud. This is revealed by the rite known as *bir* performed by a leopard-skin chief (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 152; 1956: 213), but I will use Hutchinson's terminology '*bier*' and 'earth priest' (Hutchinson 1996: 106). Upon killing a man, the murderer seeks the sanctuary of the earth priest's homestead and fasts until the priest cuts the killer's arm twice with a fishing spear, making two downward (expelling) incisions on the man's shoulder, and also performs a sacrifice of a steer, ram or he-goat provided by the killer (recall again the double-movement of the sacrifice). In this way, both the sacrifice and the killer's bleeding release the blood of the victim that was internalized in the body of the killer by the act of homicide. Only then can the compensation negotiations between the respective (feuding) kin of the murderer and his victim proceed.

Evans-Pritchard stressed how the leopard-skin chief had no juridical power in these events. Nuer society may not, therefore, have had kings in that legalistic sense, but this does not mean it did not contain sovereignty. That sovereignty was, instead, embedded in ritual. To use the language of Kantorowicz (1957), among the Nuer one of the king's two bodies was in-

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visible (everywhere and nowhere) and the other was the cow. The sacrificial surrogates were the ritual symbols that formed the simulacra of power that became the imaginary and seductive power of the State. Such a State is not reducible to the actual world of kings and states, because what *they* comprise are the limited forms of territorial and economic capture of what is always a cosmological process. Put differently, every king is a simulacrum of kingship, its second and actual body portending the macrocosm it represents. The marvel of Nuer statelessness is that by having no actual king the nature of the two bodies of kingship is brought into stark relief, and this was indeed the 'peace in the feud' (Gluckman 1955).[13]

I am arguing, then, that the Nuer cucumber breaks the cake of custom to enfranchise speculation on the relationship between sacrifice and sovereignty. Concomitantly, it informs the compulsion for ritual, the pomp and circumstance, that underlies all forms of statehood. Such pomp and circumstance, evident for example in the recent coronation of Britain's King Charles III, is not, however, simply a display – a theatre – but rather a fraught cosmological process in the imaginary of power striving to represent itself to itself.

I want to explore these ideas through a less recent royal ritual that some may decry as merely a television spectacle that, like a hippie in headdress, is a mere approximation to the *realpolitik* and, as it were, '*real rituel*' of genuine states and monarchs. I disagree, and while I am mindful that some may mock my disagreement by declaring that once one decides that a cucumber is a sovereign being one has little choice but to imagine the power of royal ritual, I can only fall back on my original observation about the intensity of royal ritual. I want, therefore, to examine some contemporary royal rituals to appreciate their sacrificial nature and the tremendous human fascination people have with such rituals and their leading players. Put simply, why do we fuss so much about the emperor's new clothes, and how might that relate to someone substituting a cucumber for an ox, or a father-in-law for a father?

The Iconoclastic Nature of Crowning Oneself

Hubert and Mauss (1964) commence their essay on sacrifice by distinguishing the royal unction from sacrifice, declaring the former to be merely a status change for the neophyte where, in sacrifice, that change is more encompassing and can even include non-human entities like new dwellings. A *sacre* is thus a consecration rather than an immolation, albeit with a fine line separating the two, and a line underscored by the two bodies of sovereignty – the 'house' so to speak and the individual occupant at the time. As

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examples of *sacre*, coronations are, therefore, good examples of the relation between sacrifice and sovereignty, because in the former the focus is the transformation of a new monarch into twin bodies.

While the instances of monarchs crowning themselves are considerably greater in number than the most notorious case when Napoléon Bonaparte became Emperor of France in 1804, self-*sacres* remain remarkable (Aurell 2020). But perhaps more important than a scandalous instance such as Frederick I in 1701 or Napoléon a century later is Jaume Aurell's conclusion that coronations have a long history of ritual innovations, one of which one might call the DIY variant. Napoléon's *sacre* remains a beautiful example. After careful planning, he arrived at the capital's main cathedral dressed already in the robes and crown of a Roman emperor, and thereby conjured 'up the spirits of the past' in a new formulation (Marx 1978: 9–10). The crown that had been prepared for the rite was redundant, as was the Pope who had travelled to Paris to perform the *sacre* but appears to have been privy to what would transpire when, in preference to leaving the official crown hollow, Napoléon used it to crown his wife Joséphine. Priest and king were thus combined in the republican body of the new emperor, who had transformed the coronation into another critical event reconfiguring the social dynamics of post-Revolutionary France. This was expressed not only in the relation between Church and State but also in the sense of the laity (*laïcité*) as a generalized egalitarian body of undifferentiated labour from which an unrestricted modern bourgeoisie could arise (ibid.: 10). Personal dress, moreover, played a critical role in these fashion politics, and in this way Napoléon was buying into what the historian Lynn Hunt has identified as a critical feature of the larger spectacle of revolution (Hunt 1998). Put differently, while Napoléon might have been the only person in a toga, all around him the citizens of the new republic were wearing new clothes.

Marx notes the emperor's Roman robes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* declaring how, like Luther before him, the new emperor draped himself in old clothes as the symbols of authentic authority. But where the predecessors had been iconoclasts smashing the feudal system, their successors set about the bourgeois capture of the momentarily free republican body still revelling in its iconoclastic spectacles of storming the Bastille, bearing witness to the decapitations of the aristocracy and, later, every 'enemy' of the Revolution in the Great Terror. The ritual theatre of power was, therefore, not limited to the actual coronation event but to a larger revolutionary spectacle: the 'hot spot' of the Terror where the visible and invisible interpenetrated, and, as Hegel (1977: 355–63) describes it, Spirit descended from heaven to earth and took on the form of an absolute freedom ascending 'the throne of the world' (ibid.: 357). These were indeed exceptional times; times in which the anti-structural power of sacrifice, its 'mere anarchy' (to borrow from Yeats)

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was 'loosed upon the world', and 'a new rough beast' slouched 'towards Bethlehem to be born'.

The importance of iconoclasm in these political events has been identified by Dominique Colas (1997) in a powerful study of the history of the concept of civil society. Commencing with Luther and the Reformation, especially the extreme iconoclasm led by Zwingli and Müntzer, Colas traces the history of civil society and civil war into the time of the French Revolution and its aftermath, stressing the importance of the symbolic gestures in the theatre of politics in ways that relate closely to the argument being made here about the ritual process. For indeed, the actions of Napoléon in his self-coronation were not just symbolic gestures but acts of '*destruktion*'. By this I mean acts of identification of the traditional content of ancient ontology that are then systematically dismantled in order to identify the primordial experiences of being by which lifeworlds are apprehended. The term '*destruktion*' was coined by Heidegger (1962: 44) to describe his phenomenological method. Translated as 'deconstruction' partly through the work of Derrida, the hermeneutic developed by Heidegger as *destruktion* is not simply interpretation or *verstehen* but more radical in its sense of identifying primordial experience and striving to recreate it. For my purposes, the term elaborates on Turner's description of the interpenetration of the visible and invisible in the 'hot spot' of sacrifice and Hegel's description of Spirit descending in the secularization of the Great Terror. Iconoclastic violence is, in other words, intensely anti-structural. It does not simply destroy but highlights ancient ontologies through its acts of violence such as Alexander the Great's slashing of the Gordian knot.

The Wedding of Harry and Meghan

Perhaps oddly, I was reminded of Napoléon's carefully planned hubris when I watched on television the 2018 royal wedding in Britain of Henry Windsor (aka Prince Harry) to an African American television actor Meghan Markle. The wedding broadly followed the sacrificial logic of an initiation typical of the Western 'white wedding' with the usual symbolism of that rite, including, for the royal men, military costume and accoutrements. Weddings are thus public events with state (and church) sanction, multiple symbols of fertility (flowers, page-children, sometimes rice or confetti) and the three phases of a *rite de passage* including an integrating feast known as the 'breakfast'. The principal neophyte is the bride who wears the dominant symbol of the rite – a special white dress that is normally invested with magical properties and kept hidden from the groom until the rite begins, and the two families joined by the alliance become wife-giver and wife-receiver.[14] Weddings

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are also some of the most widely practised initiations in the contemporary world, and concomitantly some of the most innovative and personalized consumer events (Grimes 2002).

Many people in Australia, and I imagine elsewhere, especially women, declared in their passionate enthusiasm for the 2018 event that they 'just wanted to see the dress' (albeit with the woman inside it). A few, a very small number in my limited survey, noted the fact that Markle is a divorcee and therefore no stranger to marriage or presumably sexual intercourse. A mere generation earlier her white wedding dress would have been disparaged because the 'meaning' of the dress is meant to be virginity.[15] However, like the mother–daughter bond symbolized for the Ndembu by the milk-tree (Turner 1967: 34), the ideological pole of meaning is subverted by ritual practice and emotional response. As the dominant symbol of marriage, the dress symbolizes the bride's liminal neophyte status, not her sexual history. While rarely worn in subsequent marriages because of expense, white wedding dresses are not forbidden; and while this was not the bride's first marriage it was her first time for becoming a (real) princess. Moreover, white wedding dresses have grown in popularity around the world. An industry attaches here with the lucky dress designer becoming famous and hopefully rich from their commission.

The wedding of Harry and Meghan then proceeded to become too remarkable and, for me at least, reminiscent of Napoléon's coronation. In the spirit of intensifying identity politics, particularly as these feature black/white women at the creative threshold of unmaking/remaking race (Streeter 2012), the bride subverted the father's role of sponsor who 'gives the bride away' to offer herself as the initiate – at least almost, for there remained a boundary within the ritual enclosure, the chapel at Windsor Castle, that separated the initiate from the ritual space and thereby gave a role to the groom's father (the then future King Charles) to become a surrogate father to the bride as well as father to the groom. The twist followed a brouhaha before the wedding when Markle's father, a white American, gave several paid interviews to the popular press about his daughter in which he stressed his importance in her career. In the event, Thomas Markle did not attend because he was recovering from heart surgery. The strong sense, though, was that he had been excluded and his daughter was responsible for this abdication. In addition to the secret of the dress, there was now the question of who would be giving the bride away. Would it be her mother who had behaved with impeccable aloofness towards the media throng? The answer was no. Meghan's mother performed the traditional role and was simply in attendance while the daughter gave herself away. This was all about the individual collapsing the initiate and sponsor roles into a fluid state between the solitary bride and the royal family into which she was marrying. There

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was, quite simply, an element of gender politics and the individualism that underpins that politics. It was a republican body in a white wedding dress that entered the chapel amid the anomaly of the wife-giving father now also being the wife-receiver.

At this point, the wedding became decidedly strange. It included an African American preacher, prominent African American television and sporting celebrities, and a British-based Anglo-Caribbean gospel choir that performed in the African American style. British celebrities and older aristocrats did their part by being visibly uncomfortable with what became a prolonged event of at times jarring innovations that presented to the world the British monarchy's new relationship to its racist and slavery-based past. The commoner woman thus did not simply become royal. She also converted the royals into African Americans by becoming a vector for the uncanny return to the past. The couple then drove away in an environmentally conscious electric version of one of the iconic and arguably most phallic English sports cars of the 1960s – an E-Type Jaguar with the wedding date forming its registration number; the whole symbol declaring in effect 'Something old, something new in Year Zero'. To cap it off, the car was left-hand drive, and so although Prince Harry drove the car, Meghan may have appeared to some to have been in the driver's seat. It was an act of symbolic capture that one can imagine gladdening the hearts of a few old iconoclasts while also generating for others a degree of discomfort.

Unsurprisingly, it did not take long for the British press and its public to unite with the nation's discombobulated aristocracy to depose the usurper who had presented to the nation a version of the master–slave relation reformulated by this black/white embodiment of the threshold of race rendering Britain's relationship to its past intensely uncomfortable. In 2019, the couple took legal action against a tabloid newspaper, and Harry publicly declared that the campaign against his wife paralleled his dead mother Diana's bitter and ultimately tragic experience. While the legal action has received widespread public support, it has also invited criticism that the British royal family does not demean itself by going to court in the manner of an ordinary citizen. The attempted conversion of the Royals vis-à-vis their kingdom's racist and enslaving history has thus failed spectacularly, and in 2020 the couple chose to abdicate and move to California from where they will be able to pursue a more conventional celebrity lifestyle and campaign more aggressively for the revisionist history gaining momentum through the iconoclastic Black Lives Matter protests of that year, when historical figures with close associations to slavery, racism and empire, such as the Royal Africa Company stalwart Edward Colston, who had his statue toppled, defaced and dumped in the Avon River in Bristol. Meghan's carefully choreographed wedding might have lacked the spontaneous violence of Colston's fall. Nev-

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ertheless, it employed the same dynamics of anti-structure to imagine a rebirth full of new potential – failed perhaps, but not forgotten.

Like the coronations and weddings, innovations to British royal ritual are not new. In the 1920 interment of the Unknown Soldier – Britain's version of what became a widespread celebration of a nation's anonymous 'Everyman' victim of the First World War – King George V and close male kin walked *behind* the gun carriage bearing the Unknown Soldier to Westminster Abbey (Bastin 2012: 328). The people in their sacrifice to the nation were thereby honoured by the monarchic state in the classic pose of status reversal. In the face of the world events involving the revolutionary and civil war collapse of dynastic empires, including those of several of King George's relatives, the heroic mortuary rites for the Unknown Soldier realigned the British monarchy in relation to its potentially outraged subjects who had just endured the 'Great War'. The war had itself provoked intense memorialization with noteworthy variations in how different states engaged in this process and, where monarchies remained, how the monarchs participated in breaking the 'cake of custom' and enfranchising speculation. Where there were no longer monarchs, it was in the icons of state that the reversal occurred. In France, for example, the Unknown (French) Soldier was laid to rest at the same time as in London: the moment of the armistice which has remained sacred ever since. In Paris, the site chosen was in the ground at the base of the Arc de Triomphe: Napoléon's Roman arch erected to commemorate the emperor's victories and honour his fallen generals. With the everyman installed, however, this acknowledgement of rank ceased, along with any passage through the arch by any future military parades. The Unknown Soldier thus does not simply deterritorialize and reterritorialize the Arc de Triomphe but adds another layer to the state ritual that Napoléon himself had captured and secularized.

When Prince Harry's mother Diana was killed in a car crash in Paris in 1997, other royal/commoner inversions took place in Britain. The men of the family – Diana's brother, ex-husband Charles, his father Philip, and Diana's two sons William and Harry – walked in the funeral procession behind the catafalque while the Queen (Elizabeth) stood in front of the palace gates with her sister Margaret and their mother to honour the 'People's Princess', acknowledge the tremendous outpouring of grief, and dispel the growing resentment for the Windsor family over Diana's death (when more accurately she was a victim of public obsession about her private life). Unlike the Unknown Soldier, the funeral for Diana was more heavily gendered and the palace domesticated not only with the reigning monarch being female but also in the way she chose to present herself in a deferential relation to the nation's most popular royal celebrity. Indeed, she even agreed that the British flag – the Union Jack – could be flown at half-mast at Buckingham Palace as a sign

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of mourning, and bowed her head when the catafalque drove past. For while the protocol is that the only flag that flies at Buckingham Palace is the Royal Standard, which only ever flies when the monarch is present and thus never flies at half-mast,[16] the absence of any flag in the aftermath of Diana's death (the Queen was in Scotland) was widely and angrily interpreted as a snub to the ex-wife of the heir to the throne. Resented for their ostensible lack of emotion in the face of the enormous sea of cut flowers placed by members of a grieving nation – a demotic storming, so to speak, of Kensington Palace – the concessions made during the funeral converted Diana into a sacrificial victim duly honoured by the ritual sponsor – the Queen – who thereby restored the dignity of her office.

Princess Diana's story is, of course, well known and a powerful reminder how the nexus of sex and celebrity in the creation of virtual women has never been limited by the categories of race. After her divorce, which if anything garnered her further popularity as a victim of a seemingly duty-bound and appearance-keeping monarchy, she began to consort with rich and famous men who represented the new foreign wealth in post-imperial Britain. This rendered Diana liminoidal, not unlike her son's daughter (whom she would never know). When she died in a car crash fleeing pursuit by a ravenous paparazzi, her funeral, in its combination of public grief and anger as well as state-response, reincorporated the dead ex-princess as a sovereign being standing in relation to the main sovereign – the Queen – in a similar way to the Unknown Warrior's burial 'among kings because he had done good toward God and toward his house'.[17] The Union Jack at half-mast in lieu of the Royal Standard was like the crown being placed on Joséphine's head. It was, in short, another act of iconoclasm through which the monarchy – the cake or, better, the Battenberg of custom – was reimagined.

Stephen Frears' fictional film of the aftermath of Diana's death, *The Queen* (2006), is part of this reimagining as a myth of state employing the ritual technique of cinema. In a compelling scene, we observe Queen Elizabeth alone in the grounds of Balmoral Castle having a moment of private grief over Diana's death, when she encounters a stag so close it appears almost tame. Her quiet admiration of the stag's majestic beauty is then interrupted by the distant gunfire of hunters and the barking of their dogs (and presumably her husband, whom she has earlier admonished to take his grieving grandsons for a walk *without* any guns). Kingship as the Master of the Hunt reasserts itself, prompting the Queen, in her private moment, to shoo the animal away and prevent any royal sacrifice – the capture of the life of the stag, the wild exteriority of sovereignty itself, that, again, like the Nuer cow, embodies the archetypal conjuncture of life and death. In this moment, we also realize the nature of the paparazzi: the hunting dogs of a populist state that adorns the pages of the gutter press with the trophy-simulacra (photographs) of captured heads.

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By her action of shooing the stag away, Elizabeth creates her scapegoat, allowing the animal to rejoin the wild from which it came, taking with it the sins of state. She thus reasserts her sovereignty over the sacrifice with a new relation to it as woman/mother/grandmother or what the Nuer would call '*yang*' (cow). While some interpret the stag to symbolize the Queen, others declare it to represent Diana. A third interpretation would call it the Queen's father reappearing like Aslan to restore the overwhelming sense of duty that attaches to the monarchy. In my approach, all of these perspectives are true because the Queen and Diana and the Queen's father are 'sovereigns', but in this way the stag – sovereignty – is not limited to any one of them. It is, instead, a complex symbol: highly polysemic and yet simple in form (Turner 1975: 163) – a vital body of the sovereign reborn following Diana's now sacrificial death. As wild nature – crowned nature with a head that could grace an interior wall of the castle stuck on a wooden plaque to bear witness to its killing/capture – the stag embodies the wild nature of the 'king'; the true king who can remove the sword from the stone (i.e. unleash power from its chthonic embrace). As such, the stag is also Britain itself in the way the Unknown Soldier became the nation reborn from the Great War. Symbol of a symbol, the stag is not reducible to one being or another but becomes instead an archetype, a being at the interface of life and death.

Recalling Turner's point about the 'high spot', the nature of sacrifice is that it unleashes a dynamic of structure and anti-structure whereby transformations of sovereignty provoke axial moments by enabling enthusiastic realignments of consciousness associated with their worlds. They thus reflect the changing configurations of power not simply as representations of some ideal order, but as part of the instrumentality of that world. Such instrumentality often occurs where the cracks are widest and contradictions most apparent (Turner 1969: 43), such as when an estranged princess dies or a descendant of slaves becomes a princess. Critically, too, they do not always work in the ways their creators intend. Meghan Markle's self-coronation when she married into the royal house of Windsor was a critical event in the history of race relations and the transmutations of slavery, but these are only some of the cracks. They sit within the circumstances of ongoing conflicts not only in the UK and the USA but also in the broader hegemonic space the dynamics of structure and anti-structure engage.

Conclusion

I began this chapter noting Turner's observation about the hippies and the H-bomb, and the importance of the 1960s as the context when *The Ritual Process* was published. The connection is well recognized if perhaps inac-

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curately and too glowingly described (e.g. Rio and Bertelsen 2018). For it was a period of new possibility wherein social and political institutions, themselves products of previous radical movements, were challenged and thereby exposed as the products of the dynamic of structure and anti-structure. In this way, the radical movements of the 1960s such as the May '68 movement in France failed and thereby preserved a great tradition that 'has been with us since the beginning of modern times' (Castoriadis 1997: 55) when people like Napoléon crowned himself and mobilized the spectres of the past. They have not gone away, but neither has the dynamic of structure and anti-structure that these attempted captures amplified.

For while anti-structure appeals to anti-capitalism – going primitive – capitalist modernity at the same time thrives on this anti-structure, its dialectic. Put simply, the connection between the hippies and the H-bomb is also the connection between the hippies and the military-industrial complex that fed and educated them, and let them loose on the world as members of the Peace Corps who built the great fiction of 'civil society' as the new Leviathan – a Leviathan formed in the baskets catching the heads during the Great Terror. It was, of course, a struggle because its target was for the old state to be replaced by a new society, a struggle against domination through a historic movement of liberation that 'only paved the way for hegemony, the reign of general exchange – against which there is no possible revolution, since everything is already liberated' (Baudrillard 2010: 67).

Therein lies the rub of it. The dynamics of anti-structure captured within the dialectics of capital have been the driving force of global hegemony and its celebrations of freedom. The naive utopias of the 1960s that created the farces of primitivism, the small wins of occupation, and a few decapitated tyrants, also extended the boundaries of capture into the newer spectacles of 'identity talk', including the contemporary farces of royal weddings, the assaults on a few statues and other acts of iconoclasm that form the basis of new populisms in which the populace disintegrates in readiness for the return of the king. I may perhaps be merely echoing the words of Pete Townsend – 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss'[18] – or another Napoléon (*Animal Farm*'s pig) but I do so to share Townsend and Orwell's note of caution, which I also recognize as Turner's note of caution conveyed in his misgivings about the anti-structural aspirations of the hippies. But this is not saying abandon hope, but rather insist on a more authentic grasp of what our contemporary political agitations involving historical revisionism and iconoclastic name calling (and changing) is actually achieving.

For the dynamics of structure and anti-structure are also the dynamics of capture and the potential of ritual to make cucumbers of us all. And while there might be a tremendous *jouissance* in this becoming-vegetable, there re-

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mains always the threat, the pickle so to speak, of an egalitarian nightmare: the totalitarianism that cuts us in two.

Rohan Bastin teaches anthropology at Deakin University in Australia. He specializes in the anthropology of comparative religion, myth and ritual, with a special focus on Sri Lanka and South India.

NOTES

1. The characters of Hitler's favourite novelist, Karl May, whose fanciful novels of the American West were enormously popular, including with Albert Einstein (Galchen 2012).
2. In films like *The Flowers of Saint Francis* (Roberto Rossellini 1950) and *Brother Son, Sister Moon* (Franco Zeffirelli 1972) one can see the celebration of a Catholic ecology movement reacting to fascism and its relation to Church history.
3. See also Kapferer's discussion of sacrifice in relation to the film *2001, A Space Odyssey*, and the sequence where the sole-surviving human, Dave, re-enters the spaceship *Discovery* and deactivates the ship's computer HAL to transcend the death drive inherent to sacrifice, and thus become the last man (Kapferer 2014b: 76–80).
4. Kapferer (1997: 210–13) addresses some aspects of this literature, noting its functionalist themes. A broader survey is warranted. Inter alia, it would include recent work on the transmutations of sacrifice in ancient Rome (Stroumsa 2008, 2009; Agamben 2011, 2013) and India (Heesterman 1993; Collins 2014), as these works enable a reconsideration of Girard's discussion of the scapegoat and the figure of Christ (Girard 1986). For Girard's concern with the violence of sacrifice and mimetic rivalry is also grounded in the nature of symbolic obviation and the potential *end* of sacrifice as the enabling condition of new political theologies, which is evident, for example, in the Abrahamic religions from the Akedah onwards (Evens 2008). Ostensibly abandoning sacrifice, these new theologies internalize it in new forms of capture that enable axial moments and new modalities of sovereignty.
5. This point draws heavily on Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of becoming in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: 232–309). Commenting on Lévi-Straussian structuralism, Deleuze and Guattari identify a third space between his account of sacrificial analogy and totemic institution that is 'more secret, more subterranean: *the sorcerer* and becomings' (ibid.: 237); a dynamics approach with strong parallels to *The Ritual Process*.
6. See Evans-Pritchard (1956: 202–3); Lienhardt (1961: 257). See also Lévi-Strauss (1966: 224); Descola (2013: 231).
7. Turner (1975: 163) identifies the inverse relation between form and meaning in simple and complex symbols in his study of the *Chihamba* rite.
8. Evans-Pritchard (1956: 202) describes the ox as the pre-eminent immolation, but tellingly adds that fertile cows are only sacrificed at mortuary rites for eminent persons. Moreover, while Evans-Pritchard declares that the appellation '*yang*' should be considered along the same lines as the English synecdoche for any member of the bovine species (ibid.), the fact of its usage for a hierarchy of offerings, including cu-

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cumbers and male and female goats in a culture and language so intensely focussed on cattle, suggests the labelling reveals a hierarchy in the whole–part Dumontian sense (Dumont 1980). Indeed, the cow–ox relation can be likened to the Indian priest–king relation that has been consistently misunderstood by Dumont's critics due to what I would call their neglectful utilitarian approach to ritual and symbolism (Bastin 2016).

9. No doubt the 'poor cousin' substitute perspective resonates with common sense Nuer understandings grounded in the realities of the respective market prices of cucumbers, goats and cattle. Nevertheless, symbolic value always transcends the market because it remains its enabling condition (Bourdieu 1990: 118). Indeed, other clues from Sharon Hutchinson's (1996) more recent account of Nuer cultural values highlight this. For example, the different types of money in a changing Nuer world affected by colonial occupation, cattle markets, labour migration and civil war reveal two principal forms distinguished by the relative degree of sociality and wage labour in their acquisition (Hutchinson 1996: 53). Simply put, the money of blood (*riɛm*), that is the money born of human social interaction between the Nuer themselves as well as cattle, is greater in value in the cattle market than wages earned in Khartoum and elsewhere. Such wages are known as 'shit money' mainly because it is money often earned through menial cleaning jobs. More than that, this kind of money is also 'shit money' because it is symbolically dead. It lacks the pulse of human (and cattle) sociality in its formation. Money and its associated debt as its entanglement in the web of sociality is thus exposed in Nuer ideology in all of its life/death potentiality.
10. The twinned elements of biopower and necropower combined in the figure of the sovereign draws upon the work of Achille Mbembe (2019). I stress, however, that in my usage these double movements of sovereignty are non-dualist and hierarchical rather than simply dialectical. This is not to say that dialectics are impossible but rather to limit those dialectics to states of exception, such as what Mbembe describes for the postcolony, but more broadly for the totalitarian death-spaces embedded in such states of exception, where, indeed, the dynamics of hierarchy are flattened and suppressed by the totalitarian disease.
11. The language of the two bodies of kingship is drawn from Ernst Kantorowicz (1957), albeit with the suggestion that their relation is hierarchical.
12. Jadran Mimica's description of Yagwoia fatherhood as an 'archetypal auto-symbolization of the existential flow' (Mimica 2006: 79) is important for this discussion.
13. A critique of David Graeber's discussion of divine kingship (Graeber 2017a, 2017b) will be developed elsewhere from this point. Suffice to say here that Graeber's approach takes as its starting point the figure of the human divine king instead of the nature of divine kingship and royal ritual as variants on the nature of sovereignty.
14. The magic is the sense that it is considered bad luck if the groom sees the bride wearing the dress ahead of the rite.
15. Indeed, when Harry's great grandfather's brother Edward married the American divorcee Wallis Simpson in 1937 in a civil ceremony in France, the bride wore a pale blue dress with a matching hat.
16. Thus, were Queen Elizabeth to have died at Buckingham Palace when her son and heir Charles were elsewhere, the Royal Standard would have to have been lowered, and immediately raised wherever Charles happened to be.
17. From the inscription on the gravestone inside Westminster Abbey.
18. From the song 'Won't Get Fooled Again', first recorded by The Who in 1973.

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PART II



MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF COMMUNITAS

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CHAPTER 6



COMMUNITAS AND PRACTICE IN THE BALTIMORE RHYTHM FESTIVAL

Rory Turner

Victor Turner's classic analyses of the liminal phase in Ndembu rites of passage addressed action and meaning-making in contexts where participants shared common experiences, social structure, and symbolic and expressive traditions (Turner 1969). The complex entanglements of people bound by close social ties, and the build-up of tensions that tend to accompany such structured intimacy, provided the context for the emergence of communitas. The anti-structural genres of ritual in these settings invited communitas experience that reframes these embedded relationships, potentially renewing the bonds of existential recognition. What of communitas and liminality in settings where these conditions are not present? I will use a case study of an event that I have been involved with for over a quarter century, the Baltimore Rhythm Festival, to reflect on communitas and liminality in a contemporary urban context. Here, many participants do not know one another, and come to the event with selves, identities, and perspectives that are differentially shaped by their positioning within the social fields of the contemporary United States. It is fair to say, though, that many of them do experience some form of egalitarian communitas at the event, as their accounts and documentation of the event suggest.

Turner's later work widened the exploration of liminality beyond small-scale society to consider the phenomenon of liminality in modern post-industrial societies. He coined the term 'liminoid' to refer to events and performances that were organized in the characteristic tripartite sequence of rites of passage (van Gennep [1909] 2019) – separation, liminal period,

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and reincorporation – but that were decoupled from their formal transformations of identity and status. These liminoid genres are profuse and varied, in performativity, media, purpose, degrees of flow and reflexivity, degrees and modes of participation, scale, prestige, and more, so much so that the term becomes imprecise. Despite this, the term is productive in linking modern expressive culture to the deep patterns and roots of symbolic enactment in ritual, and some of the symbolic attributes of liminality and the potential transformative experience of communitas can be found in liminoid social genres.

Festivals are calendrical events that van Gennep identified in traditional societies as having a temporal structure similar to rites of passage, but that mark a whole society's movement through the phases of the annual round of activities, and link such activities to natural cycles and religious value systems. These have endured and interact in a variety of ways with modern economic and cultural settings. In the contemporary United States and other countries, they have been joined by a range of annual festival events which are often secular and organized under the general umbrella of 'the arts' or civic and community cultural development. As one might expect, these cultural performances reflect the aesthetics, forms of social capital, modes of exchange, individualism, collective identity projects, and organization of work and leisure of their settings, and participation in them may reproduce these structures of practice and feeling (Errington 1987; Lavenda 1988; Small 1998; Gabbert 2011; Santino 2017). They are at once ritualesque and carnivalesque (Santino 2011), events that mobilize economic resources and that can reaffirm or change how people understand and experience themselves and their communities, whilst also being full of play. As such they can invite the semiotics of liminality, multimodal in media and genre, full of metaphor, subjunctive language and action, make believe, and humour. As cultural performances, they provide a mirror of the collective, and participation in them signals the affiliations and differential perspectives of attendees. As carnivalesque, they are always subject to transgression and contestation, but generally they affirm status quos while being opportunities to negotiate difference, and over time, through recurring recontextualizations, perform changing cultural values, meanings and relationships.

I come to a consideration of the Baltimore Rhythm Festival from a particular perspective, that of a public folklorist. For those unfamiliar with the term 'public folklore' (Baron and Spitzer 2007), it is used primarily in the United States to refer to work done in public settings, often by people working in government agencies or for non-profit organizations concerning the folklife and traditions of communities, and often working with organizations whose mission concerns the arts, heritage, humanities and, to some extent, education.

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The work of public folklore embraces what Robert Cantwell (2001) describes as 'folklore's pathetic fallacy', the affective valuing of cultural forms for qualities of beauty, ethical depth, creativity, spirituality, meaning, traditionality and integrity. Both blessing and curse, as so many things are, this positionality can occlude problematic aspects of culture, and foster uncritical romanticization and recontextualizations. It also opens up space for a political engagement with creative cultural action, as resistance and as new possibility. Resituated as cultural workers committed in fellowship with communities to both understanding, and design and action, public folklore provides a model for a decolonized praxis.

For me, the missing piece of this subdisciplinary charter was the existential dimension. Influenced by scholars such as Michael Jackson, Henry Glassie, Jeff Todd Titon, and my parents, I came to see that what mattered most to me in the rich worlds of cultural generation I have been fortunate to experience were the qualities of existential epiphany and ontological connection and balance they invited, qualities that I both witnessed in others and felt in myself. These qualities and others are part of the fruit of the performative and participatory genres, unlocked through the deep play with form and symbol that lies at the heart of embodied, mortal, erotic, gift-giving and receiving experience.

My work with the Rhythm Festival flowed from this budding sensibility, and in many ways nurtured it. What was valuable about working with artists in traditional genres in crafting this event was not their authenticity or traditionality, the usual markers of significance for celebrating such people and their forms, but the way they shaped a field of being that invited an experience that grounded interaction in existential qualities and relational connection. What made these genres valuable was not determined by conventionally and often external processes of certification and legitimation, but by the fruits of experience they fostered; and forms that did not meet the standards of authenticity were no less precious to me. In an era where much of the expressive culture we encounter has the annunciation and concealment of commodity fetishism as its core significance – something to buy, consume, and in some sense acquire – I was looking for something different. The logic of gifts in the sense that Lewis Hyde explores in his meditation on the arts and Mauss (Hyde 2007) was closer to the mark, it being the flow of relational exchange and participation that serves as the ground of being that widens and sustains the fullness of interconnected human experience.

The Baltimore Rhythm Festival was conceived on a rainy night in the winter of 1994. I was on my way home from the Wednesday night drum jams that at that time were held at the Resurgam Gallery, a small locally focused art gallery on South Charles Street in Baltimore's Federal Hill. I was giving

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a lift to another regular at these sessions, Darryl Morgan. For me, a relative newcomer to Baltimore, these jams were a great blessing. I had discovered this kind of music making when I was in college. In a zone between the more orthodox and formal study of particular percussion traditions and what would emerge in the following few years as a structured often commodified approach to guided drum circles, what I found at Resurgam felt familiar and sympatico. The crew that gathered there came from different backgrounds and experiences, and brought different vibes and styles into the space. For me, this was a comfortable space that was a kind of flow sweet spot between structure and incoherence, open to experiment and beginners but also rich in possibility through sustaining grooves serving as a foundation for meaningful rhythmic generativity. The magic of such gatherings usually depends on having enough people who are solid enough in the pocket, and comfortable with the basic vocabularies of complementary rhythmic layering developed in the musical and cultural spaces of Africa and its diasporas (though not limited to these contexts). The Resurgam sessions often really jammed with the participatory discrepancies, call and response, and apart playing/layering that such gatherings can be blessed with (Keil 1995). A big part of what made them so nice was Darryl. Born and raised in Cherry Hill in south Baltimore, Darryl was at that time an upholsterer by trade who occasionally did work for the furniture restoration shop next to the gallery. He was also a gifted musician with an open heart and a philosophically and spiritually nuanced and deep sensibility about life. Adding spice and complexity to jams with his favourite talking drum, Darryl's presence and musicality enriched the sessions, and I always enjoyed our conversations in the car when I gave him a ride home.

That night, Darryl and I were talking about the phrase that he was currently exploring, Peace through Music. We had that relaxed joy of having shared in some pretty sweet jams, and we were feeling generous and playful. Would it not be cool to have a festival that was dedicated to Peace through Music in Baltimore? Something that would be all about the jamming, about that feeling, that spirit that we loved so much? This seed took root with some of the folks at Resurgam and led to an event called the Baltimore International Rhythm Festival and a non-profit organization the Baltimore International Rhythm and Drumming Society, which everyone called by its acronym BIRDS. The BIRDS festival lasted from 1995 until 2007, when waning energy from John Millen, a core organizer who had first taken it on, finally led to it being discontinued. I watched its withering with some sadness from my position in the early 2000s as a program officer at the Maryland State Arts Council, a role that meant I had to step back from the festival due to conflict-of-interest policies, as the council was providing modest grant support to BIRDS.

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In 2014, at a bit of a juncture point in my own life, I could not help but remember the festival. Repeatedly I had encountered people who had been part of the event who spoke movingly of its impact on them – decisions to live in the city, change jobs, testimonies of how no event had been so meaningful for them. I had recently stepped away from directing the Master of Arts program in Cultural Sustainability that I had launched at Goucher College where I teach, and was open to what was next. I got a phone call from Menes Yahudah, a local Baltimore native who has been playing drums since the age of two with his Afrocentric father at the Park Vibe, a drum gathering in the city's Druid Hill Park for the past fifty years. Menes and I had met through the festival and my work at the Arts Council; his mentor Baile McKnight had suggested to him that he call me as he too was looking for new beginnings. Over tea and a handshake, we decided to revive the festival.

The basic framework of the festival is quite straightforward and has carried over from the old BIRDS festival to its resurrection as the Baltimore Rhythm Festival. The event is a single day, a Saturday in September or October. Beginning around midday, we open with some form of prayer or spiritual blessing. Simultaneous workshops and community performances ensue. Alongside this, a space is designated for jamming, which will usually get rolling in the first hour or two. At the end of the day, the stage features more professional performers usually in a ticketed evening concert for this past year. We invite vendors to come, and it is a good place to buy African inspired clothing, jewellery, drums, and the like, along with food. We have had three different locations in the past five years, beginning at the old site at 2640, a church converted to a performance space, then moving to another church, and finally these past years we have been at the Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School. All of these spaces have been in the city, and in areas where the stark racialized geography of the city is blurred, spaces where both white and black Baltimore can feel welcome and comfortable.

Along with Menes and myself, Menes' wife Eboni Yahudah has been the other main organizer, joined by others who have helped for a year or two. A reliable core group of volunteers has supported us, and each year a changing cast of others, including some of my students and former students, have helped to set up and staff the event. Financially, we have relied primarily on crowd funding and individual support along with limited grant support from city, state and regional arts agencies and a couple of private philanthropies. We sell T-shirts and water, and also receive fees from our vendors. We have been leery of seeking corporate support, but recurringly wonder if it would be good to try to make the festival bigger and better funded. Most of the money we raise goes to artists and workshop teachers, although we rely on them to be willing to accept less than the full worth of the gifts they share. We are a fiscally sponsored program of an umbrella organization called Fu-

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sion Partnerships, which allows us to apply for and receive grants, and which provide accounting and financial management services to us. We are all volunteer, and the compensation for the work is largely a matter of collective satisfaction. Darryl Morgan remains part of the festival, and we along with a few others are usually the last to leave.

My journey as a human being has been influenced by a concern that the transpositions into scholarship of cultural phenomena can be an implicit complicity with institutional status quos that pay lip service to the urgencies of social transformation and justice but replicate ontic hierarchies and the inequalities and ordering of knowledge and power that underlie them. The odd in-between space of folklore and its partnerships with cultural sustainers and creators can be a space for advocacy that works towards the emergence of new cultural possibilities and relationships grounded in different aesthetics and commitments. These interstitial roles and spaces require landing in the particularities of commitments and the labour of co-creation with a reciprocity that is both exhilarating and humbling.

In this sense, the Baltimore Rhythm Festival is part of the work I and my colleagues have been engaged with around the emergent discourse of cultural sustainability. This perspective on active scholarship explores the ethical and practical issues and strategies that arise from cultural work grounded in partnership and conscious effort to sustain cultural forms and the people who value them. Eclectic, transdisciplinary and multifaceted, my colleagues, students and I have tried to move beyond conventional anthropological applied work that presupposes positivist paradigms of social scientific method or facile cultural objectification. Renouncing the Archimedean vantage point, we insist on landing in reciprocal mutuality with local cultural actors and action, and always begin with ethnographic experience and relationship building to implicate ourselves into the projects and vulnerabilities of these real arenas of experience. We hope, though, to equip our students with facility to interact with and be effective in larger arenas of policy and institutions that exert control over the collective radical autonomy of generative meaningful cultural practice.

At this point, I want to reflect a bit on the existential fields that the festival persistently generates. I am not sure if the label communitas is apt for the relational modes that flower in the event – there are so many culturally inflected modes of collective experience that we humans conjure for ourselves that can be kludged into this category – but certainly, a desirable feeling seems to suffuse and connect most participants, at least part of the time. I am sure it has something to do with the cybernetic forcings of rhythmic sound. By framing this event as being a celebration of rhythm, we sought to identify a sturdy human essential that was unarguably a commonality at the very core of the human design. Symbolically, this importantly proposes a connective

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field that both honours the specificities and elaborations of distinctive styles, genres and experiences, and invites participation in embodied and varied ways. Regardless of status or identity, rhythm, this generous mantle, was one's own and yet all of ours. In an urban American context, genuine frames for participation that span the stark divides of racialized cultural politics and the cynicisms of superficial multiculturalisms are hard to find. The generative logic of rhythm helps as an enabling condition for this festival, but the challenge of non-exploitive practice, shared agency, and critical reflexivity is constant and abidingly necessary in holding open the possibility of the existential capability the event affords. Still to be developed and incorporated in the design of the event, rhythm also suggests a promising re-entwining with broader ecological cyclicities and commonalities as a calendrical rite, and is, to my mind, a suitable response to the implications of the Anthropocene.

It 'involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men' (Turner 1995: 127). It is a space where an existential sweet spot is invited, between boredom and anxiety, bridging difference, safe yet subjunctive, abundant in giving, receiving, gratitude, recognition, generous in negative capability. It is a day when the structural divides and violence of my city Baltimore are at least figuratively healed for a moment. Starry eyed as I can be, I am not so naive to believe that this moment of collective joy has the centrality and dialectical weight to affect transformation of the structured dehumanizations of race, and our other stalled emancipations, let alone the triumphalist neo-social Darwinism of our dominant political economic ideologies. Marginal and rough, the festival shambles along, and claims little impact in our larger regimes. As Thomassen (2016) suggests, we are in a time characterized by permanent liminality and an unbridled but neutered proliferation of the liminoid, a category within which the festival probably lies. The high in our hierarchies soars ethically unbound from inversion and humbling (except in the grotesque affinities with our demagogues) on the logics of business value propositions, and we are all either nothing more than objects of data analysis, consumers, or often both. Yet, I do feel some cause for hope in such phenomena as the festival, and the collective labour and thought that shapes it. Perhaps the white-hot accelerations of our times might settle into something humane in the cracks in the system, and the "dancing in between" that my friend Joe Kennedy, a regular at the festival claims for himself will still have a place in a dialectic that is not an oscillating stasis, but an upward spiral of myriad possibilities for an emergent, capacitated, whole, collective aliveness.

Rory Turner is a Professor of Practice at Goucher College's Center for Social Sciences in Baltimore MD, and teaches in the Sociology/Anthropology

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program. He designed, launched and continues to teach in Goucher College's Master of Arts program in Cultural Sustainability. Formerly Program Director for Folk and Traditional Arts and Program Initiative Specialist at the Maryland State Arts Council, he co-founded and directed the Maryland Traditions program from 2000 to 2006. He also founded and subsequently revived the Baltimore Rhythm Festival. Publications include book chapters along with articles, reviews and creative writing in such journals as *Folklore Forum*, *Journal of Folklore Research*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Anthropology and Humanism*, and *The Drama Review*. He received his PhD in Folklore from Indiana University.

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CHAPTER 7



INSIGHT MEDITATION

Liminality Without the Excitement

Ward Keeler

At the opening of Chapter 4 of *The Ritual Process*, entitled 'Communitas: Model and Process', Victor Turner writes of 'a seminar [he] ran with an interdisciplinary group of students and faculty, on various aspects of what may be called the meta-structural aspects of social relations' (Turner [1969] 1977: 131). If I may be permitted a boast: I was a member of that seminar, and it was very exciting. For the whole of the fall semester of 1967, at each weekly gathering (held in the evening at his and Edith Turner's home), Turner read out to us drafts of the chapters of the book he was writing. His ideas all seemed wonderfully clarifying and in step with the times.

Following the book's appearance in 1969, it was then gratifying to see how widely Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas were taken up, not just by anthropologists but by people in a great range of fields in the humanities. Clearly, many other people found these ideas as clarifying, useful and exciting as we had when Turner laid them out for us at Cornell.

I do not want to deny the power of these concepts. But in what follows I do wish to analyse their appeal – and to suggest that our own enchantment with communitas, like Turner's, stems from a set of assumptions that incline us to make judgements in favour of certain social phenomena and against others. Those phenomena we favour, ones characterized by feelings of solidarity and enthusiasm, we believe to have a 'universal' appeal. But anthropology has taught us we should be guarded about anything 'universal' – and that even includes communitas. The example I will use to make my argument is a Burmese meditation retreat that I undertook in the Shan Hills in

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2012. Everything about this ten-day experience fits the account of a liminal period to a Turnerian T. Yet even if the retreat did, after a fashion, generate feelings of solidarity, such feelings were for most intents and purposes squelched, or at least discounted, by the organizers of the event. I include among those organizers not just the people responsible for that particular retreat but more importantly U Goenka, the Burmese man of Indian descent who founded the organization, Vipassana Meditation, which has now spread around the world and brought the practice of 'insight meditation' into the lives of enormous numbers of people.

The terms and conditions for participating in a ten-day meditation course at the Dhamma Vipassana Center in Pyin Oo Lwin (formerly Maymyo), Burma (now Myanmar), were as straightforward as they were astonishing.[1] One needed simply to arrive on a course's starting date – in my case, 25 April 2012 – and complete a short form. I was handed a pamphlet listing the Code of Conduct in English (see below), and immediately shown to my room, a very small one, in a row of similar ones. It had a rough cement floor, two simple wooden beds (one on each side) and a tiny bathroom at the back with a small sink, a toilet, and two big plastic buckets (formerly paint containers) to store water for bathing South East Asian fashion, pouring water over one's body with a big plastic ladle.

We men were few enough in number that we each got a single room; I later learned that women participants, more than three times more numerous, were all doubled up except for the one Western female participant. As a Westerner, I too came in for special treatment: I was granted the loan of a mosquito net, a very thin mattress, and a single sheet (on which was printed a repeating, and in context, an odd motif: 'I love you' in three languages). Burmese participants were not so favoured, presumably because they would know to travel with such amenities if they felt they needed them. Mosquito nets are used almost universally in the lowlands but in the cooler Shan Hills mosquitoes are much less prevalent, and so many people do without; and many people in Burma sleep on simple woven mats placed over wooden planks for beds. That is how I slept in the monastery where I was living (as a lay visitor) in Mandalay at the time, but I was happy to accept the loan of the mattress. A neighbour, peering through the tinted jalousies flanking the door, the room's only windows, saw the mat I would not be using, as I had a mattress, and darted in to borrow it. Assuring yourself a little extra padding is a wise move at a meditation centre, as I was soon to learn.

No reference was made in all of this to money. Those of us participating as students ('yogis'), about 130 people, would be housed, fed and instructed, for ten days plus an initial evening and a final morning, for free. Anyone who chose to make a donation at the end of the course to help defray the cost of future ones was welcome, but by no means obliged, to do so. There was

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no talk of 'suggested donations', those shame-based hooks that American museums twist into their visitors' flesh. Instead, we were to enjoy in our efforts the same kinds of support, including board and lodging, and a few basic amenities (e.g. buckets and ladles for bathing) that monks and, to a lesser degree, nuns, enjoy in Burmese Buddhist society while pursuing the path of *Dhamma*, the 'Law', a simple set of moral understandings articulated by Gautama Buddha about 2,500 years ago.

Monks follow a set of 227 rules, known as the *vinaya*, an elaborate, abstruse, and sometimes puzzling list of pro- and prescriptions. One such proscription has it that a monk must not sit in a careless manner when in the upper story of a building. A monk told me that this rule stems from an incident in the Buddha's time – all fundamental elements of the Buddhist scriptures, written in the classical language of Pali, must be said to have originated during the Buddha's lifetime – when a monk was sitting inattentively, fell down, and killed a monk who was sitting a storey below.

A much shorter list, the Five Sila, imposes five rules upon all Buddhists, lay as well as religious: not to kill any living being; not to steal; not to engage in sexual misconduct; not to lie; and not to imbibe intoxicating substances. We yogis, however, were to imitate monks and nuns by abiding by the five sila in more stringent form: to engage in no sexual behaviour of any kind, and not only to avoid lying but also to lay no claim to possessing supernatural powers. A rider to that last rule is that even if one does possess such supernatural powers – most Burmese Buddhists believe that there are a good number of such people about – one should refrain from boasting of the fact. So even if you are capable of levitating through meditation, for example, you should make no mention of the fact.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct to which we pledged to conform, we yogis would commit ourselves to a further three precepts. Like Buddhist monks and nuns, we would not eat any food after noon until the following early morning meal; not dance, sing, play a musical instrument, or use perfume or cosmetics; and not indulge ourselves in any excessive comforts, such as sleeping on thick mattresses or sitting on highly cushioned seats.

There were further rules, and this was where our rules were more stringent even than those enumerated in the *vinaya* for members of the clergy. Men and women were to remain segregated in different areas at all times. Tarps divided the meditation centre's campus into two parts, and the dining shed was similarly divided. Only in the Dhamma Hall itself, where we sat in meditation, would we actually see members of the opposite sex. But then we would sit divided by gender and, whenever sitting, have our eyes closed. We would neither read nor write during the entire retreat. We would seek out no other form of entertainment. We would not speak among ourselves from six that first evening until the rule of silence was lifted mid-morning

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on the tenth day. (We could speak, briefly, to the teacher for individualized pointers about meditation, and for practical matters, as well as to 'Dhamma Workers', volunteer support staff (people who had previously completed a similar course). We were not permitted cell phones, and nor could we make any sign, verbal or physical, among ourselves. In fact, we were even prohibited from so much as glancing at other yogis.

We were told in our first evening lecture that we were to think of ourselves as much as possible as being like forest monks. These lone ascetics, who pursue their spiritual betterment in the jungle, are paragons of Buddhist ascetic practice. They can lay the greatest claims to moral purity and so are thought to be those 'most likely to succeed' – that is, to escape the cycle of rebirths to become individuals poised to enter Nirvana.

And after that first evening, when we were served dinner (for the only time) and given our initial instruction, we would follow a rigorous and consistent schedule. We would be awakened at 4 in the morning by a series of deliberately paced but stentorian gong strokes – these gong strokes punctuated every period in our day – and we would gather in the Dhamma Hall, all of us, to start meditating by 4.30 AM. That first session would end at 6.30, when we would have breakfast – noodles of one sort or another, and the Burmese version of coffee (a weak, sweet swill made with powder and hot water) in place of the more ordinary, and so less prestigious, Burmese version of tea (a very strong, very sweet, very milky concoction, drunk in small but still powerful quantities, to which I had become addicted). At 8.00, we would sit for another hour, have a five-minute break, reconvene for another sitting lasting until 11.00, at which time we would be served lunch – a big plate of rice with two curries and other accompaniments, plus a sweet (the diet was vegan). At 1.00 PM, we would start a sitting lasting till 2.20, then another from 2.30 to 3.30, and another from 3.35 (usually more like 3.38, and the minutes mattered) to 5.00, at which point we would be served a cup of a sweet fruit drink and a little ball of toddy-palm sugar (monks are also granted this slight leeway in the prohibition on eating after noon). At 6.00 PM we would have another hour's sitting, then a lecture lasting about 75 minutes: a recording in Burmese played in the Dhamma Hall for most of the participants; a recording in English played in the Mini Hall for the five of us needing or preferring the English version. Finally, we would sit (the Burmese expression is 'to sit the Law') from 8:30 to 9.00, then get ready for bed, with 'lights out' at 9.30 – except that few South East Asians sleep with the lights out, so our rooms were always quite brightly illuminated from the lights kept on all night in the open-air passageways between the rows of rooms.

Here we find all the features Victor Turner sees as characteristic of liminal situations: isolation in space from one's normal social as well as physi-

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cal context; disruption of the normal tenor of face-to-face interaction; and the imposition of ascetic rigours. Even the principle of exchange was put in abeyance, as we were fed, housed and instructed without need for payment. As in many other liminal situations, we were also enjoined to rethink our assumptions, to take a different perspective on the world and our place in it. We should find ourselves changed in fundamental ways at the end of the period of seclusion, having learnt both from the lectures we had heard and, more importantly, from the ordeal – it was truly an ordeal – of doing meditation ourselves for ten-and-a-half hours a day.

Had the 130 or so of us who had undergone this experience together come to feel by the end the sense of solidarity and fellow-feeling that Turner would lead us to expect? The answer is yes and no – but mostly no. And that was, in the view of our teachers, I believe, as it should be.

To the extent that doing anything in a group, particularly a physically and emotionally stressful activity, gives it greater affective resonance, yes, I think we all felt a heightened sense of solidarity. When the ban on talking was lifted midway through the tenth day, there was a camaraderie in the air that differed, I think, from what the atmosphere would have been had we simply come together at that moment without having just shared a ten-day ascetic exercise. The extra fortitude that undertaking the endeavour along with others granted us was, for that matter, I assume, part and parcel of the organizers' strategy, even if unacknowledged. We are social beings, and the presence of others always matters to us. That fact alone helped us to not just give up and go home – although the thought certainly went through my mind, and I imagine other people's too. In any case, brought together in liminal situations, as Turner taught us to see so vividly, we are inclined to bind ourselves to each other in one – perhaps highly euphemized, or even denied – way or another.

Yet denied our inclination to bind ourselves to others certainly we certainly were, both experientially and doctrinally. Recall that we were enjoined to not even look at each other. The model to which we were told to aspire, that of a lone monk meditating in the forest, stands at the opposite pole from that of a participant in rites of passage who learns the fundamental, and presumably heartening, lesson of human community – that we are all in this together – in the company of his or her peers.

To describe individuals at a meditation retreat whose identities have been stripped from them as 'equals' would not be completely inaccurate. Granted, there is still a status hierarchy: we were seated in order, according to how many such retreats in U Goenka's tradition each of us had done. Individuals with a greater number of such retreats to their credit were seated closer to the (more prestigious) east side of the hall. Those, like me, who had not yet done any, appeared to be arranged fairly randomly. Nevertheless, no

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further acknowledgement of our personal identities was made other than to sort us by gender (separated in space) and by whether we were lay people (sitting on mats) or members of the Buddhist clergy (sitting on slightly elevated stools). Yet Buddhist ideology and also the retreat's practices did not so much look upon us as equals but as free-floating individuals – which was how they urged us to see ourselves.

To address the matter of ideology first: Buddhism shares other Indic traditions' view that each of us carries with us an ongoing karmic balance sheet. Our deeds and misdeeds have generated and continue to generate (as we speak) a certain quantity of merit, and that quantity determines what kind of existence we will enjoy or suffer come our next turn in the cycle of rebirths. It is hard to think of any more individualizing concept than this one. True, the way you interact with others has inescapable karmic consequences, but each of us must tend to our own personal karmic account. It is, one might say, a free market in merit. Even if we team up with others for a while in this life, and if we are lucky and wish it to be so, might even get to re-establish those ties in another one, we are still lone individuals pursuing idiosyncratic paths through the cosmic samsaric landscape. Not incidentally, the reason most Burmese give for engaging in meditation is that according to the Buddha this is the single most effective means for attaining merit. I am not sure that the Pali canon actually supports this view, but it is very widely held in Burma today.

If Buddhist ideology tells us that we are on our own, the meditation retreat was designed to implement such notions in practice. With respect to what we did, what mattered was what we did *not* do: talk to each other or otherwise interact (let alone have sex – something U Goenka told us, in one of his recorded lectures, we would lose all interest in once we were advanced enough in our meditation practice). So we enjoyed not the thrill of communitas but rather the calm, the lack of stress, the relief, of autonomy. I have written elsewhere about how much autonomy preoccupies Burmese and so will not repeat myself here (Keeler 2017). I wish to pursue the question, rather, of why equality and what we assume goes with it (feelings of solidarity and collective effervescence – Turner does not use the term, in my recollection, but certainly has it in mind) speaks to us so compellingly, and why it figures so little in Burmese imaginings of an alternative to ordinary, structured, which is to say hierarchically differentiated, social life.

Before I turn to that larger us vs. them question, let me note one more element of our practice of meditation in which pondering ourselves as individuals took precedence over celebrating any potential solidarity we might feel with others. Meditation in U Goenka's tradition is not 'guided': we were not told what sorts of images we should attend to in the course of any sitting. Nevertheless, what distinguishes 'insight' meditation from 'concentration'

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meditation is the way that in the former, as we learned from U Goenka's taped evening lectures, the meditator casts their attention over the surface of his or her body, attending to any physical experience one may note. Tension in past relationships, moments of anger and disappointment, are believed to have generated knots that inhere in the body and these are expected to come to the surface under such attention. The meditator is not advised to ponder the nature of the original cause of particular knots but rather simply to let the resultant tension go. Thus attention is not focused on one's relations with others but rather on oneself. U Goenka believes, along with other meditation instructors, that such inward-looking, 'insight'-generating practice will give rise to more satisfying and sustainable relationships with others.

Yet the practice is predicated on a radically solipsistic focus – or actually on a still more radical assertion: that there is no self. This important and abstruse Buddhist concept of 'non-self' further denies the reality of our everyday lives, going along with the fundamental assertion that, as all conditioned beings and circumstances are impermanent, there is nothing real about our experience. I will not try to explain a concept that I (along with a great many Buddhists) find difficult to fathom. I will simply note that Turner's idealizing image of liminal individuals joined together in the equality and fellow-feeling he labels 'communitas' stands in clear contrast to a set of free-floating elements of so-called persons who are really just transient and chance agglomerations of constituent, impermanent parts in an illusory world. This way of conceiving matters is not likely to give rise to a lot of singing and dancing.

Communitas is not foreign to all Burmese social life. Some degree of licence is to be found in the *nat* cult, wherein cross-dressing spirit mediums become possessed by the spirits of legendary figures, and thereby become those figures' vessels for communicating – sometimes quite abrasively – with their human interlocutors (Spiro 1978; Brac de la Perrière 1989). Events of this sort can take place throughout the year, although the government has made concerted efforts to tamp them down, but really come into their own at the annual Taunbyoun festival, when spirit mediums gather for a brief period of intense ritual activity, plus a lot of carryings-on (Brac de la Perrière 2005; Nu Nu Yi 2008).

More obviously still, during the Buddhist New Year celebrations, the 'water festival', there is riotous behaviour among young and old. The event occurs during the pitiless heat of April, and it allows people to throw water on anyone within range. This custom may once have implied the gentle and welcome relief of people's heat-induced discomfort. That would have been prior to the arrival of plastic buckets, water guns and fire hoses in places like Mandalay, where the practice has come to assume extraordinary proportions. The mighty are of course altogether fair game at such a moment,

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a 'moment' that lasts a few days, and come in for many a drenching should they venture outside unprotected. Few do.

Closer still to a Turnerian vision of marginal figures laying bare the fact that the powerful have feet of clay was a traditional practice (*than ja'*) included in water festival celebrations whereby young people chanted rhymed verses critiquing the authorities. I observed it in Mandalay in 1988; flatbed trucks were driven through the city's streets from one rallying point to another, and young men standing on them chanted scripts that had been written out for the purpose in the preceding weeks (see Keeler 2009). The criticism had to be oblique, couched in euphemistic allusion, not direct attacks. But it was the one instance in which the politically weak got to let the politically powerful know what they were thinking, a practice that otherwise would have been extremely dangerous. Tolerated even during the dark days of Ne Win's military dictatorship, it was then forbidden by the military clique that replaced him in 1988. I am unaware whether it has been reinstituted: I saw no evidence of the practice in April of 2012, and the new civilian government turns out to tolerate criticism no more graciously than did the military one. Yet I cannot say for sure whether the practice has been revived.[2]

The question remains, though, why such an obviously liminal event as a meditation retreat should generate so little by way of communitas among its participants, and why its organizers should seem so little invested in making such a thing happen. A related question is why so many of us embrace the idea of communitas so fulsomely. I offer two suggestions to account for why Burmese meditators show so little taste for the experience and expression of fellow feeling and solidarity. The first turns on questions of emotional style; the second on divergent ideological models of how to organize humans into groups.

Anthropological attention to the matter of emotions has waxed and waned over the years. At present, when many of our colleagues contend with urgent questions of human rights, migration, the environment, and so on, talking about feelings strikes some people, I imagine, as irrelevant, or even self-indulgent. Yet I am convinced that how people react to their experience belongs at the centre of virtually any anthropological project, and reactions always implicate attitudes towards the experience and expression of feeling.

What strikes me as characteristic of much Burmese talk and behaviour is the preference for an attenuated degree of emotional arousal. People may not conform to this ideal: I have certainly seen people get angry or impatient or unhappy. Yet as anthropologists have reported from elsewhere in the region (cf. Brown, Cassaniti, Cook, Geertz, Wikan), public expectations and, to a remarkable degree, actual behaviour emphasize the need to stave off powerful emotions. This applies to positive as well as negative emotions. I was frequently told in Burma (and in Indonesia, as well) that one must not

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be too happy or too sad. To be given over to any emotion, even a pleasant one, implies a lack of control, and with that comes vulnerability. Self-control enjoys an enormous value; strong feelings, even if they are positive, always threaten to undermine such control.[3]

The need to resist pleasure just as much as anger or hurt comes up in U Goenka's instructions to meditators. In the course of their meditation, many people apparently experience a very pleasurable sense, a kind of shower of sensations flowing from their head and then down over their bodies. Should they encounter this, however, they must be careful not to invest in the pleasure: rather they should, as with everything else, simply note it and let it go. To come to like it, or even seek it out, would mean becoming attached to it: precisely the wrong move. The core claim of Buddhist teachings is that attachment, given the impermanent nature of all conditioned things, is the cause of suffering, and the aim of meditation is to learn to forego all attachments.[4]

Julia Cassaniti, in a vivid and intriguing analysis of how people she knew in northern Thailand handled their own feelings, describes the great store people lay on 'letting go', on not letting feelings of hurt, disappointment, grief or anger take clear form and preoccupy their thoughts (Cassaniti 2015: 87–117). Claiming that what people are doing is suppressing the negative emotions they experience is not a gloss that Cassaniti wants to put on what people have told her, as she is anxious to avoid imposing Western understandings on her data in this way. She insists that people did indeed seem able to dissipate and even stave off any distress that might come up in their day-to-day lives.

I am a little more wedded to Western psychological biases than Cassaniti. I see real costs to this strategy of minimizing emotional experience, as it gives relationships in Burma a tenuousness that I, as a Westerner, find unfortunate. (I infer from Cassaniti's data, and from incidents that Brown (2001) and Cook (2010) report, that the same characterizes relationships in Thailand also.) Yet Cassaniti has written illuminatingly about that very contrast between the ways that we Westerners think about and respond to the rough patches in our experience and the ways people in the region of northern Thailand – not all that far from the Shan Hills of eastern Burma where I did the meditation retreat – do so.

The whole point of a meditation retreat, or at least a major element of it, is to enable practitioners to distance themselves from the vagaries of their own reactions to things. Just as one notes physical sensations on the surface of one's body and simply moves on, such experiences as anger and grief should be noted but then dismissed, as they derive from our relationships and so, like everything else, are a part of this impermanent world, which makes them unworthy of attachment.

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Communitas *celebrates* the attachments we humans can and should enjoy with our fellow humans. But we are too often prevented from doing so because 'structure' insists upon our differences, distracting us from our more fundamental, existential similarity. Strip away the differences, or even strip away people's clothes (think of the immodesty enjoined upon Ndembu women in certain fertility rites), and people will enjoy the excitement, joys and reassurance that human solidarity affords us. A Buddhist meditator would hardly know where to begin to counter such illusory notions, ones necessarily leading, in Buddhist views, to suffering.

I do not wish to suggest that Turner is wrong in his compelling account of communitas. It is a phenomenon to be found in contexts the world over, and, at times, as I have suggested, even in Burma: a powerful model to pit against the normal and normative organization of individuals into distinctive roles. Rather I wish to suggest that Turner has omitted from his account an alternative rejoinder to structure, a third possibility to place alongside the 'two "major" models of human interrelatedness' he posits, one 'structured' and the other 'unstructured' (Turner 1969: 96).

I do so with recourse to Louis Dumont's analysis of two *other* major models of human interrelatedness, predicated on what he labelled 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' or 'modern' assumptions. In the former, Dumont tells us, people are bound together by virtue of their differences. For example, men and women have an interest in pairing up because each of them has traits and capacities the other lacks. In egalitarian or modern ideology, in contrast, people are looked upon as fundamentally similar. Men and women may differ, but in what really matters – their dignity and their rights – they are the same. In hierarchical arrangements, difference is the keystone in the social arch; in egalitarian ones, difference makes (or should make) no difference.

At one point, Turner gives an account of 'structure' that rhymes pretty closely with Louis Dumont's account of 'hierarchy'. Turner describes the standard, everyday model of society 'as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less"' (Turner 1969: 96).

Similarly, Dumont describes Indian caste society as predicated on relations of exchange among people differentiated along some axis of difference (ritual purity, gender, etc.) – and along with that difference, whatever it may be, a difference in value (Dumont 1980). Important to note here, though, is Dumont's emphasis upon the bonds, not the separations, that hierarchical distinctions generate. Once again, it is because individuals have distinctive skills and roles that they have an interest in linking themselves to others, unlike themselves, in long-term relations of exchange.

Turner goes on, in the same third chapter of *The Ritual Process*, to note that, 'from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the main-

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tenance of "structure", all sustained manifestations of communitas must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions' (Turner 1969: 109).

Dumont makes a similar point about caste society protecting itself from challenge when, in an early, much-noted discussion of renunciants in Indic traditions, he points out that the only way those traditions could accommodate 'individuals' was by allowing them to pull out entirely from society: to become mendicant wanderers (Dumont 1960). Buddhism, in the creation of a monastic order, represents one among several variants of the pattern. Buddhist monks become permanently marginal, in Turner's terms, and thereby are at once tolerated and neutralized. So the Buddhist solution to the idea that there might exist an alternative to 'structure' fits Turner's view that the guardians of order will go to great lengths to protect structure from all counternarratives.

Turner himself was very interested in the phenomenon of monks, particularly Catholic ones, as marginal beings. But he also included a few paragraphs about the Buddha towards the end of *The Ritual Process*. His final gloss on him is as follows: 'In the Buddha we have a classic case of a "structurally" well-endowed religious founder who underwent initiation into communitas through stripping and equalizing, and putting on the behavior of weakness and poverty' (Turner 1969: 197).

I think we can relate this comment to one Turner makes in an earlier chapter, when he writes: 'Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen", who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination' (ibid.: 128). It is in that last phrase ('to enter into vital relations with other men') where I think Turner is misleading for the Buddhist case, and where thinking further about Buddhism might have suggested an important emendation of his views. The 'path' that Buddhism prescribes as an alternative to structure is the opposite of what Turner takes to be self-evident. Rather than pitting against structure, which is to say, hierarchy, affirmations of solidarity, it pits against it the absence of bonds.

It turns out that structure – people bound to each other through hierarchically differentiated roles – admits of two contraries: people bound together in homogeneity and equality, and people not bound to each other at all. Even though the existence of the community of monks, the *sangha*, is predicated upon mutual interdependence through difference, the ultimate Buddhist ideal, as personified, or really, idealized, in the lone monk meditating in the forest, is of the absolutely autonomous individual.

To be fair to Turner, he was not unaware of the latter possibility, that of radical individualism. Very occasionally, he alludes to it, particularly in the

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essays collected in his 1974 book, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*. Here is a representative, if particularly piquant, example of the passing glance he makes from time to time to this alternative to both structure and communitas-filled anti-structure: 'Liminality often provides favorable conditions for communitas, but it may have the reverse effect, either a Hobbesian war of all against all, or an existentialist anarchy of individuals, each 'doing his own thing' (Turner 1974: 285).

But Turner never dwells on these alternative cases. Nothing about Africa, as far as my little reading on the region tells me, and little about Victor Turner's investments, would lead him to linger over this other kind of response to structure. The fact is that contemporary, well-educated Westerners worry about alienation, isolation, a loss of community, as Durkheim did – and before him, Tocqueville warned us that we should. Of course, we have plenty of other matters to worry about. But Turner's description of moments in social life when inequality falls away and 'vital relations with other men' come to the fore appeals to us, and appealed I assume to him, because it fits so well with our ideological commitments.

The fact that Turner's concept of communitas caught on so widely – close to thirty years after the publication of *The Ritual Process* a colleague at the University of Texas was using Turner's ideas as the key theoretical instrument with which to analyse Japanese manga – reflects Dumont's point that 'modern' people have embraced egalitarian ideas so completely that we have lost all feel for what an alternate take, a hierarchical one, on social relations would look like. We have taken our stand on equality. Anything that contrasts with it we brand 'inequality' and condemn.[5]

In their 1986 book, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White already warned us of the violent turn that communitas might take when generated in situations of communal tension. Think, for example, of South Asia. Old leftie that he was, Turner also well knew the perversions that might arise when certain people took it upon themselves to dismantle dominant hierarchies, only to replace the formerly powerful, in the name of the people, with themselves.

Indeed, Turner was actually more discerning than many of the people who took up his ideas. He points out in passages close to those I have quoted that 'structure' is necessary to the orderly pursuit of social life, that communitas can only operate as a reminder, punctuating our lives at moments of individual or social transition, of the fact that our hierarchical relationships are elaborated upon a fundamental, foundational ground of shared humanity. Both models, structure and anti-structure, he notes, must coexist and keep the other within bounds: '[F]or individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality

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and inequality . . . In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable' (Turner 1969: 97).

Yet even if we accept Turner's sober qualifications, our hearts respond more readily to appeals for solidarity based on fundamental sameness. As Dumont emphasizes, this makes it difficult for us to concede that others may very well not share our investments. Others, such as a lot of people in Burma, and a lot of Buddhists, may choose to idealize not powerful and exciting sensations shared among people in groups, but rather a very different, if equally unsustainable, model, one in which we evade the burdens of hierarchical relationships by wandering off on our own to meditate like lone ascetics in the jungle.

Ward Keeler is professor of anthropology at the University of Texas, Austin. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Java and Bali (Indonesia), and in Burma (Myanmar) since the 1970s. His work has focused on performance, gender, language and hierarchy in all three societies. His publications include monographs on Javanese shadow plays, and on Burmese Buddhism and gender, textbooks for the Javanese and Burmese languages, his translation of an Indonesian novel, and CDs of classical Burmese music, as well as a number of academic journal articles. As a recent fellow at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Study, and a guest at Stockholm University, he has been writing about shifting aesthetic preferences in South East Asia, and links between those shifts and larger issues in social relations more generally.

NOTES

1. More thorough accounts of meditation retreats in South East Asia can be found in Jordt 2007; Cook 2010, 2012; Keeler 2017; and Cassaniti 2018.
2. Since I wrote this essay, the Burmese military has staged a coup (on 1 February 2021), removing the civilian authorities from power and reversing what small liberalizing steps the civilian government had made.
3. Cook discusses the need to exercise control over emotions among Thai nuns who engage in meditation as a way to seek and at the same time embody and perform the Buddhist ideal of detachment (Cook 2010). Cassaniti traces the central importance of a Buddhist notion of 'remembering' in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka, and in each case the concept seems to imply a similar emotional steadiness (Cassaniti 2018). I find Cook's and Cassaniti's arguments convincing, but would note that a great many South East Asians who are not Buddhist adopt the same attitude towards emotions, suggesting that Buddhism provides only a partial explanation of the phenomenon – or even that Buddhist ideas have been shaped in light of a more generalized set of assumptions that are widespread throughout the region.
4. I never had to be careful not to grow attached to any pleasure during the retreat. I was struggling constantly to develop some equanimity in the face of physical and

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emotional pain, so I was well insulated from such a risk. Cook and Jordt clearly proved much better equipped to engage in meditative practices than I was.

5. David Graeber voices precisely such a gut aversion to hierarchy and to Dumont in a recent commentary (Graeber 2018).

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CHAPTER 8



MUSIC AT THE EDGE

American Torture and African Trance

Steven M. Friedson

> Music has a thirst for destruction, every kind of destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation. Is that not its potential 'fascism'?
>
> —Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

> At the limit, there are only intermezzi.
>
> —Roland Barthes, 'Rasch'

Somewhere on the plains of Africa roughly one million years ago, according to Gary Tomlinson's (2015) extremely long history of music, our hominin ancestors began to synchronize muscles and minds, to entrain bodies and souls, to keep time together.[1] Within this proto-human capacity for keeping time, the beginnings of musical experience were taking shape and, within this making of music, perhaps the very terms of ritual and social existence, of being-with-others. Contrary to Steven Pinker's (1997: 534) relegation of music to mere 'auditory cheesecake', making music together may well be the Ur-ritual where the being-with of human comportment was forged. Fiddler crabs synchronize their waves for enhancing display, fireflies synchronize their bioluminescent flashing, but we are the only species that keeps time together to an external beat (McNeil 1995; Merker 2000).[2] Different from fireflies and fiddler crabs 'who can't help it', we *want* to entrain (Wilson and Cook 2016: 1654).

A million years later and music is virtually everywhere, whether you want to hear it or not. In fact, music is hard to get away from – ambient tracks at a supermarket, hotel or restaurant; a commercial jingle on television or the

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radio; background music in a film; listening to music while driving, washing the dishes, doing homework, or walking down the street. One could extend the list ad infinitum. With this ubiquity of music, however, we musically entrain with each other less and less. Musical experiences are often thin, mundane, barely noticeable, more sonic wallpaper than transcendent risk, more a matter of passively listening to music than making music together. Even when we listen together at, for example, a rock concert, we tend to transfer our subjective experience of isolated listening (think earbud culture) to a kind of isolated listening with others, what Michael Bull (2000: 192) calls 'accompanied solitude'. Taken to the extreme, there is now the recent phenomenon of 'silent disco', with people dancing in a shared space, but not dancing together because each person is wearing headphones listening to their own music from different DJs.



Figure 8.1. Silent Disco at the Edinburgh Festival. Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic licence.

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Yet, in the right circumstances, at the right time, musical experience can still be profound, have ontological weight, become a mode of being-in-the-world, a sharing of time with others in immediacy in ways that only music can do. And wherever we find this kind of musical being, this kind of sharing of durée, we invariably encounter ritual. Ethnographic examples abound – chanting the world into being by a Navajo healer while drawing a sandpainting meant to attract the Holy People to help to heal the patient, those whom Navajos refer to as the 'one-sung-over'; dancing your disease in a Tumbuka temple in northern Malawi to heat the spirits through drum-specific rhythms in order to enter a divinatory trance of great diagnostic power; singing *bhajans* with your fellow congregants at a neighbourhood temple on a Wednesday evening in Chennai; riding to the upper and lower worlds through the sounds of a frame drum that is your horse, the beater your whip; or, in one of the most exotic of ethnographic settings, sitting quietly in the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam being transported to a different way of experiencing the flow of time while listening intently to a performance of a Bach unaccompanied cello suite. All these musical experiences, in their specificity, have the ontological weight to transform being-in-the-world to a way of being-musical.

Such musical experiences stand out from everyday life like a rock in a Zen sand garden, as Victor Turner (1986: 35) so aptly put it in his turn to an anthropology of experience. Here he was drawing on Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of Erlebnis, something lived through, bounded, marked off from the movement of everyday life. Lived experience has a beginning and an end, a structural nexus immediately given before distinctions between subject and object. Dilthey uses a musical metaphor to make the point: 'Lived experiences are related to each other like motifs in the andante of a symphony: they are unfolded (explication) and what has been unfolded is then recapitulated or taken together (implication). Here music expresses the form of a rich lived experience' (Dilthey 1985: 227). This does not mean that there is a conscious synthesis of past experiences, but rather this sedimentation, this weight, manifests itself in immediacy in its entirety: 'There is no duality of lived experience and music, no double world, no carry-over from one into the other. Genius involves simply living in the tonal sphere as though this sphere alone existed' (Dilthey 1977: 140). Although Dilthey is referring to the genius of a composer such as Bach or Mozart, it is equally applicable to the musical events mentioned here. Far from a subjective aesthetic experience as often portrayed, living in the tonal sphere, a form of musical Erlebnis, itself has power, has agency to draw us out of ourselves and into its realm. And when music does this, it is already becoming ritual, even at a solo cello concert in Amsterdam.

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In this power to make us musical, however, there is also a danger. The affordances of musical experience, its capacity to become our mode of being-in-the-world, its fascistic power, can be turned against us into an aversive sonic attack over which we have no control, to bend our social arc into an unbounded intermezzo, a liminality without end. When this happens, when musical experience becomes never-ending, unrelenting, unpredictable, we have entered the realm of music torture, a relatively recent innovation in that dark art that was ushered into the world in full force at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[3] Music became part of a regime of 'enhanced interrogation' (the George W. Bush administration's euphemism for torture) inflicted upon detainees in the 'Global War on Terror', itself a war without end. Turner's *communitas*, with all of its attendant modes of being-with, was inverted into a solitary musical existence, with no future, no past.

This chapter brings this tortured musical existence into close contact with a musical way of being that is, in many respects, its ontological inversion, namely the ride of the divine horsemen of the Guinea Coast of West Africa, the aboriginal home of that world religion of the Black Atlantic called Vodu, which is something I have been researching for the past thirty years.[4] Here musical experience is a way of being that is ecstatic in Heidegger's ek-istential etymological reading of Dasein, 'standing out from' in the projective ek-stases of time (Heidegger [1927] 1996: 302 ff.; see also Krell 2015).[5] And in this ecstatic time, deity and devotee find each other in the sound of the drum, the turn of the dance.

Intermezzo

Two musical moments on the edge. First, at a black site in Thailand, Abu Zubaydah, the first high-value detainee in the Global War on Terror, is placed inside a confinement box with a floor area of less than three feet square, all the while music – from death metal to children's songs – blasting unpredictably, unrelentingly. Not only in the box, but day and night Zubaydah was subjected to a musical assault that was inescapable, nailing him to an existential hell, an intermezzo with no beginning, no end. Second, Ama, an elderly fishmonger, regularly gets possessed by the mother of a pantheon of deities from northern Ghana. At shrine celebrations, she is no longer herself but a dancing god being praised by drum and song. As long as the mother is there, Ama is away, and when the god is ready to leave, Ama will return to take up her everyday life as mother, wife, daughter, fishmonger. She accrues no particular cultural or social capital from being one of the wives of the gods, other than she is assumed to be a morally upright person or the gods

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would not ride her. Possession is a rite of passage that continually folds back on itself, structurally ending where it started. Instead of a transformation of status, this is a trance-formation that returns to itself, a different kind of intermezzo, a different kind of liminality.

African Trance and American Torture

For the Vodu shrines of the Guinea Coast, musical experiences are energy producing, life-affirming, a musical communitas at the time of their happening, a being-with-others through the sacrifice of the one possessed. In detention cells, whether in Thailand or Guantánamo Bay, musical experience is an anti-ritual ritual that is life-diminishing, isolating, sacrificial, though not a sacrifice of the sacred kind. Whether the sacrifice is for the instantiation in the world of one of the many vodu, or on the altar of empire, neither detainees nor devotees have a say in the matter. This is obvious for those who are tortured, but it is also true for those possessed – one may choose to join a Vodu order but one does not choose to become ridden by the gods. It happens in a blink of the eye. Suddenly you are no longer yourself, but one of a pantheon of deities who have spread throughout the Black Atlantic, including the island of Cuba, where Vodu in the form of Santeria holds strong, and the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay is located – a geographical closeness that is worlds apart. In US detention sites scattered across the globe, prisoners were routinely bombarded with music for days, often weeks on end.[6]

How then do we investigate, do research, on such opaque experiences? What do we do with people who, in one instance, are not there at all, are profoundly away, possessed by a god or spirit; and in the other, are so unrelentingly there that they may never see the light of day to tell their story, though more and more of these testimonies are coming to light.[7] In the former case, at least we can do ethnography; in the latter, participant observation is not exactly an option. What we are left with, however, is a rapidly expanding archive told by those who were tortured, and those who did the torturing, the witnessing of victim and perpetrator, detailed in declassified bureaucratic reports sent up the chain of command, and now in the legal briefs of lawsuits working their way through the federal courts. But first and foremost, it is etched in the body-subjects of all of those who endured what became known as no-touch torture, what Alfred McCoy (2007: 8) cites as the first true innovation in torture techniques in the last three centuries.

How did music become weaponized as part of the Global War on Terror? By what path did it become a force multiplier individualized into an instru-

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ment of torture in the detention cells of Guantánamo, Bagram, Abu Ghraib, and black sites scattered across the globe? Its beginnings stretch back into the early years of the Cold War (McCoy 2012); its end, unfortunately, has not been written. To draw the genealogy of this weaponization – its interlacing movements and moments that congealed into a hardened practice; its trajectory into the silent corridors of official and unofficial government policies; its progression from inoculation to pathogen, from defence to offense;[8] its migration from the many to the few;[9] its evolution from noise to metal[10] – is to trace the spaces in between the reports, testimonies, documents, hearings, condemnations and dismissals that are now part of the public record, a body of material analysed and parsed by numerous human rights organizations, government committees, journalists and academics.[11] And while much has been said, much remains to be told about the musical experience of this fugitive territory. But first to more settled terrain, a Vodu order of the Guinea Coast, where musical experience is a 'being-with' that has the power to manifest a pantheon of northern gods.

Being-Away

In the 1920s, ritual entrepreneurs brought deities from northern Ghana to the shores of the Guinea Coast, specifically to the Bight of Benin.[12] The negative effects of British colonialism were coming to their full fruition in the Volta Region during this period; the economy was in a shambles; and Africans who had been conscripted to serve in the First World War had come home with new horizons and expectations. The older vodu did not seem to be doing the needed work, and so, as often happens in Africa, people sought the power of strangers and their gods to deal with the problems at hand.[13] Called Brekete, among other names (here christened after the northern drum that calls the gods, hence the importance of music), this pantheon was quickly incorporated within the wider Vodu world.[14]

As with other vodu, these northern gods ride their devotees on a regular basis, especially when shrines gather to celebrate and the gods come to dance with their 'children'. Seized by their capacity to be captured, it is not they who dance but Bangle the soldier; or Wango, god of the waters and roads; or Kunde the hunter, the father, always dressed in red; or Tseryia, his wife, always dressed in white, benevolent, though lethal if crossed (see figures 8.2 and 8.3). Old women who can barely walk are suddenly transformed into twirling, dancing gods whose virtuosic feats are confirmations of their unconcealed presence.

The complete 'being-away' of spirit possession, its amnesic happening, is made manifest in this testimony from Ama, the elderly fishmonger men-

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Figure 8.2. Possession by Kunde, the father and hunter of the Brekete pantheon. © Elise Ridenour



Figure 8.3. Possession by Tseriya, the mother of the Brekete pantheon. © Elise Ridenour

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tioned earlier, when she became possessed during a cow sacrifice for the gods:

> I was sitting with the other *adehawo* [shrine members], singing *brekete* songs when out of the corner of my eye I saw a bright light coming from inside the shrine. I turned toward the light, and standing in the doorway of the shrine was a woman with long flowing hair dressed all in white; it was Tseryia. She looked at me and began to dance, twirling as she came toward me. I felt a tremendous joy and stood up to greet her, and that was the last thing I remembered until I found myself sitting in the back of the shrine exhausted.[15]

The deities and devotees of Vodu have developed techniques over hundreds of years to mine the vital forces of musical experience for ritual purposes. Here ritual technology creates and reveals musical worlds that are energy producers, enhancers of the vital force at the heart of this Black Atlantic religion.[16] Hot music here produces a cold fusion (see Friedson 2009, chap. 5), where more energy is generated than is put in. And it is through this musical energy that the vodu find their way into the world, an intense being-musical, a musical entrainment of being-with-others, thus ritual. For the gods to be there in their totality, however, someone must always be leaving, way beyond our experience of such ways of not being-there.

This extreme letting go of the tension of consciousness, however, is not some archaic remnant frozen in a distant African past, but rather a universal possibility, a psychobiological capacity of human comportment (Bourguignon 1968; Cohen 2008). This is not to say that all cultures have forms of trance where one's being-there is superseded by another entity: some cultures promote such states, while others suppress it, usually labelling it as pathological, or the work of the devil, or some other malevolent entity.

We all, however, do experience modes of being-away as part of everyday life. It may be as mundane as daydreaming, of being bodily emplaced while lost in a reverie about bygone times or future plans. We may do rather complex tasks, such as driving a car, with our thoughts and awareness far away from the road and steering wheel, only to be instantly pulled back when the car in front suddenly brakes; or we are surprised to find ourselves pulling up onto the driveway of our home, and wonder exactly how we got there. And these days there are the more extreme cases of DWA (driving while on Ambien [a sleep tablet]), which leads some people to, among other things, drive their cars while asleep.

There is a rhythm to it all, pointing to a cognitive flexibility in our lives that probably had strong evolutionary benefit, though perhaps not for DWA. Research suggests there may be something like a ninety-minute cycle during waking hours analogous to REM sleep cycles when we are more apt to experience 'stimulus-independent thought' (Singer 1975: 734). Yet this

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flexibility of being-away is something we ultimately have no control over at the precise moment of its happening. We may think we can control such things. After all, for the most part, you decide when you want to escape into some memory when bored, or take a nap, or go to bed. However, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962: 189–90) points out, when we go to bed we assume the posture of someone who is sleeping before sleep ultimately visits us on its own accord. And I would make the same case for daydreaming. We may want to be away in numerous circumstances, but when we are actually displaced while embodied, it is something that is not a result of a conscious decision. Trying to make yourself think of something else to take you away from a situation often does the exact opposite. You may indeed succeed in thinking of something else, but this present-at-hand thinking is still rooted in being-there (i.e. being aware in a kind of apperception that you are thinking of something else), and is ontologically different from the kind of everyday mind wandering I am discussing here. You may prepare yourself for daydreaming, but, as with sleep, it comes of its own free will, has a certain agency, an autonomy that has a resonance with episodes of spirit possession.

As I argue in *Remains of Ritual* (2009), I am not suggesting that possession trance is somehow an extreme form of daydreaming or some kind of sleepwalking, but by realizing that we can do complex tasks while being-away brings us somewhat closer to an understanding of how someone entranced can be there and away at the same time, can dance, divine, bestow blessings. It is precisely because the vodu are there in the fullest sense of the term – no remainder, no surplus, no unconscious – that possession can transpire. Being-there in the mode of possessing is an unconcealing of the divine in a world of finitude. For the one possessed, on the other hand, to dance is to dream of nothing. For someone caught in the snare of being identified as an enemy combatant in the Global War on Terror, sleep, let alone dreaming, is only a remote possibility, as people go days on end with neither. Loud music is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that detainees stay awake.

Being-There

In a series of CIA cables released in 2017,[17] describing in clinical detail the interrogation of the first documented victim of new torture techniques deployed by the US government post 9/11, we gain witness to what happened to Abu Zubaydah (born Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn), a kind of patient zero.[18] He was the first to have the full panoply of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' applied in a systematic and calculated manner. It was taken as an article of faith by the intelligence community and the upper administration that he was one of Osama bin Laden's top lieutenants, and, therefore,

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had information about future attacks, which they needed to extract by whatever means necessary.[19]

In 2002, when he was captured in Pakistan, Abu Zubaydah was considered the United States' first 'high-value' detainee and was quickly sent off to one of the CIA's black sites in Thailand.[20] Shortly after arriving, the CIA sent two psychologists, James Mitchell and John 'Bruce' Jessen, who had been involved with Survival-Evasion-Resistance-Escape (SERE) training at Fairchild Airforce Base in Spokane, Washington, to interrogate Zubaydah. According to official accounts, SERE was initially designed and implemented after the Korean War as a programme of inoculation, a way to prepare those most vulnerable to capture (e.g. air force pilots) to better resist harsh interrogation by exposing them to some of the techniques they might encounter.



Figure 8.4. Sacrificed to the music while being doused with cold water. Drawing by Abu Zubaydah depicting multisensory torture. © Abu Zubaydah. Drawings by Abu Zubaydah can be found in *American Torturers: FBI and CIA Abuses at Dark Sites and Guantanamo* (Denbeaux, Mark; Jess Ghannam; and Abu Zubaydah. 2023).

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Essentially, they reverse engineered the programme to use as an interrogation regime on Abu Zubaydah.[21]

But what Mitchell and Jessen devised for Zubaydah went way beyond what was done to soldiers at Fairchild. According to the lawsuit, they based their programme design on Martin Seligman's (1972) experimental work in the 1960s on 'learned helplessness'. Dogs who were unpredictably given electric shocks, with no means of avoiding them, soon gave up trying to escape even when they could.[22] According to Seligman, they had been conditioned, had learned to be helpless. Working off of Seligman's theory, Mitchell and Jessen believed that, among other techniques (see below), sustained 'monopolization of perception' (Biderman 1957) – sensory deprivation as well as sensory overload – would regress 'resistant' prisoners to an infantile state totally dependent upon the interrogators, compliant to their every wish, including freely giving any actionable intelligence they might have. For Abu Zubaydah, learned helplessness became futility at all levels of existence, as detailed in the CIA cables, which documented pretty much every step of the process, because, beyond wanting to get intelligence, he was being treated as a test case, a medical experiment to find out what happens to a human being when subjected to extreme stress for prolonged periods of time.[23]

Bombarded with ear-splitting loud music,[24] stripped naked, grabbed by a collar around his neck and repeatedly slammed against a wall, he was waterboarded eighty-three times over a fifteen-day period, sometimes three or four episodes within an hour.

After suffering these bouts of literally life and death, he was put into a small wooden box, measuring less than three feet square (Salim vs. Mitchell 2015: 23). I quote from one of the cables:

> [A]t 1742 hrs, subject was unstrapped from the board and the neck collar was removed. Pointing to the small box, the interrogator said, 'you know what to do'. Subject got off the table, sat on the floor, and scooted into the small box. At 1743 hours, prior to closing the door, the interrogators said that when they came back, they would pick up where they left off.[25]

Less than three feet square, not even from the tip of your nose to the end of an outstretched arm – hard to imagine projecting oneself into that space; unimaginable being there after being waterboarded multiple times in the past hour, all the while being blasted with music that is haptic in its reach. Abu Zubaydah's account of what happened to him, not surprisingly, is quite different:

> It was so painful. As soon as they locked me up inside the box I tried my best to sit up, but in vain, for the box was too short. I felt I was going to explode from

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> bending my legs and my back, and from being unable to spread them even for short instants. The very strong pain made me scream unconsciously. As to my back, it was playing solo the guitar of pain but with no chords, for I couldn't feel any chords, or nerves or even bones. The tone of the music was dissonant.[26]

Stuffed inside what his torturers called the 'music box', Abu Zubaydah literally became an instrument of torture, specifically a musical instrument, a guitar of pain. Verging on the poetic, the musical imagery is striking, even more so when read in the context of a legal brief. One can only interpret this as a reflection of what he had gone through, how he had become the music.

Take away waterboarding, walling, and stress positions, and leave only the music, then how can this be torture? How can being forced to listen to music, no matter how much one might hate the particular kind of music being played, no matter how much it might offend one's cultural sensibilities, regardless of how long it goes on, or how loud it might be (except for levels that literally kill the ear), really be considered as such? Fingernails pulled out, electric shocks to genitals? Absolutely. Waterboarding? Every-

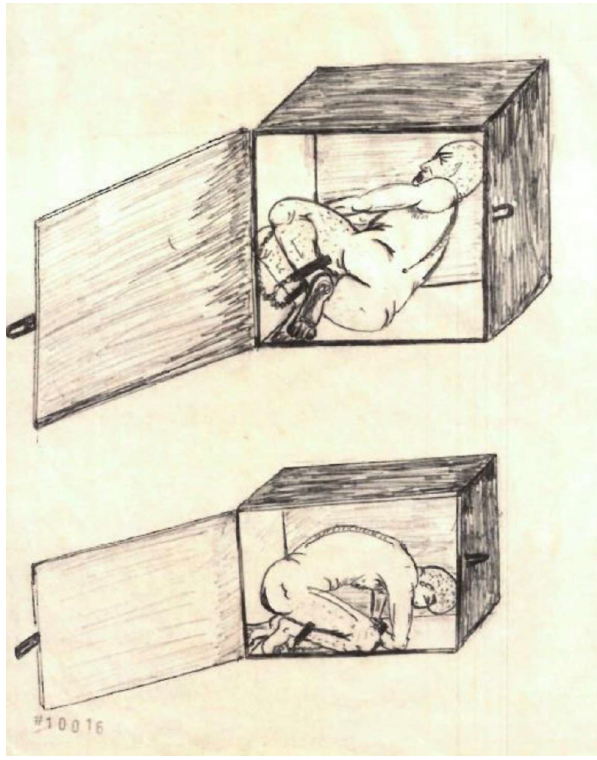


Figure 8.5. Inside the small confinement box. © Abu Zubaydah

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one agrees, save for a few notable exceptions. But music? How can music be torture? Isn't this overstating the case, undermining sanctions against 'real' torture, a physical reality that inflicts pain on the body through the direct actions of another human being?

Popular Western conceptions of music as merely entertainment, aesthetic uplift, or as background accompaniment to other activities, when projected upon considerations of music as torture relegates it to a lightness of being incapable of anchoring such extremes. Music torture is often treated as a joke, or some kind of gruesome parlour game, people coming up with song lists that would 'torture' anyone forced to listen to such annoying music (Cusick 2006). Even Darius Rejali (2009), whose comprehensive study of torture and democracy offers a penetrating analysis, cannot resist the trivializing of music: 'If playing Barney, Metallica, or Eminem loudly was a form of SD [sensory deprivation] experimentation, then Amnesty International should be looking for torture victims in the American suburbs. There will be lots of them' (ibid.: 379).

Yet more than one detainee *and* interrogator have cited music as one of the most devastating forms of no-touch torture. As one CIA operative put it, after a session of loud music and strobe lights they come out 'completely fried' (Jones 2008). Ruhal Ahmed, one of the Tipton Three, a British national who was caught up in the war on terror and incarcerated at Guantánamo from 2003 to 2007, was subjected to this technology of sensory bombardment multiple times. He speaks directly to the power of aversive musical experience:

> Once you accept that you're going to go into the interrogation room and be beaten up, it's fine. You can prepare yourself mentally. But when you're being psychologically tortured, you can't. . . . [Music] makes you feel like you are going mad. You lose the plot and it's very scary to think that you might go crazy because of the loud noise, because after a while you don't hear the lyrics, all you hear is heavy banging, that's all you hear. You can't concentrate on the drums or what the person said. All you hear is this loud shouting, and loud banging. It just sounds like metal is clashing against metal. (Reprieve 2008)

It seems that music has a unique ability to prevent mind wandering, to escape into a daydream of better places, better times, to get away from the excruciating pain of stress positions. Albert Biderman, in his research on communist interrogation of air force personnel during the Korean War, states that the manipulation of perception 'fixes perception on [the] immediate predicament' (Biderman 1957: 619), exactly the point I am making here in regards to the manipulation of the acoustical realm through music. Musical experience here does not take you away, but just the opposite, it literally does not let you leave, even in your own head.

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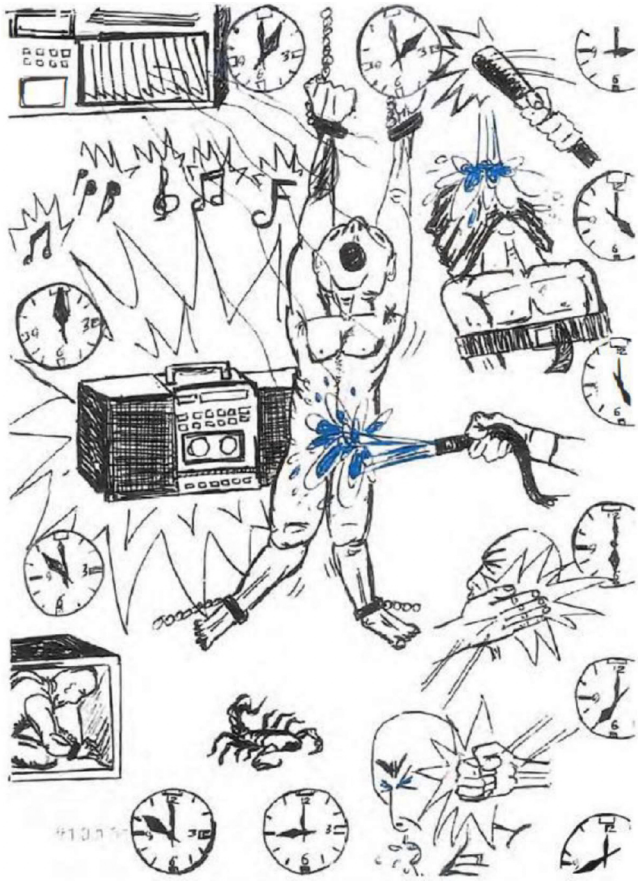


Figure 8.6. Abu Zubaydah drawing, 'The Vortex', representing the full panoply of torture techniques. © Abu Zubaydah

The Weight of Heavy Metal

Between bouts of waterboarding and interrogation, Abu Zubaydah was shackled naked to a small metal chair tilted at a 45-degree angle, head covered by a burlap hood, in a freezing cell, with a fifteen-minute tape loop playing non-stop for days at a time (ICRC 2007: 28). Short shackling to a leaning chair, along with hooding and non-stop loud music, were the same techniques used by the Israeli General Security Service (GSS) during the detention and interrogation of Palestinians. According to the Israeli human rights organization, B'Tselem, '[r]egular shabeh entails shackling the detainee's hands and legs to a small chair, angled to slant forward so that the

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detainee cannot sit in a stable position. The interrogee's head is covered with an often filthy sack, and loud music is played non-stop through loudspeakers' (see Figure 8.7) (B'Tselem 1998). One can only speculate that given the close ties between the two agencies, and the CIA's immediate concern with applying maximum pressure to this new crop of 'Islamic enemy combatants', they turned to the GSS for guidance.

Although many different kinds of music were played, heavy metal, especially the subgenre death metal, was a favourite choice. In particular, the band Deicide's 'Fuck Your God' is mentioned in more than one account. While the title of the song was known to those who were doing the torturing, though not necessarily the lyrics, the ones on the receiving end probably did not have a clue as to what the song was about. It is the timbre of the screamed and growled vocals that is meant to invoke heaviness, dark power, here the satanic, which overwhelms lyrical content, the semantic message.[27] Zubaydah, of course, did get the message, just not in the form of lyrics. The message being sent came in the form of vocals that were indexes of aggression, something discernible across cultural boundaries.[28] Combined with



Figure 8.7. Shabeh positional torture. © B'Tselem

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distorted guitars playing at extremely fast speeds, supported by drummers playing 'blast beats' at over 200 bpm (Roddy 2007: 11), the aggressive nature of the music is universally unmistakable, its effect inescapable.The perception of it, of course, was, for those involved, at polar opposites, which raises the question of what kind of stance (Berger 2009) does the one tortured take to such music. Does he actually have any agency to take a stance? What intentionality is left when you are no longer able to form an intention beyond the intentionality of simply being-there? The weight of sonic torture is so heavy that it intrudes upon musical ways of being before textual exegesis is possible, an inherent violence embodied within sound.

In addition to death metal, thrown into the mix were such artists and groups as Eminem, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Prince, Marilyn Manson, Bee Gees, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Queen, Drowning Pool, to name just a few, and included selections specifically referred to as 'futility songs', such as the Meow Mix jingle and the Sesame Street theme song. But the futility song that has received by far the most attention and reaction from people being told about this aversive musical practice is Barney the Purple Dinosaur's 'I Love You'. The almost universal response from those in the know (i.e. American enculturated listeners) is 'If I was forced to listen to Barney's theme song, I would confess to anything'. Its cloying melody, based on the children's counting song 'This Old Man', seems to especially grate on the sensibilities of adult listeners. And that is precisely why it was used. In the confines of the asymmetrical torture dyad, the one pushing the play button projected onto the one being forced to listen his own distaste for the music, coupled with the cruel irony of the lyrics, which may be lost on the one being tortured, who may not even understand English, but most assuredly not on the one doing the torturing. The playlist of no-touch torture reflects a warrior mentality – 'War itself is heavy metal'[29] – and an irony of asymmetrical power that can turn a children's song into an instrument of torture.[30]

Regardless of the genre, in one sense they were all songs of futility because there was absolutely nothing you could do about the random nature of their application. One minute it might be Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' and the next Barney's 'I Love You'. Sometimes different tracks and genres were played at the same time (Sharrock 2010: 166). What you were hearing was totally out of your control, the sonic embodiment of learned helplessness. You could not outstrip music's capacity to capture the ontological present.

Being-musical, whether life-enhancing, or life-diminishing, is always reaching out into the social surround. But here the social surround thins, disappears in the darkness of being hooded, in the isolating self-inflicted pain

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of stress positions, in the sheer loudness of music that occupies every crack and crevice. Technology is heavily implicated in all of this. It was a low tradecraft approach to music torture – there was no official playlist handed down from above – enabled by the portability of music machines with their now immense storage capacity and loudspeakers that could generate the desired volume. Music became a complex weapon system, a web of significance sonically realized, specifically designed to harm.

How does the sheer dynamic force of music achieve the objectives of no-touch torture, which in Zubaydah's case, of course, also involved physical abuse? Michael Heller's work on loudness gets at some of this in his notion of 'listener collapse' (Heller 2015: 44–46). As he hears it, listener collapse involves a double move: '[Extreme] loudness foregrounds sound's identity as a physical presence, while at the same time dissolving selfhood through the approach toward physical pain' (ibid.: 52). Cusick (2006, 2013a) also hears the loudness of music as a means of disrupting and destroying subjectivity. And this is exactly where an ontomusicology intervenes.[31] I argue that, in fact, it does the exact opposite: listener collapse nails presence, removes absence and the ability to get away from the pain, removes the capacity to go inside oneself for relief, to meander, to get lost in a daydream of other places and better times, to escape. The mettle of the real impinges on the soul of the tortured.

This raises the whole question of whether it is just the sheer loudness of the music, the debilitating acoustical energy, that does the damage, or is there something about the structure of the music itself that is a major contributing factor to its devastating effect. This moves us to an aspect of musical torture that, for the most part, has been overlooked in the scholarship on this subject, namely temporality.

A Time of Torture

An essential component of the no-touch torture regime is the manipulation and disruption of the temporal environment. Procedures are meant to intensify shock, insecurity and psychological stress. As detailed in the CIA manual, *KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation* (1963: 76–77), one of the main objectives is to disrupt the subject's sense of time. This applies from the moment the target is captured, which should ideally be done in the early morning hours when 'a person's resistance, physiologically as well as psychologically, is at its lowest' (ibid.: 85). One minute asleep in your bed, the next hooded, thrown into a waiting Humvee, driven around in circles until arriving at a detention site; it is shock and awe at the local level. Any kind

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of routine was to be avoided at all costs. Interrogations happened at random intervals, cells admitted no natural light, sounds of the outside world were masked, essentially there were no markers to situate yourself within a temporal world. Whatever circumstances landed you in one of the detention facilities, your separation from your previous life was instantaneous and complete. You were no longer in control of your destiny. Like an initiand in a classic African circumcision school, someone else controlled the essentials of your life; but here there was no one to share your experience, your ordeal, nor was there any implicit understanding that you were in a liminal period of transition from one stage to another. This was a rite of passage with no exit, no aggregation.

In these situations, music, the temporal art par excellence, is unpredictable and unrelenting, which is a time dimension that is part of the program of futility. You never knew when or what was coming next. There might be ten minutes of silence, followed by twenty hours of non-stop acoustical assault. The random nature of this sonic assault contributes to this inability of being-away. In studies on stimulus-independent thought, it seems to be extremely difficult to reduce mind wandering in experimental settings except when stimulus is random: 'Only extreme irregularity in presentation of signals can dramatically cut down reports of the occurrence of task-irrelevant thought' (Drucker 1969, quoted in Singer 1975: 733). In other words, the unpredictable nature of music in these settings would tend to obviate the ability to escape aversive circumstances through daydreaming, turning inward, being-away. As Ruhal Ahmed describes after being subjected to such musical assault:

> Later on they introduced the music. It just became even worse because before you could actually concentrate on something to try and make yourself focus on some other thing in your life that you did before and take the pain away. . . . You can think about your girlfriend, you can think about your family. You know you can block this out. But once they introduced the music torture, you couldn't think because music was so loud in your ears all you could hear is banging (Retrieved 15 June 2019 from https://youtu.be/_EuIlAiFWQc; https://youtube/mn6xQPvsjJk).

He goes on in a later interview to speak of music as a 'black ecstasy', an inversion of his experience of disco clubs in England: 'When you go to a concert or a club, you're looking for loud music and flashing lights. You want to be transported into ecstasy. We experienced exactly the same thing, except that it was turned on its head. You could call it black ecstasy' (Rapp 2010). Music at the moment of its happening can directly take over one's sense of the flow of time, can force its time to become your time, its durée your passage. There

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is no escaping its omnipresence. And this omnipresence removes the past, freezes the future, with nowhere to escape, not even within your own head, leaving you with nothing but the bare bulb of the present.

One possible way music does this is through the phenomenon of musical entrainment. As Clayton, Sager and Will (2005: 14) state, 'Music, as an external oscillator entraining our internal oscillators, has the potential to affect not only our sense of time but also our sense of being in the world'.[32] While not necessarily a direct causal relationship, there may be a kind of neural resonance at work, with brain oscillations entraining to external rhythmic stimulus (Wilson and Cook 2016: 1649). If so, then how different is the pulse of African trance and that of American torture? One is suffused with the rhythm of the crossroads (Friedson 2009: Chap. 5), the other with satanic blast beats.

In heavy metal, rhythmic practice is 'stiff' (Berger 1999: 59), often a straight up and down series of fast beats. Blasting, as this rhythmic practice is called, which in its classic form alternates kick-drum strikes (usually played simultaneously with ride or hi-hat cymbal) and snare drum hits (Roddy 2007: 11), fill up rhythmic space leaving no alternative – the beat is heavy, and meant to be so. Death metal drummers often employ a more intense version of blast beats (Purcell 2003: 23), using a double-kick pedal to also play the bass drum on the snare strikes.

All rhythmic space is taken up; it ties you to the moment, unable to escape the weighted time of heavy metal.

This is quite different from the well-ventilated rhythmic practices of a Vodu shrine, which always invites other parts to contribute to the spaces created in-between polyrhythms. I have argued elsewhere that in much ritual African rhythmic practice, there are always at least two different kinds of beat going on, something I, following Ruth Brandel (1959), have termed the African hemiola, where six pulses can be grouped into three two-pulse beats, or two three-pulse beats.[33] It is not three beats against two, or two beats against three as a hemiola is often described by Western music theorists; in much African ritual music both are simultaneously available for a musical rhythmic sophistication that has been developed over hundreds of years. In *Remains of Ritual* (2009), I argue that this creates a phenomenological shifting conducive to a cognitive and bodily flexibility that is a powerful site of West African multiplicity. Master drummers play around with it, dancers embody it, and ritual participants embrace it in that undertheorized form of body concussion called clapping.

The temporality of musical experience, its durée, has the uncanny ability, in both no-touch torture and shrine rituals, to bite into the very realm of existence, not in order to dissolve it, but to become it. In both instances, musi-

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cal repetition is extreme, creating a kind of hyper entrainment, but with very different outcomes. In musical torture, entrainment is totally asymmetrical, imposed from above as it were, the density of time delimiting possibilities within each period of its unpredictable occurrence. For the ride of divine horsemen, on the other hand, there is a mutual tuning-in process (Schutz 1951), a social entrainment of being-with-others that is a musical plane of multiplicity, a musical communitas. Within this sphere of making music together, this manifold repetition of multiplicity folds back on itself in a kind of stacking effect, creating weighted hollows, productive absences that form into a well-ventilated musical experience full of potential.

The ritual gathering at a Brekete shrine is a musical gathering, a logos (λόγος) in Heidegger's (2000) etymological/ontological reading of the term. For Heidegger, logos is a gathering of Being into unconcealment, which seems particularly apropos when people are dancing with their gods, being embraced by them through musical experience, and through such experience reaching out into the social surround of being-with-others. Given the sacrifice of the one possessed, such a musical gathering brings these divine horsemen and their adherents into the sounded light of the world, where people can dance with their gods. Inside the music box, on the other hand, it is a dark gathering within oneself, totally isolated, locked within a world where all contact is suspended, perception totally manipulated, enchained to an isolating music with no hope of release. Flesh and bone are vibrated to their core in this ontological hell.[34] We human beings are supposed to be flexible, both there and away in a continual flux of give and take with each other. When this being is reduced to the narrow chinks of the cavern of the present, all hope expires, and the gods indeed have fled.[35]

This is a nomadic site, a desert of sound, of flashing light, of night temperatures cast in a smooth space. You, and very specifically you, a haecceity, have entered a ritual initiation not of your own free will, an initiation into learned helplessness, a liminality without end. You are the sacrifice. And who are you being sacrificed to? According to *New York Times* columnist Jane Mayer in her book *The Dark Side*, the CIA interrogators 'planned to become Zubayda's [sic] 'God'' (2009:333). They held his life in their hands; as a result of waterboarding, they literally brought him back from the dead more than once. And, more directly to the point here, by the time they got through with him, they had transformed him into a one-eyed guitar of pain.

One of the last pictures we have of him was taken in 2006 when he was transferred to the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay. When he was captured in 2002, he had both eyes, four years later, only one (see Figure 8.8). What happened to his left eye has never received an official explanation.[36] As of this writing, he remains a prisoner at Guantánamo Bay. His case is still pending in front of a US military tribunal.

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Figure 8.8. Abu Zubaydah before capture in 2002 and after four years in US custody.

Conclusion: Being-With

Is the aversive musical experience I have been detailing here an aberration, something attributable to a few bad actors? Or are our ways of consuming music somehow implicated in its use for torture? While there might not be a direct connection, there is, nonetheless, a resonance at work that is suggestive. We now have a tremendous amount of mediated music readily available to us on demand thanks to the viral proliferation of listening devices of all kinds, shapes and sizes. According to the latest iteration of the Apple watch, you can carry a million songs on your wrist.

This state of affairs, where moveable music can accompany us wherever we go, has resulted in an inversion. Walking down the street plugged into our own private soundtrack for living has cut us off from others. We are statistically no longer pulled out of ourselves into musically being-with others, collectively absorbed into music's auratic glow, to appropriate Walter Benjamin's terminology; rather the music is now in us, absorbed in a masturbatory denial of risk assuaged by nostalgia. Musical experience becomes a kind of anti-ritual, an aesthetic pleasure that goes nowhere. And where can this nowhere lead? In a literally bone-chilling report in the *New York Times*

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Figure 8.9. Start them young.

(Kirkpatrick and Gall 2018), as the Saudi forensic doctor was getting ready to use a bone saw to cut up the body of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Turkey, he advised everyone to don headphones, as he was doing, and listen to music.

If music is the herald of the future that Jacques Attali (2011) claims, then its weaponization adumbrates a troubling one. Worrying signs are on the horizon. A former president of the United States openly endorses torture (the euphemisms have been discarded), Guantánamo remains open, and new forms of technology, such as directional speakers, can tailor a sonic beam to make music and words seem like they are coming from inside your head.[37] What kind of sonic torture would that afford?

Perhaps we need to find new ways of doing old things. Instead of listening to music through ever-smaller personal audio devices that isolate us into a private soundtrack for living, we need to, once again, start making music together as is still done in the Vodu shrines of the Black Atlantic. We need to embrace the gift of being-with-others, of a musical way of being-in-the-world, hence the significance of making music together, one of the most human things we do. Music is that rare experience that has the potential to lead

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us forward into new rituals of becoming thus belonging, of being-with, of being-musical.

Steven M. Friedson is Distinguished Research Professor of Music and Anthropology at the University of North Texas. He has published two books: *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), and *Remains of Rituals: Northern Gods in Southern Land* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

NOTES

1. This chapter is a revised and expanded version of my previously (2019) published work: 'The Unbearable Weight of Music: The Intermezzo', *Anthropology Today* 35(5): 11–15; and 'The Music Box: Songs of Futility in a Time of Torture', *Ethnomusicology* 63(2): 222–46.
2. Emphasis here is on the 'together'. While there is evidence from recent research (Merchant and Honing 2014; Patel 2014; Wilson and Cook 2016; Honing et al. 2018) that in limited contexts other animals have the capability to entrain to an external beat, it is not usual, it takes a fair amount of training, and, most importantly, other species do not do this together. While other animals may entrain to a beat, it seems that only humans keep time together. According to a recent review article on the evolutionary origins of beat perception, it turns out that audiomotor entrainment – that is, moving in time to an external beat – is 'potentially the most biologically unusual feature of human rhythmic behavior' (Kotz, Ravignani and Fitch 2018: 897). In this article, they further state that 'it is clear in humans that engagement in rhythmic group activity is a human universal and can lead to enhanced social bonding' (ibid.: 906), which adds weight to my claim here, as does the fact that much of the neural activity during beat entrainment happens in the basal ganglia, which speaks to its ancient provenance (Large et al. 2015; Ravignani and Madison 2017).
3. See Greenberg and Dratel 2005; Cusick 2006, 2008, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Sifton 2006; Worthington 2007, 2009; McCoy 2007, 2012; Fletcher and Stover 2009; Pieslak 2009; Cusick and Joseph 2011; Grüny 2012; Szendy 2012; Grant 2013, 2014.
4. The term 'divine Horsemen' comes from Maya Deren's work (1953) on 'Vodoun' in Haiti, referencing a widely held metaphor across the Black Atlantic that those possessed are like horses ridden by the gods. I am using the term 'Black Atlantic' in Robert Farris Thompson's sense as a 'philosophic stream' (Thompson 1983: xiii) informed by a set of aesthetic parameters, here a religious complex that is, in part, danced, which extends from the West Coast of Africa to the shores of the 'new world'. This is different from Paul Gilroy's (2007) emphasis on the Black Atlantic as a site of 'modernity and double consciousness', as the subtitle to his book makes clear. Religious denominations of the Black Atlantic, which also includes Santeria and Candomblé (Matory 2005), among others, all have four defining features: a pantheon of spirit-gods (for Santeria and Candomblé they are called *orishas*) who possess material manifestation of those deities in some physical form, often called

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'fetishes' by practitioners (see Friedson 2009: 86 for a discussion of this term), blood sacrifices to 'feed' the deities, at least some of whom hailed from Africa, and divinatory practices. The World Council of Churches declared Vodu a world religion in 1983 (Fleurant 2007: 237), and I am following their lead in using the word Vodu as an all-encompassing term to refer to different denominations found throughout the Black Atlantic. In this chapter, I am using the convention that when referring to the religion, 'Vodu' is capitalized; when referencing the deities themselves, it is in lower case.

5. This is distinct from Rouget's (1985) parsing of the term as a solitary form of altered states of consciousness – Mohammed in the cave the paradigm example – which he contrasts with the more active sociality of trance.
6. This weaponization of music extended from detention cells and interrogation rooms to the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq, where LRADs (Long Range Acoustic Devices) blasted death metal *and* Barney the Dinosaur's 'I Love You' at insurgent positions, which in turn often blasted back *nasheeds* and Qur'anic chants using the low-tech but still effective loudspeakers of mosques.
7. See The Guantánamo Testimonials Project, Center for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas, University of California Davis; retrieved 15 June 2019 from http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu/projects/the-guantanamo-testimonials-project/index. See also Begg and Brittain 2006; Slahi 2015.
8. 'Enhanced interrogation techniques' were developed from the military's SERE (Survival-Evasion-Resistance-Escape) programme, which was originally part of defensive training for personnel who were at high risk of capture.
9. Although Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs) were not, to my knowledge, used in interrogation, the rationale behind music as weapon, in one sense, moved from the battlefield to the interrogation room.
10. One of the first reported instances of music used in modern torture regimes was the CIA interrogation of KGB operative Yuri Nosenko, who defected to the United States in 1964. Worried that he was a double agent, the CIA subjected him to 'hostile interrogation' ('Family Jewels' Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities 1975: MORl DoclD: 1451843, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB222/), which included a starvation diet, being dosed with LSD and other mind-altering drugs, and forcing him to listen to music through headphones for twenty-three hours a day (Finley 2008: 62).
11. See US Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014; The Torture Data Base (ACLU), https://www.thetorturedatabase.org/search/apachesolr_search?filters=tds_cck_field_doc_release_date%3A%5B2016-06-01T00%3A00%3A00Z%20TO%202016-07-01T00%3A00%3A00Z%5D&release_date_from=06%2F01%2F2016&release_date_to=06%2F30%2F2016&advsearch=1; Reprieve (http://www.reprieve.org.uk/topic/Guantánamo-bay/); Human Rights Watch (https://www.hrw.org/); 'No Blood, No Foul': Soldiers' Accounts of Detainee Abuse in Iraq' (https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/07/22/no-blood-no-foul/soldiers-accounts-detainee-abuse-iraq); Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General Special Review, *Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities* (September 2001 – October 2003); American Psychological Association Report to the Special Committee of the Board of Director of the American Psychological Association Independent Review Relating to APA Ethics Guidelines, National Security Interrogations, and

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Torture 2015; and Salim v. Mitchell (https://www.aclu.org/cases/salim-v-mitchell-lawsuit-against-psychologists-behind-cia-torture-program). Also: Worthington 2007, 2009; US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General 2008; Mayer 2009; Soufan and Freedman 2011.

12. A distinction is made by some southern Ewe speakers between vodu and *trɔ* (referring to northern gods), which I am not following here (see Friedson 2009: 23). This terminology, however, is rather loose, with people often using 'vodu' as a generic term.
13. See Shack and Skinner 1979 on strangers in Africa. See Friedson on the power of foreign spirits in *vimbuza* trance (1996), and for a discussion of the ethos of the stranger among Ewe speakers of Ghana (2009).
14. See Werbner 1979 on the transformation of deities from exotic to an 'indigenous mode' (663).
15. This is an edited version. The full quote can be found in *Remains of Ritual* as the epigraph to the 'Coda' (Friedson 2009: 181).
16. See Thompson 1983 and Senghor 1974 on the vitality of African-based religious praxis.
17. These declassified CIA documents are part of evidentiary findings in the lawsuit Salim v Mitchell (https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/salim-v-mitchell-complaint). See also https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/us/politics/cia-torture.html?emc=eta1#whats-next. In August of 2017, Mitchell and Jessen agreed to settle the lawsuit, the first time a lawsuit has been settled that involved CIA torture (https://www.aclu.org/cases/salim-v-mitchell-lawsuit-against-psychologists-behind-cia-torture-program).
18. In the early eighteenth century in France, the recipient of judicial torture was referred to as the 'patient' (Foucault 1977: 40).
19. Abu Zubaydah's status within Al-Qaeda continues to be contested. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence states that '[t]he CIA later concluded that Abu Zubaydah was not a member of al-Qa'ida' (2014: 409). However, others, including upper-level Bush administration officials along with James Mitchell (Mitchell and Harlow 2016) still claim he was a senior figure.
20. See Hickman and Kiriakou (2016) for an eyewitness account of Abu Zubaydah's capture.
21. See Hickman and Kiriakou (2017: 94); Soufan and Freedman 2011; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report: Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program (declassified version 2014). Mitchell, in his book, *Enhanced Interrogation: Inside the Minds and Motives of the Islamic Terrorists Trying to Destroy America* (2016), denies reverse engineering the SERE protocol for enhanced interrogation. Loud music is cited in the US Senate Committee on Armed Services Report (2008: 3) as one of the standard techniques used in SERE training, which was directly adopted as an 'enhanced interrogation technique'.
22. The use of dogs in behavioral research has a long history, most notably Pavlov's groundbreaking work on conditioned reflexes and the manipulation of behavior (1927).
23. According to Bloche (2017), detailed monitoring, record keeping and clinical evaluation of 'enhanced interrogation' methods on detainees constituted medical ex-

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perimentation on human subjects without their consent, something outlawed in numerous international conventions and treaties. This has particular relevance to Abu Zubaydah's case, given that he was patient zero.

24. Loud music is mentioned sixteen times in the 82-page brief from the lawsuit Salim v Mitchell, filed on 13 October 2015. Retrieved 15 June 2019 from https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/salim-v-mitchell-complaint.
25. Salims v. Mitchell – United States Bates Stamp #001953, 20 December 2016. Retrieved 15 February 2024 from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/us/politics/cia-torture.html?emc=eta1#whats-next.
26. Statement from Abu Zubaydah, February 2008, document marked Tracking #7B, p. 6, Salim v. Mitchell 2016.
27. One of the stylistic features of death metal, a genre of extreme metal according to Kahn-Harris (2007), is the general inability to decipher lyrics. He cites this unintelligibility as a marker: 'Extreme metal takes vocal distortion further than heavy metal by abandoning practically all elements of melody in the voice. Instead, vocals are screamed or growled in ways that generally make lyrics impossible to decipher without the aid of a lyric sheet' (2007: 32). Harris Berger, however, argues that aficionados, in fact, pride themselves in being able to 'hear' the words (personal communication).
28. See Mehr et al. (2018: 356) on hostile vocalizations by humans and the cross-cultural understanding of such vocalizations as acoustic universals. The article, however, mainly focuses on the recognition of lullabies, healing and dance songs across cultures. See also Arnal et al. 2015 on the universal features, especially the 'roughness', of the human scream.
29. Quoted from the documentary *Soundtrack of War* (Gittoes 2005).
30. See the documentary *Songs of War: Music as a Weapon* (2012).
31. Although Cusick gets close to an ontomusicological understanding in her idea of a 'second, vibration-centered framework' (Cusick 2013a: 278), she still holds on to a subjective metaphysics, though one that is nuanced through (following Jean-Luc Nancy 2007) a re-sounding vibrational touch, always already in touch with other subjectivities, but this still starts from a fundamental understanding of how isolated minds get in touch with each other.
32. See also Merker, Madison and Eckerdal 2009; Phillips-Silver, Aktipis and Bryant 2010; Trost and Vuilleumier 2013.
33. See A.M. Jones (1959) on the ubiquity of 3:2 rhythmic praxis in African music.
34. Cusick also makes this point, of bodies literally forced to 'vibrate sympathetically to their enemies' tunes' (2013a: 276). See also Goodman 2012 on 'vibrational ontology.'
35. The phrase 'the gods have fled' comes from Hölderlin by way of Heidegger (1971: 89).
36. See US Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014: 112) and the US Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General (2008: 325). See also 'How Did Abu Zubaydah Lose His Eye', *New Yorker*, 9 June 2015, retrieved 15 June 2019 from http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-did-abu-zubaydah-lose-his-eye.
37. Woody Norris, who invented the LRAD system, has developed a new speaker technology he calls HyperSonic Sound (HSS) (http://hypersound.com/pro/products/), which can make the sound, to quote Norris, 'feel like it's inside your skull' (https://www.ted.com/talks/woody_norris_invents_amazing_things, retrieved 16

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February 2024). Another type of directional speakers, called Audio Spotlight (https://www.holosonics.com/), can pinpoint the sound directly to your ears.

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PART III



LIMINOID SPACES AND THE POLITICS OF LIMINALITY

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CHAPTER 9



MAHISHI'S RAGE

Communitas and Protest at Sabarimala, Kerala

Dinesan Vadakkiniyil

The pilgrimage shrine to Lord Ayyappan at Sabarimala, located in a remote jungle area in the southern Indian state of Kerala,[1] is a liminal space and site of communitas par excellence. Sabarimala attracts people from across the religious and socio-ethnic spectrum, including many of the most socially and politically excluded and marginalized in the complexity that is contemporary India. There worshippers of different identity and station in life move outside the hierarchies of routine existence and form a unity, an existential communitas, as Victor Turner ([1969] 1995) might have said, in the primordial presence of Ayyappan.

Central to Turner's discussion in *The Ritual Process* is the idea that communitas, an anti-structural dynamic, is intimately bound with structuring, hierarchizing processes. Although one is overcome in the other, they are mutually implicated which is a force in driving social process, its dynamics of transition and transformation. Moreover, communitas is an immanent potential of hierarchy (structure) as hierarchy is immanent in communitas. There is a unity even in their contradiction producing a paradoxical intensity of sometimes violent dimensions that Turner discusses, for example, with reference to initiation rites.

Such became starkly apparent at Sabarimala over the main festival and pilgrimage season from October 2018 to January 2019.[2] Events of protest and violence broke out, drawing the attention of the national and international media. The liminal space of Sabarimala, far from being apart from or outside the orders and structures of everyday life, became an intensity, a vortex, for the inflamed expression of the conflicts and contradictions at the heart of the

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Figure 9.1. The temple sanctum. © R.K. Sreejith.

existential realities of India, the more focal, such as those of gender, having significance also for global discourses of egalitarian or equalitarian concern.

The events of protest and violence in relation to Sabarimala were sparked by the announcement on 28 September 2018 of the majority decision of the Supreme Court of India that the vital rule banning women and girls of fertile menstrual age (i.e. those between the ages of 10 and 50) be abandoned, and



Figure 9.2. Pilgrims before the sanctum. © R.K. Sreejith.

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that all females of whatever age be admitted entry to the site (Supreme Court of India 2018). The judgment had been reached in response to a petition of the India Young Lawyers' Association (IYLA) to the Supreme Court to direct the Kerala government and the ritual authorities governing Sabarimala to allow all females access on the grounds that the then legal regulations supporting the menstruation rule were in contravention of the Indian Constitution and its provisions against exclusionary practices on the grounds of biology or caste.[3]

The decision of the Supreme Court coincided not just with the start of the Sabarimala season but also the heightened period of political campaigning as India moved to its national elections. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seeking re-election appealing to Hindu nationalist and traditionalist interests promoting Brahmanic values, part of the India-wide Hindutva populist movement for which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) militant right-wing organization is a primary force. The BJP had made virtually no successful political inroads into Kerala, famously politically secular and ruled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – or CPI(M). Significantly, the state of Kerala had, in the recent past, been part of a region where royal and Brahmanical value, of a remarkably oppressive, exclusionary and marginalizing kind, had held sway (Roopesh 2018). This was very much alive in the historical consciousness of many, a ghost of the past that haunted the present.

The very historical and sociopolitical context of Kerala was a ready fuel for the protests and violence that exploded upon the court's decision.[4] The court judgment struck at the nationalist and religious sentiments and value that are at the roots of the populist appeal of the BJP among traditionally oriented elites and that also cross-cut into the interests of those populations otherwise subject to the hegemony of such elites. The direction to abandon the menstrual rule restricting the access of females to the Sabarimala site (not all females are excluded, only those of reproductive age) hit at what may be conceived as a value of central hegemonic potential.

Louis Dumont (1980) has famously argued for the general and overarching significance of religious/ritual values centring around purity and pollution in India in the dynamics of hierarchizing structuring processes in the routines of everyday life and their tragic impetus in the discourses of modernity (e.g. in the violence of Partition). Dumont conceives concepts of purity and pollution as active in the reproduction (and resilience) of caste relations. The concepts of purity and pollution also have relevance for the understanding of class (in which caste plays a role, see Kapferer [1983] 1991) and in the politics of ethnicity and identity. Dumont's understanding is controversial among anthropologists and other scholars of India, not least because it relies on Brahmanical value which has played a significant role in national politics as Perry Anderson (2012) and Arundhati Roy (2014) have stated. Notwith-

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standing the controversial reception of Dumont's perspective, his approach extends an understanding of the furies that erupted at Sabarimala, and also, in this particular case, the limitations of Dumont's perspective.

Sabarimala and the Assemblage of Division

Initially there was general enthusiasm in Kerala for the court decision. But this quickly assumed divided shape when members of the Nair Service Society, representative of the elite fraction of the dominant caste in Kerala, with ties to the Brahmin ritual head of Sabarimala and the erstwhile royal seat at Pandalam, declared the court ruling to be an assault on Hindu tradition. Women from elite sections of the Nair organized protest marches throughout Kerala, chanting the names of Ayyappan (*namajapagoshayatra*). The protest was joined by the *Thazhaman Tantri* (the ritual head of Sabarimala), members of the *Pandalam* royal family (who once owned Sabarimala tem-



Figure 9.3. The *namajapaghoshayatra*. © G. Sivaprasad.

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ple), the caste organization of Kerala brahmins (*Yogakshema Sabha*) and the organization of brahmin priests (*tantri samajam*). At this point the RSS and the BJP joined the protest, and a host of short-lived organizations sprang up in support of opposition to the decision.[5]



Figure 9.4. Abasement of a twice-born in protest. © G. Sivaprasad.



Figure 9.5. Hindu militants surround the Ayyappan shrine. © G. Sivaprasad.

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In response, the CPI(M) conducted what they called a 'Renaissance Assembly' (appropriate to the spirit and potency of Ayyappan at his annual festival) throughout the villages in Kerala to resist the BJP and Hindutva attempts at Hindu nationalist communalization. The Kerala government, with the support of well over a hundred local social and political groups, organized some five million women into a 'women's wall' across the state to coincide with New Year's Day 2019, with the aim to defend gender equality and to protect progressive value against the forces of tradition. Gender activists conducted parades celebrating menstruation. Dalit excluded or out-castes and marginalized tribal groups (Adivasi) added their voice to the cause of the social revolution heralded by the court ruling. Adivasi took the opportunity to declare that their traditional authority and ownership of Ayyappan's temple as well as land had been falsely appropriated by dominant castes (Sajeev 2019).

The situation worsened when women tried to enter Sabarimala.[6] Hindutva groups including women, sometimes masked and bearing offensive weapons, attempted to stop their entry.[7] Groups gathered at critical points along the pilgrim route, preventing the access of any female of inappropri-



Figure 9.6. A woman activist, even though protected by police, fails to break through a barrier of Hindutva militants. © G. Sivaprasad.

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ate age. Anyone (including representatives of the media) who broke the customary rule was threatened with extreme violence, rape or death.[8] On 2 January 2018, two women were given police protection to enter Sabarimala and this provoked state-wide violence. Indeed, throughout the festival season and with expanding intensity Sabarimala and its pilgrim route became a zone of violence, with protesters pelting police, vandalizing state-run buses and organizing state-wide protest strikes (*hartals*). There were stabbings of supporters of the verdict, and the throwing of home-made bombs. Hate speech was rife and this spread onto the internet, on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. Some supporters of the verdict were hunted into their homes and places of work. In the course of the weeks and months of the violence, some forty thousand protesters were arrested or charged, and a few jailed.

Ayyappan: Liminality and Heterodoxy in Myth and Practice

The division and violence that marked the events of Sabarimala has much to do with the liminal dimensions of the site influencing a high degree of social, ethnic and religious inclusiveness. The extensive range of Sabarimala's appeal made it attractive as an apparatus of capture (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2004) for hegemonic interests of the BJP and other powerful groups, as well as resistance to them.

The menstrual rule applies to all sections of society, whether Hindu or not, and may be considered as the principle for the forming of a cross-cutting community of adepts, if dominantly male, though not exclusively so. The menstrual rule is a unifying principle for the worshippers (including females who are not of reproductive age) in the encompassing primordial being of Ayyappan. Although exclusionary, this is not necessarily so in a negative sense, as in the assertions of traditionalists such as the BJP and Hindutva or in the views of many gender activists who regard the menstruation rule as a pollution rule.[9] The negative valuation is supported in other contexts of ritual practice as it is part of widespread popular 'common sense' prejudice that wins easy acceptance transnationally.

There is a more positive interpretation of the menstrual rule in the context of Ayyappan: the female, in her reproductive centrality to the continuity of life and society, as *threatened* rather than threatening. In this sense, and as I will explain further below, the menstrual rule is more equalitarian in effect rather than hierarchical and exclusive, which is the force of its interpretation as a rule of pollution. The attempt by Hindutva hegemonic interests to assert the menstrual rule in terms of Brahmanic value accentuates the divisionary and hierarchical and subordinating potential of the rule rather than the more positive and less exclusionary (if still masculinist) understanding of the rule

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that is apparent from an examination of the logic of Ayyappan myths and stories as well as practice at Sabarimala.[10]

Myths and Practice

There are numerous myths and stories surrounding Ayyappan, and new ones are continually being invented. They legitimate the rights of different caste, tribal, ethnic and religious communities or groups of interest to Ayyappan's temple (for such stories see Thekkumbhagam 1985; Sekhar 1992; Osella and Osella 2003; Rajeev 2019). During the period of protest and violence new narratives were invented (Sajeev 2019; also see episodes of the television drama '*Ayyappa Saranam*' telecasted through a pro-BJP channel). Hindutva groups constructed stories asserting the value interpretation of the menstrual rule as a pollution prohibition, broadcasting it via the internet. Adivasi (tribal) groups declared that Ayyappan was born in their community but was killed resisting a Tamil invasion of Kerala in the twelfth century and the stealing of their lands (Sajeev 2019).

The most popular and widely known myth of Ayyappan tells that he was born of the union of two male deities, Siva and Vishnu. This marks him immediately as a liminal heterodox god conjoining the two major divisions in Hinduism. His point in life, his raison d'être, is to kill the demoness, Mahishi,[11] who attacks fertility and reproduction. The baby Ayyappan is given to the childless Pandalam king[12] (a totalizing symbol of Mahishi's curse), who out hunting hears the child crying on the mudbank of the Pamba River. The king takes him to his palace and brings Ayyappan up as his successor. In the meantime, the king's queen gives birth to a son, and desiring to make him the royal successor plots the demise of Ayyappan. She pretends to have a stomach-ache that is to be cured by drinking leopard's milk. She asks Ayyappan to collect the milk from a lactating leopard, expecting him to be killed. In collecting the milk and avoiding death, Ayyappan also achieves his life's purpose which is the killing of Mahishi, whom he meets on the way. On his successful return to the palace, the queen, acknowledging her devious intent, accepts Ayyappan as the king's successor. However, Ayyappan renounces the claim, returning to the wilderness of Sabarimala where he continues to help those who seek refuge with him. Among the main boons that Ayyappan grants is the gift of children and the overcoming of threats to fertility and reproduction.

From this myth it is arguable that the banning of girls and women of reproductive age has much to do with the danger to their fertility and reproductive capability, a positive protective reason for exclusion, as against the more negative widely held understandings of impurity and pollution of Hin-

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dutva insistence. The menstrual rule insulates (quarantines) reproductive females from the danger of Mahishi, the manifestation of death and discontinuity who causes infertility. Mahishi's destructive energy is not merely killed by Ayyappan but quite literally stamped out in Ayyappan's victory dance on Mahishi's dead body. The dance (*pettathullal*) is a major event in the Sabarimala season and is re-enacted by men (and occasionally non reproductive females) from across the socio-ethnic and religious spectrum (Muslims particularly, see below). Some of the dancers wear horned devil masks, others have their faces painted with tribal markings (participants say those of jungle tribal peoples who aided Ayyappan's victory) and wield swords, clubs and other weaponry.[13]

The pilgrimage to Sabarimala, the main event of the ritual season, plays out the logic of the myth. Pilgrims (males and non-reproductive females) effectively become Ayyappan and follow his path. They also, by symbolic extension, overcome death and act regeneratively. Pilgrims are addressed as 'swamy', an honorific of Ayyappan. They undergo a vow of forty-one days of strict purity involving abstention from sexual congress. This is understood by many (certainly Brahmin priests) as conforming to values of celibacy, but it may as well be a mimetic playing out of Ayyappan's birthing, a virtually autogenetic process outside that of heterosexual reproduction. The pilgrims wear black loincloths, indicative of death or perhaps their liminal or transitional state between life and death. They carry on their heads, throughout the pilgrimage, a cloth bag in which sacred (protective) offerings are contained.

The pilgrims' first stop (or initial stage of congregation) is at the Vavar mosque at Erumely (30 miles from Sabarimala). According to legend, Vavar, a Muslim warrior saint, became an adept of Ayyappan, helping him in his fight with Mahishi and other battles. The pilgrims circumambulate the mosque where they re-enact Ayyappan's victory dance (*pettathullal*) on Mahishi's body, from where they proceed to the Pamba River (where the baby Ayyappan was found) close by the main Sabarimala shrine. Finally, the pilgrimage is ended with the coming of the pilgrims into Ayyappan's shrine and their offering to the god of the sacred objects that they have been carrying on their heads.

Ayyappan: A Being of Unifying Communitas

Lord Ayyappan of Sabarimala is an all-inclusive divinity. He is a being born of division, himself a divided unity. He is a cohering force in a heterodox and heterogeneous socio-religious, ethnic and political reality. The continuing history of his formation indicates such. A diversity of religious and cultural

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influences are evident in his construction. Many communities from the most dominant to the most marginal have narratives of their connection to him and of his beneficial potency in their existence. The stories of Ayyappan tell of him overcoming the conflicts and oppositions inherent in a heterogenous/heterodox reality. His potency is the facilitation of relations and transactions across divisions to common benefit.

The collective *pettathullal* performed by pilgrims at the outset of their journey to his shrine is intensely expressive of the character of Ayyappan's battles and war. They are conflicts of generation and the turning or transmutation of antagonistic, destructive and rupturing potential into forces of unity, generative beneficence and continuity. Ayyappan creates positive relations in the place of negative division and opposition.

The *pettathullal* (literally 'market dance') occurs in a centre of trade, an intense space of entropy threatening disorder in division, which Ayyappan overcomes in his killing of the prime agency of decline and destruction, Mahishi, who strikes at the generative root of life and its renewal. The dance is a symbolic action of conversion and metamorphosis. Mahishi's death is facilitated by the assistance of Vavar, an erstwhile enemy who became an ally. The dance also effects the emergence of the beautiful and fecund Malikapurattamma, Ayyappan's bride-to-be.

Overall, Ayyappan is the positivity of structure and anti-structure, in the senses of which Victor Turner writes, and the negation, or amelioration or reduction of their negative or internally contradictory possibilities. As such, Ayyappan describes a tension towards communitas. His is a decentred generative potency to be distinguished from the centred totalizing power of kingship, for example; hence the significance of Ayyappan's renunciation of kingly power, its hierarchy and potentially oppressive and fragmenting potency from which he is distanced in his jungle abode. Ayyappan interrelates heterogeneous populations horizontally rather than vertically, permitting their relative autonomy. His is a more equalitarian force facilitating unification in difference and its fruitfulness per se. In the jungle of Sabarimala, he becomes one with its abundance and its endless dynamic of renewal.

Sabarimala as a Liminal Vortex

It is the all-inclusiveness of worship at Sabarimala, Ayyappan being the dynamic of such inclusiveness, that sets the ground for the eruption of protest and violence throughout Ayyappan's festival season in 2018–19. To put it another way, the all-encompassing character of Ayyappan's domain makes it a fragile space open to the destructiveness, division and fracturing processes

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of that which it brings into union. It is a place for what might be regarded as the pivoting of the sacred or the overturning of the very union (one that is virtually totalizing) that is achieved in Sabarimala's liminal space. What was potential became realized. Far from being a space apart from the realities of the everyday social and political world, Ayyappan's domain was converted into an epicentre, a vortex, for the expression of the many conflicts and tensions that lie at the root of contemporary India. Mahishi raged.

The conversion or subversion of the overarching communitas in the realm of Ayyappan into what may be described as a fractured communitas of intense and violent turmoil of opposing passions was triggered by the Supreme Court judgment on the menstruation rule. This affirmed the menstruation rule as integral to the logic of purity and pollution, and therefore to the exclusionary and subordinating effects of hierarchy, of structure. It agreed with Hindutva values, but gave them negative value rather than the affirmative weight of Hindu nationalism.

Diametrically opposed camps were united in their valuation of the menstruation rule and effectively combined to suppress its positive aspect or possibility that is apparent in the logic of the Ayyappan myths and stories. These indicate that the menstruation rule operates in the interest of protecting and securing fertile and reproductive females from the dangers to their generative potential, and therefore their benefit to society as a whole. Sabarimala in the festival season is a dangerous space in this regard. Moreover, the menstruation rule enables a communitas among the less vulnerable (males and non-reproductive females), a bonding against the present danger of Mahishi, who the pilgrims in their progress, as Ayyappan, will conquer.

The menstruation rule understood in the foregoing sense is a relatively equalitarian and unificatory principle. That is, it applies in the same way to all, regardless of religious practice, caste, class, ethnicity or identity. Moreover, the rule transects all communities, uniting them in a common purpose. All are placed in more or less equivalent relation to Ayyappan with their own mythic claims to the benefits of his potency.

The assertion by Hindutva interests of the menstruation rule as a pollution rule (in effect supported by the Supreme Court ruling) gave rise to its negative value over its more positive value in the situation of Sabarimala. Females are excluded because they are endangered rather than being themselves in a dangerous polluting condition. The stress on the pollution is not only subordinating of women but also gives force to the rules of hierarchy in traditionalist Brahmanic Hinduism especially, which has hierarchizing differentiating effect among Hindus and in their relations with other communities (affecting females and males).

The establishment and broad acceptance of the menstruation rule as one of pollution and exclusion counteracted the tension towards a singular unity

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in communitas, the spirit of Ayyappan and the impetus of the more positive valuation of the menstruation rule. The re-evaluation of the menstrual rule opened the gates of hierarchical fracture and virtually unbridgeable division, indeed a fractured communitas of opposed camps bonded in passionate reciprocal antagonism.

All the above being said, the hierarchizing and subordinating effect of the pollution rule is nonetheless implicit in the more positive valuation that it dominated and suppressed. As gender activists would point out, that the rule is protective of females legitimates male control and subordination of females.[14] The inegalitarian potential of what has been presented as a relatively egalitarian principle is immanent within it.

The abolition of the rule certainly expands the egalitarian and ahierarchical energy of Ayyappan and the sense of renewal or 'renaissance' expressed in the Kerala government's support of resistance to the Hindutva reaction.[15] Subsequent to the 2018 judgment, there were two other judgments of the Supreme Court concerning the Sabarimala issue. Among these two judgments, the first one came on 14 November 2019, which was on the review and writ petitions (there were more than forty such petitions) filed before it against allowing the entry of women into the shrine (Supreme Court of India 2019). The second one came on 6 February 2020, which was against the petition challenging the judgment of 2019. Rather than upholding the earlier judgment, the Supreme Court, through its November 2019 judgment, referred the review petition to be heard by a larger bench of the Supreme Court. Indicating such a judgment as unconstitutional, the supporters of women's entry approached the Supreme Court again, but that too was dismissed by a nine bench Supreme Court judgment, which came in February 2020. Both these judgments undermined the spirit, at least for the moment, of equalitarian value. This keeping in abeyance of the otherwise made possible horizontal interrelations renewed social division and furthered differentiation centred around the value of pollution. By this, the Supreme Court, being the apex of structured juridical authority, destabilizes communitas despite having the potential to renew the 'total community as an unstructured unit' (Turner 1995).

More generally, the events of 2018–19 at Sabarimala underline the potential of ritual institutions of liminality and communitas to become vital foci for social and political transformation. As a catalytic vortex of social and political forces in contention, reacting explosively against one another, Sabarimala operated in a manner something akin to a catalytic converter. Thus contradictions at the heart of social and political processes in contemporary India were thrown into the open, made thoroughly part of public consciousness but in the main resisted with renewed overall unifying effect. It might be said that the spirit of Ayyappan prevailed against the forces of division.

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The BJP did increase its vote among the population in Kerala but it won no seats there. The political commitment of Kerala to egalitarian value and to the overarching unity of its heterogeneous population held firm.

Dinesan Vadakkiniyil is a professor at the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, South India. He was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, in the Egalitarianism programme 'Egalitarianism: Forms, process and comparison', directed by Professor Bruce Kapferer, and supported by the ERC Advanced Grant.

NOTES

1. More precisely, at the Periyar Tiger Reserve of the Western Ghats in the Pathanamthitta district.
2. Unlike other temples, Sabarimala is only opened for worship and pilgrims during the festival season and on the first five days of every Malayalam month.
3. For a discussion on gender and law in relation to the Sabarimala case, see Acevedo 2018; Jassal and Chibber 2019. Also see Sarukkai 2018.
4. An early form of protests began in 2016 while the ruling Left government decided to file an affidavit favouring entry of women in Sabarimala, can be seen in the 'Right to Wait' campaign initiated by upper-castes women backed by Hindu-rightists. The campaign, which intensified during the time of violent outbursts at Sabarimala in 2018 and after, encouraged elite women to express their voice through declaring their willingness to wait until they reach the age of 50 to enter Sabarimala Temple. For details, see Devika 2020. Also see Kumari 2019.
5. I was told that in a meeting of Hindu organizations held in Kochi at the height of the turmoil, more than seventy Hindutva organizations participated.
6. Many women tried to enter Sabarimala but were prevented from doing so, although two eventually managed it with the support of the police. However, as a consequence, they had to live in hiding for several weeks and were subjected to abuse from their kin and at work. Very recently, one among them openly declared on Facebook that she was moving out of Kerala because it had become unsafe for her to live there due to the continuing hunting of Hindutva forces. The other one narrated a series of events of ill-treatment she had to suffer from both the kin and the right-wing supporters through a biographical narrative (see Jeevanlal 2023).
7. The women's organization of the BJP played a major role. Equally supportive and active were the members of the Nair Service Society, a caste-community organization of the upper and dominant caste of Nairs.
8. The situation became very threatening for the media. Many international and national journalists were forced to leave Sabarimala by Hindutva militias. Meanwhile, an otherwise poorly rated regional language channel run by the Hindu right wing had achieved a high rating during the period of conflict by (live) telecasting of protests and violence.

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9. The relationship between religion and menstruation centred on purity and pollution had been discussed in the context of the Sabarimala verdict. For details, see Sridhar 2019; Joseph 2019; Cohen 2020.
10. The arguments made in two works published in 2019 underscore this notion. Nithin Sridhar (2019), through a comparative analysis of menstruation and religious practice among the Hindu, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist faithful, labours hard to state that menstruation is 'an agent of purity and a form of *tapa*', a key Brahmanic ideal. Likewise, Sinu Joseph (2019), anchoring on the value of 'indigenous science and religion', which I would read as Brahmanic ideals, argues that there are separate spiritual paths for men and women: strict austerities and renunciation of desire for men and fulfilment of desire for women (ibid.: 101). She would add that the insistence of purity is to preserve the energy of each sacred space, and has nothing to do with gendered-discrimination. The effect of the assertion of such Brahmanic arguments in the middle of Sabarimala controversy would be a legitimization and reproduction of hierarchy. A less impressive perception, meanwhile, illustrates the call for the entry of women to Sabarimala as a conscious move to dismiss belief on Ayyappan. It adds that the existing exclusion is founded not on the cause of menstruation or fertility, but on the hardship that Ayyappa had in this world as an adopted son and his preferred life as a celibate (Kumar 2017: 16). Making Facebook posts of women who rejects the Supreme Court verdict subject of discourse analysis, J. Devika states the idea that emerges out of these discourses is that 'the stated reason for prohibiting women of reproductive age from Sabarimala had nothing to do with their readiness or unwillingness to wait, but was all about *aachaaram*, of the Malayali Brahminical kind' (Devika 2020: 9)
11. Mahishi is the sister of the buffalo demon Mahishasura, whose death at the hands of the gods (deva) Mahishi must avenge. She is virtually invincible. Only a being born of two males can defeat her. Ayyappan is her nemesis.
12. Pandalam royal family is said to have migrated from Madurai in Tamil Nadu. Their small kingdom was absorbed into the Travancore Kingdom in the eighteenth century.
13. It is customary that a first-time pilgrim (Kanni Ayyappan – 'virgin' or novitiate) to Sabarimala should perform the *pettathullal*.
14. Devika interestingly conceptualized this as 'new-savarna' mobilization to protect the Hindu culture, wherein women are subordinated under Brahmanic masculine value (Devika 2020).
15. Scores of books had published in the regional language of Malayalam (Jyothirghosh 2019; Namboothiri 2019; Puthukkad 2018; Rajendran nd; Rajeevan 2018; Surendran 2019), including the one by the chief minister of Kerala (Vijayan 2019) and major intellectuals of the Communist Party of India (Ganesh 2018; Pattaannur and Padmanabhan 2018; Rajeev 2019; Charuvil 2019; Jitheesh 2022), defending the judgment, condemning the Hindu rightists' violence and defending renaissance value. All are emphasizing the historical struggles through which Kerala became a progressive society and the commitment to uphold egalitarian value. An overall dimension of this discourse is to engender an all-inclusive communitas. However, in the statist discourses could be seen the recognition of social divisions, differentiations and hierarchy, on the one side, and an imagination of a generalized social bond, on the other. This contradiction resolves the otherwise differentiated voice of the state and the post-2018 positions of the Supreme Court.

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CHAPTER 10



KNOTS, THREADS AND MEANING

Liminality and Value in the Carpet Trade of the Istanbul Grand Bazaar

Patricia Scalco

Tourism stands as one of the main driving forces of Turkey's economy and, among the various domestic destinations on offer, Istanbul – Turkey's largest and most vibrant city – remains one of its most visited. Almost ubiquitously designated and represented as a crossroads between East and West, North and South, for centuries (Ahmad 1993; Secor 2001; Tugal 2008; Yazıcı 2013), advertisements inviting tourists to visit the city often play out Istanbul's many forms of 'in-betweenness'. Images of contrasting lifestyles and of geographical and historical landmarks and landscapes that emphasize its role as a 'bridge', 'crossroads' or 'corridor' take precedence in such adverts. One of the most iconic representations of Istanbul as a geographical and geopolitical 'crossroads' is the Bosphorus Strait. A waterway that cuts through the city, separating the European and Asian continents, the 31 km strait also stands as an important economic and military corridor between the Black Sea region and the Mediterranean. While the Bosphorus stands as a powerful geographical landscape evoking Istanbul as an important geopolitical hub, the Istanbul Grand Bazaar also figures in touristic advertisements as an iconic landmark, evoking the city's historical role as a connecting hub promoting the circulation of goods and ideas through the commercial encounter between travellers and tradesmen since the fifteenth century.

In such advertisements, the most common pictures of the bazaar are panoramic shots emphasizing its immense rooftop, alongside written or voice-over references to the more than three thousand shops distributed along its

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sixty-one covered streets. In other equally appealing images, one or more of the Bazaar's twenty-two imposing doors stand side by side with images of its interior. In these takes, the focus is on the network of corridors and passages, the plentifulness of goods and colour and, sometimes, pictures of smiling sellers standing by their shops. Describing the internal area of the bazaar as a 'labyrinth', touristic adverts describe it as an exotic place where visitors may be lured by enticing objects that they can take home if they outsmart the bazaaris' 'mischievous character' in the process of bargaining for lower prices. In many ways, these descriptions of the bazaar bear similarities with the ways in which Istanbul is marketed in advertisements inviting international tourists to the city.

Grounded in over twelve months of ethnographic research conducted at the Istanbul Grand Bazaar between 2017 and 2019, in what follows I explore further aspects of what has been outlined above, extending the understanding of the bazaar beyond the established approaches that emphasize the 'bazaar economy' (Geertz 1978; Fanselow 1990; McMillan 2003). Drawing on the asymmetries that mark the encounters between foreign customers and sellers in the context of the carpet trade, I am concerned to show that the liminal intensity (Wagner 2018) of the Grand Bazaar is central to its economy and to its larger economic role. I will further claim that the negativity that accompanies attitudes to the trade in carpets is a positivity, vital to the appeal of the bazaar and to understanding key processes of value production, which extend beyond issues such as lying, falsity and truth.

Liminality and Asymmetries in the Bazaar

My arrival in the field in January 2017 coincided with one of the most difficult times in the recent history of Turkey. On New Year's Eve the city witnessed a massacre carried out in one of its most upscale nightclubs. This was one of several ISIS-inflicted terrorist attacks that had taken place during the previous year and threatened to continue in the months ahead. Paired with the tensions of the Syrian refugee crisis and with an economy further wounded by instabilities generated by an attempted coup d'état in July 2016, the terrorist attacks had a significant impact on the daily life of the bazaar. With a remarkable reduction in the flow of tourists, the shops were nearly empty when compared to previous years. The relative absence of tourists changed the rhythms of everyday life in the bazaar's streets, generating 'bubbles of idleness', particularly observable in businesses that depend on large-scale revenue, such as the carpet trade. In many ways, this idleness is what enabled my access to these spaces, which are usually occupied by customers carefully entertained by the salesmen's showmanship typical of the process

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of carpet/kilim selling. Under the slow pace of business, sellers who might have been inaccessible or unavailable in previous years were, in the early months of my fieldwork, willing to spend some of their time generously engaging with my many questions. One of these sellers was Ahmed, whom I met in the early days of fieldwork.

Ahmed worked as a carpet seller in the Istanbul Grand Bazaar. He proudly explained to me that he had over twenty years of experience as a carpet seller in the bazaar, having started off in the business as an apprentice (*çırak*) at the age of thirteen. Besides learning the basics of weaving and repairing, the main role of the *çırak* is to run errands in the shop, attending to the requests of the other two workers. He then moved on to the position of *yancı*, a support role during the sales, commonly in charge of spreading the carpet in front of customers and folding and piling them back. Only then was he considered ready to move on to the position of 'main seller' (*tezgahtar*) in the shop he worked at when we met. Although the transition to each of these positions is not specifically marked in terms of rite of passage, the relative power each one of these roles yields is acknowledged by fellow workers.

At the time of our meeting in 2017, he was 36 years old and the father of two young children. For him, one of the joys of working in the bazaar was that every day he met new people, from all around the world. Indeed, he had sold rugs to some famous people: Hollywood stars, internationally acclaimed footballers, and powerful politicians. Like many carpet sellers, he displayed their photos in his stall.

Although Ahmed has from time to time sold other wares (e.g. leather goods), his principal occupation is as a carpet salesman (*halıcı*), but not always at the same stall. Over the previous three years, he had worked at eight different stalls in the bazaar. On one occasion, when I visited his shop, he had had a very quiet day, for no customers had come into his premises. But just before he shut up shop, a potential buyer reluctantly accepted Ahmed's invitation to entered the shop. While the customer, an Englishman aged about 60, preferred not to sit down and refused Ahmed's offer of a cup of tea, he did look over the carpets displayed around the walls of the stall. I was introduced to the customer as Ahmed's friend. As the customer was showing interest in a particular carpet, bargaining preliminaries began with the usual exchange of information relating to the carpet's provenance and a contesting and testing of knowledge. However, with little further ado, the customer broke off the encounter and left the shop, but apparently having enjoyed the brief exchange. This, of course, is a feature of bazaar interactions, for it is the performance of this type of exchange that brings enjoyment (for tourists especially) – possibly as much as the actual act of purchasing. Indeed, carpet sellers must work within such a performative exchange, all the

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while attempting to turn it into a more serious and committed purchasing encounter.

Ahmed had missed his chance and reacted with mutterings of sarcasm and offensive jokes at the would-be buyer's expense. Ahmed confided that he had tried to capture the Englishman's custom by playing along with the man's display of knowledge, despite the fact that it was largely inaccurate. In other words, Ahmed was complicit in the construction of a lie (or a story) in order to realize a sale. He said as much in his own explanation of his action to me.

> I know it's wrong, and we shouldn't lie. I fear God and I don't like to lie. That carpet, for instance, is probably from Pakistan, but they are now doing it in similar patterns to look like it was made here [Ahmed had colluded with the customer that the carpet was Kurdish in origin]. They have cheaper wool there and they do business with other places, such as India, for weave and dyes . . . not very good quality of course. But if I said this, the customer loses interest. That is why I prefer to tell certain customers that the carpet is of Kurdish origin, for example. If I don't say this to particular customers [especially Germans in Ahmed's opinion] they drop all interest. Other carpet sellers do the same. Even if the carpet comes from China, they will say it is Kurdish, just to close a deal. I have no other choice than to play the game, for I must make a sale for the sake of my family. My son, I believe, might have some of his health difficulties as Allah's punishment for the lies that I tell in this business. But I cannot do otherwise.

The encounter between Ahmed and the tourist from England illustrates one of the many instances where the liminal vitality of the bazaar is at play. In this specific case, I draw attention to the particularities of the asymmetries between the parties involved in the exchange. Ahmed recognizes his own position of 'liminal personae' (Turner 1969) vis-à-vis the values and structures of life beyond the bazaar. Whilst he recognizes his precarity and belonging in the margins of the formal economy beyond the bazaar, within the bazaar walls Ahmed draws on the 'symbolic inversion' (Turner 1974: 83) of social attributes which mark his separation from the rigid hierarchies beyond the bazaar walls. Ahmed also embodies in his performance a confident aura that results from having complied with the demands implied in each of the stages to become a *halıcı*. In other words, as reward for having mastered the informal rules at play within the Bazaar, Ahmed finds himself occupying a position of authority that he might not be able to occupy beyond the bazaar walls. The Englishman, on the other hand, and despite his assumed economic power, finds himself, in his interaction with Ahmed, socially converted into what can be described as a position analogous to that of the neophyte in a rite of passage.

Indeed, in the case above, the tourist did not comply with the rules of a typical sale, where the tourist is made comfortable in a chair, offered tea, and

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introduced to the goods of the store, flamboyantly displayed by the seller, alongside lengthy explanations about each exhibited piece. Questions about price are deflected as much as possible by the seller, whose cordiality and recurrent offerings of tea and coffee become, in themselves, both an index of a customer's compliance with the 'ritual' as much as elements of pressure in the course of the sale. In the case at hand, the customer's reluctance to enter the store, followed by his refusal to sit and drink tea, stood as a declaration of unwillingness towards embracing the role of the 'neophyte'. Ultimately, without the customer's compliance, the ritual does not take place, and consequently, the interaction results in an unsuccessful transaction.

This particular interaction also provides an opportunity to reflect on how events situated on a larger spatial and temporal scale find expression in the daily interactions between customers and sellers in the context of the bazaar's carpet trade.

The Bazaar at the Crossroads

As mentioned earlier, my arrival in the field in 2017 coincided with a period of great turmoil both domestically and beyond the borders of Turkey. These events had a significant impact on the economy and in the daily routines within the bazaar. In comparison with previous years, a relatively reduced number of tourists explored the bazaar, and even they were mostly interested in smaller souvenirs and in taking pictures. While my interlocutors have repeatedly made negative remarks about the prospects of the carpet trade remaining relevant for many years to come, they did not entertain the possibility of any radical change taking place, even in the face of the immense hardships the economy was facing at the time. 'Yes, there will be changes in this business' and 'yes, there will be hardships', but, as they remembered from other crises in the past, 'it will pass . . . until the next one reaches us again'.

Indeed, in operation since the fifteenth century, the bazaar demonstrates immense resilience and resourcefulness to absorb the impact of changes within and beyond its walls. By means of concerted mechanisms of interpretation, translation and conversion, survival is attached to alternative ways of managing and dispelling crisis.

Understanding the Sales Pitch

A typical sales pitch starts with the salesman identifying a potential customer among the crowds roaming the streets of the bazaar and passing by the store.

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Once a potential customer is identified, the main challenge is to persuade him or her to enter the shop and to listen to the sales pitch, which can lead to the purchase of one or more of the pieces. The customer will be surprised by the language skills of the seller, who will most likely be able to communicate in the native language of their customers with at least enough words to cause them to be curious. They will be invited to come into the shop and will be treated to tea or coffee, depending on their preference. Carpets and kilims will be brought by the assistant of the main seller and opened in front of the customer in a more or less flamboyant fashion. At this point the seller engages customers in storytelling narratives about precedence, quality, and the meaning of patterns and dyes that commonly accompany the sales pitch. This narrative was not always fundamental for the sales but it has become an increasingly important part of the trade, particularly from the late 1990s onwards. Carpet sellers with more than thirty years' experience in the bazaar identify that period as the beginning of changes that resulted in heightened distrust between sellers and buyers in the business. Ali Bey, a highly regarded and well-known *halıcı*, identifies the time of heightened ideological warfare and economic competition around disputes in the Middle East that culminated in the terrorist attack that took place in the United States on the 11th of September 2001 as a turning point in the way of engaging with tourists:

> Well, if we look back, as you ask me to, I would say that it was during the time of the attack in the United States that things started to change. People were afraid to travel and Islamophobia became more visible. Our most educated and richest customers (North America and, in Europe, Germany and France) were no longer around as much. I guess this is where things started to become really difficult; and in order to make the business attractive to tourists from other places who were not so much interested in carpets, the stories started to become less accurate. It was not only the quality of the carpets that changed (referencing the circulation of fake carpets), the quality of tourists changed as well!

It is significant to note that changes in the way of doing business are associated with a time of transnational and domestic economic and political duress, which was combined with a heightened global atmosphere of xenophobia and Islamophobia. According to Ali Bey, changes in the 'quality of goods' as well as in the 'quality of tourists' contributed to the use of deceiving narratives aimed at making goods more appealing to new customers who were not as much interested in tapestry. While his view provides one possible explanation of how an apparent culture of deceit has become associated with the trade in carpets and kilims in the bazaar, it does not explain how a business that draws economic value from 'authenticity' has thrived when that 'authenticity' is not verifiable in the first place.

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Addressing this apparent contradiction requires further understanding of how carpets can be simultaneously understood as valuable goods in their own right but, more than that, also as objects mediating relationships between contexts – and ultimately, between people.

Carpets as Mediums of Value

Carpets have long been important items of trade, but carpets from Central Asia only entered Western Europe in the thirteenth century via the Venetian trade with Constantinople (Spooner 2011). The carpets woven by nomadic populations were vital to survival in the harsh environments of the peoples who made them, and had meaning and value in the everyday worlds of their cultural existence.[1] However, when traded into Europe, they acquired new, largely ornamental value (as items of luxury) and were repurposed in their use-value, being displayed on tables and beds, and used as rich floor coverings. Effectively, Central Asia became vital as a zone of their production, and Western Europe as a place of their consumption and a source of carpet-mediated wealth. While many historical changes have complicated the circulation of carpets and rugs up to the present day, the production of carpets and much of their value has to do with the fact that Europe is a major consumer, and thus Europeans are the most important targets for the carpet seller. Also, of course, this underpins the high value of the carpet as a trading item, which is also integral to establishing a context for other items of trade. The Istanbul Grand Bazaar is a major centre for trade because of carpets, and it is a vital site for the attraction of tourists – especially Europeans – who are integral to the economy of Istanbul and the surrounding society.

Many factors affect the value of carpets, including the changing political and cultural constellations involved in their production and passage to the bazaar. Industrialization and contemporary globalization have complicated matters of authenticity and historical provenance, which are crucial to the value of the carpets (a value that is connected to the historical meanings woven into them), somewhat akin to kula shells in the system of Trobriand trade classically discussed by Malinowski (2014). Machine technology and modern dyes have replaced the skills that are key to the worth of a carpet or rug. Carpets and rugs that are claimed as being Kurdish, as Ahmed said, are frequently made in Pakistan or India or China, using techniques that are not 'traditional', so 'old' carpets sold as such might in fact be very new.

Carpet sellers are frequently well aware of such complicating factors (as are many of their customers) but they feel they must play to Western values and build a story into the carpet or rug that fits with expectations or takes ac-

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count of differences in orientation as to what counts as authentic, and what might subvert what counts as authentic.

A broader observation that may be made at this point is that the story that can be woven around a particular carpet for sale is often crucial in the determination of its value. The sale is in large measure influenced by the degree to which customers can be captured into the weave of the story of a carpet (by the seller and buyer) in the ritual performance of a negotiated transaction. In J.L. Austin's sense, a deal has the dimensions of a performative utterance (Austin 2013), and thus the value of the carpet lies also in the dynamics of the construction of meaning, interpretation and the exchange of knowledge that goes along with the sale.

The Making of a Liminal Space

Historians writing of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 report that after the conflict the city bore little resemblance to its glorious past. With its population largely destroyed or dispersed, the city hardly resembled a town, much less the capital of a thriving new empire (Inalcık 1969). Sultan Mehmed II saw trade as the key to restoring the city's glory and as the jewel in the new imperium he was establishing. It was Mehmed's inspiration to make the caravanserai (a resting area, common along the Silk Road, where travellers spent the nights) into a market, the Cevahir Bedesten.[2] Built in 1456, the Cevahir Bedesten provided space for the trade of jewellery and luxury goods, such as textiles, of which carpets were an important item. It was also the bank of Istanbul, functioning as a storage place for precious goods upon payment of a fee (Küçükerman and Mortan 2007). The revenue from the trade in the bedesten was invested in structures that strengthened and regulated civic life in the city. The conversion of the Greek Orthodox Ayasofia into a mosque was funded by revenue from the bedestan. The growth of the Cevahir Bedesten into a major hub for trade correspondingly facilitated the accompanying development of communication and transport networks centred upon making it an engine of the political economy of the Ottoman Empire. The 'relative location' (Green 2014) of the bazaar at an axial point between Europe and Asia added to its significance for global trade and, importantly, to its position as a liminal site of high intensity for the creation and conversion of value.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of histories, peoples and geopolitical interests dispersed or brought together in the materialities and the narratives that converge in the bazaar, what seems to have persisted throughout time is an aura of 'regimented informality'. While at first glance this expression might sound contradictory, it aims to capture the ways in which the bazaar

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has always been able to establish its relevance on the basis of simultaneously subverting or bypassing the rules/regulations of the world beyond its walls in favour of establishing new –albeit tacit – rules suitable to guarantee its own survival. Thus, the significance of the carpet trade in the context of this particular institution is largely grounded in their ambiguous role as both *goods* and *lived experience* – both of which are encompassed in the sales pitch. In other words, while as goods with material value they contribute to the circulation of currencies and profit, carpets sold in the bazaar are also tokens of the liminal experience one endured in the process of purchasing them. In this regard, carpet sellers operate as tricksters whose own liminal status (de)stabilizes (un)certainties and reassigns meaning to the goods they sell and to the experiences attached to the items.

Carpet Sellers as Hermes, the Bazaar as a 'Hermeneutic Chamber'

In the example that opened this discussion, Ahmed explained his struggle to match his customer's expectations regarding a particular item for sale. Through a narrative that partially disclosed the 'truth' of the carpet, he had sought to reweave the item by adding threads of origin and history to it that he imagined would meet his customer's expectations. This process of 'reweaving' the carpet through narrative and performance entails an assessment by the seller of a customer's potential background, which, in turn, could influence the direction a negotiation might take. Therefore, the encounter between a tourist and a carpet seller is also an encounter of assumptions, prejudices, fears and aspirations, all projected and, importantly, processed through the exchanges between them. The fact that a sale takes place while 'looking in the eye', only enhances the complexity of the encounter; apparent concerns or discomforts about the origin or price of an item, for instance, can easily become a proxy for other conflicts and tensions.

I asked why Ahmed valued German customers above English ones (a factor in his negative reaction). He explained as follows:

> It is because we need German customers. They appreciate craftsmanship. They are, alongside [North] American customers, the ones who buy more carpets than any other nationality. Germans like to know the story behind what they are buying, they like the dyes to be natural, and many of them, especially if they are not very young, they may know a lot about it. They like Kurdish carpets, for instance, because they like activism and they like politics . . . so saying a carpet is Kurdish helps.

As we see from this example, in the negotiation of different expectations, carpet sellers stand at a threshold where the customer's aspirations and the

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merchant's needs meet. In the face of this encounter, much of the work that enables the achievement of consensus between the parties depends on painstaking meaning-making, which seeks to overcome the knowledge discordancies that may threaten a potential deal.

Reflecting on the act of making sense of the world when meaning and intelligibility are not immediately available, Marion Grau (2014) sets out to revisit the etymological relationship between the Greek god Hermes and the practice of interpretation. Writing about Hermes, the trickster who inhabits roads where travellers and merchants (among others) meet, and who is 'etymologically linked to the sacred practice of interpretation', she explains:

> As a denizen of the crossroads, the figure of Hermes is associated with travel, trade, writing, communication, translation, and other processes of encounter and the negotiation of differences. Among the Greeks, the messenger of the gods is etymologically linked to the sacred practice of interpretation. Hermeneutics manifests with ambivalence, with dramatic potential for mistranslation, shifts of meaning, and outright deception. Hermeneia, the practices and skills associated with interpretation, powerfully ground, bind and shift relationships, meaning, and ways of human interaction with the forces of the universe. Hermeneutics as an interpretive, translational act is a deeply transcultural practice, at the core of communication across difference. (Grau 2014: 79)

The performance that surrounds the sale of carpets highlights both the action of carpet selling and the nature of the activities in the Grand Bazaar itself as an intense place for the contestation, conversion and production of value. In this sense, as a 'betwixt and between' space (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969; Kapferer 1983), I suggest that the bazaar might be described as a 'hermeneutic chamber', a locus of intersecting historical trajectories, cultural differences and crossover. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is also the god of the market place. He is a trickster whose very ambiguities and tricks are born of the contradictions, dangers and risks encountered at the margins of difference and in the shifts, transmission and translations of value. Hermes embodies the spirit of the market and the performance – the labour or work in fact – of the carpet sellers, who themselves express the dynamic of the bazaar as a whole.

While the livelihood of carpet sellers depends on the sale of their rugs, the rugs themselves derive much of their appeal from features that locate them within a way of life that is long gone and unlikely to be reproduced in contemporary times. In the negotiation of these different expectations, carpet sellers stand at the edge, or at the limen, where conflicting expectations intersect. Much of the work that enables the achievement of consensus between the parties involved in the transaction depends on painstaking

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meaning-making, which seeks a resolution of such conflicts in expectation and differences in knowledge or expertise.

While from an outsider's point of view, the exchanges between foreign customers and these highly skilled sellers take on a playful facade – recognized through the banter and bargaining associated with these interactions – a closer look reveals the seller's labour of (re)interpretation and (re)signification that simultaneously prevents/protects the tourist from confronting the dissonances and fragmentations 'woven' into a carpet, and contributes to the bazaar's continuing importance as a place of trade and a major tourist attraction.

When discussing the view of carpet sellers as 'liars', Ali, a collaborator with over thirty years' experience in the business, casts light on the complex position they inhabit, raising yet another aspect of the hermeneutical duty performed by the seller. While he does not dispute that some carpet sellers may not tell 'the truth' about a carpet, he raises the problem of the encounter between handmade and machine made through a very illustrative comment:

> See . . . the problem is that people come to the bazaar and they bargain, and this is done *looking in the eyes*. So they [customers] think we are lying. Now, when they go to Starbucks, because they don't have to bargain there, they think everything they say, all that is written in the package about their coffee, that those things are real. But here, because you have a person in front of you, you feel you cannot trust.

Ahmed's reflections above stand as witness to the burden carried by these sellers who, in contrast to a salesperson in a large retail chain, are perceived by their customers to be the personification of the virtues and flaws of the objects they sell. In this regard, a customer's appraisal of a carpet's 'authenticity' is mediated by their appraisal of the seller's 'honesty' – and vice versa.

Final Remarks

The Grand Bazaar stands both as a place of trade and as a hub that articulates connections and disconnections between multiple histories and places and, by the same token, between the people implicated in these contexts. The vast majority of those visiting the bazaar are tourists who are, in their own right, navigating a liminal experience per excellence (Selänniemi 2003; Bristow 2020; Rink 2020).

Carpet sellers are part and parcel of the tourists' – their customers' – liminal experience. In a similar situation to Hermes, they occupy a 'betwixt and between' space (Turner 1969), mediating a diversity of contradictory and

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often conflicting expectations with the aim of resolving them into a sale. Such a mediating role opens the carpet sellers up to the charge of being deceitful at best and liars at worst. The stories they weave in participation with their potential customers become an important part of the value of a carpet. In other words, value is not so much 'what the market may bear' as the story that is woven around the carpet during the sale. That, I suggest, is the experience that the tourist/customer will take home as they are reintegrated into their regular routines. In this regard, overcoming the doubts that surround the 'authenticity' of a carpet, the customer reaches not only a comfortable place where there is enough certainty to go ahead with the purchase, but also the certainty of having had an 'authentic experience'. In this regard, the carpet stands as a token of having navigated the encounter with these very skilled sellers. To conceive of the practice as lying or falsity, or even trickery, is to a large extent to misunderstand the nature of the practice and, perhaps in the wider scheme of things, the cultural embeddedness of the processes of achieving economic value. It is the storytelling of the carpet seller, the skill of the merchant (in discourse with the customer), that determines effective value. Grounded on face-to-face interactions, in a world where business is increasingly mediated by screens, numbers and algorithms, the bazaar carpet seller is left with only his will and skill to manage, through narrative and performance, the widening gap between the customer's expectations of 'authenticity' and the increasingly limited possibilities of delivering it. That is, as with so many marketing or trading transactions, sale and value are achieved through the stories that are told (e.g. advertising), and this receives particular intensity in the art of carpet selling in the Grand Bazaar.

Patricia Scalco is a social anthropologist currently based in Finland and interested in themes situated at the intersection of kinship studies, economic anthropology, and anthropology of moralities. Scalco trained as a social anthropologist in Brazil, Turkey (MA), and the UK (PhD, University of Manchester). She is currently a member of the Irritation Research Team (ERC/Academy of Finland) at the University of Helsinki, where she conducts research on the interplay between negative emotions, moralities, and cooperation in the context of family businesses in Brazil. This research builds on her postdoctoral work as part of the Crosslocations (ERC) and Trade, Transit and Travel (Academy of Finland) research teams (University of Helsinki), where she explored trade practices, cultures of expertise, and truth-making in the context of the Istanbul Grand Bazaar. Scalco is a co-editor of the Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Association and is currently working on a co-authored monograph (Helsinki University Press) based on the Crosslocations research project.

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NOTES

1. Archaeological evidence suggests that carpets were woven and traded by nomadic populations in the Altai mountains of Siberia from at least the fifth century BC (see Rudenko 1970; Spooner 1986; Bohmer and Thompson 1991).
2. Istanbul had three bedestens by that time, but the Cevahir Bedesten was the most important one. Küçükerman explains that 'while the Grand Bazaar of today is an Ottoman work, there existed a large bazaar on the same site in the Byzantine Period' (Küçükerman and Mortan 2007: 130).

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CHAPTER 11



VICISSITUDES OF LIMINALITY IN COMPLEX PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS

John J. MacAloon

In 1977, a Burg Wartenstein Symposium on 'Cultural Frames and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, and Spectacle' was organized by Victor Turner, Barbara Babcock and Barbara Myerhoff. Anthropologists and literary scholars associated with Turner's explorations of a 'comparative symbology' that encompassed tribal, traditional and industrial societies were assembled (Turner 1974; MacAloon 1984). My contribution was entitled 'Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies'. It offered a model of what I called 'complex performance systems' in which quite distinct and even oppositional genres of cultural performance are combined in 'nested' or 'ramified' fashions into higher order and more encompassing wholes, with distinct implications for social access to liminality.[1]

As the title indicated, the chief empirical object of my research was (and remains today) the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games. Already by the 1960s, when I began my work, the Olympics had developed into a truly world-historical phenomenon, and it seemed to me that there was nothing obvious in explaining this fact. Indeed, it appeared to defy certain core presuppositions of the kind of anthropology in which I was trained.[2] If cultural differences were as significant as claimed, how was it possible that so many 'national cultures' (112 in 1968, 206 today) and literally innumerable subnational and transnational cultural formations were investing some level of attention and participation in the 'same' performances?

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Complex Performance Systems

Following Gregory Bateson's analysis of genre as 'metacommunicative frame' (Bateson 1972), I insisted that athletic games are not rites or festivals, and that each of these is framed differently from spectacle. This permitted recognition of how in the mature Olympics these core genres are nested within one another like Chinese boxes, conceptually, ideologically, and above all performatively (Figures 11.1 and 11.2). Distinct social segments within and across cultures have quite different initial tastes, in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term (Bourdieu 1984), in various types of performance. The array of genres in a complex system like the Olympics offers multiple portals of interest and recruitment. Once attracted anywhere into such a system (on condition that it is symbolically integrated), individuals and groups are subject to being rerouted and recruited into the other genres that compose it: pay attention for the ritual, end up lured into sport; attend an Olympic sports contest in person and you (literally) cannot avoid ritual and festival. Ethnographic documentation of these phenomena was not difficult to amass.

On a macro-social level, the Olympics developed into *the* liturgy of the world-system of nation-states. Whether or not their cultural traditions have much interest or prowess in Olympic-style sport, national authorities have for decades now had no real choice as to whether to support a National Olympic Committee and send a delegation to the Summer Games. To be a nation among nations in the world *requires* marching in the Olympic opening ceremony.[3] In this instance, global ritual holds coercive power over nation-states. Analogously (metonymically), the Olympic athlete is obliged to have a nationality, as well as individual ability, and a voiced commitment – they take a ritual oath – to Olympic values of common and universal humanity.[4] I call this core symbolic code (building obviously upon Kantorowicz 1957) the 'athlete's three bodies' – Individual, National, Human (MacAloon 2019).

The ritual procession of/by nations in the Olympic opening ceremony was there from the beginning in 1896. Not coincidentally, much of the rest of the ritual complex we know today – the flame relay, the victory ceremony, and the elaborate programme of cultural representations in the opening ceremony – appeared or were consolidated in the 1930s, when the nation-state organization of the world system received a major push from the break-up of empires after the First World War, when states shouldered past civil society agencies into leading roles in staging and narrating Olympic Games, and when political, economic and ideological globalization definitively accelerated (Keys 2006). The process subsequently accelerated again (WWII, decolonization) and again (the Cold War) and again (neoliberal capitalism,

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global media, the internet) until there are few if any people alive anywhere today who do not know their own local versions of the general struggle among Individuality, Nationality, and Humanity . . . or of the Olympics.

In the Olympic performance system, each identity is condensed and expressed in a powerful repertoire of symbols: the individual athlete's named and badged personal body ('credentialed' in Olympic speech), fitted with a sports physiognomy and competitive biography, discussed in terms of individual character and commitment, ideologically privileged and protected in official Olympism, initiated into the globally recognized status of 'Olympian'; the national uniforms (athletes' 'second skins'), flags, anthems and officials, ritual opening by a head-of-state, national medal counts; the five-ringed emblem (quite possibly the most globally recognized in the world), the Olympic flame, flag, anthem, medals, the IOC and the Olympic Charter. What the Olympics dramatize above all else is the struggle among these identities through the differential relations of these three symbol sets across the entire performative process. What Olympic ideology ('Olympism') proclaims and the complex Olympic performance system has evolved to evocatively demonstrate is that Individuality, Nationality, and Common Humanity can be made compatible, despite all counter-evidence of the past century, much of it consisting in abominable horror. The modern Olympic Games, of course, carry their own heavy history of counter-evidence from within the festival itself.

Of course, I am trading here in abstractions, or what I would prefer to call 'empty forms', or better 'emptied forms' – that is to say, cognitive and behavioural forms more or less deracinated from their original historical and cultural contexts. (Whose culture does the 200-metre butterfly race, the torch relay, street festival, or nationality belong to?) In the Olympic performance system, these forms are restricted in number and screen out or leave formally unmarked many other powerful social and cultural identities, thus intensifying focus on particular things. This is much more a 'hyperstructure' than a Turnerian 'anti-structure'. These more or less empty forms then make themselves available to be filled in worldwide with local meanings by local actors, whether states, communities, social strata, or individuals.[5] We can scarcely imagine the diversities of meaning being continuously generated through this 'global' phenomenon. Merely on the level of television practice, a twenty-five-nation comparative content analysis of coverage of the 1992 Barcelona opening ceremonies revealed striking diversities, including the genres in which the opening ceremonies were preferentially framed (Moragas, Rivenburgh and Larson 1995).

Competition is not consecration, and neither of these is the same as festive enjoyment or spectacular awe. In marked contrast with other sports events, no competition takes place in the Olympics unless it is encased within and

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punctuated by intensive ritual. At the same time, Olympic ritual depends on sports competition not only to help recruit its audience but also to literally embody the core ideological truths that are to be reconsecrated – namely, that productive competition requires complete collaboration and generates fellow-feeling, that patriotism can be rescued from nationalism and tamed by humanism, and that humanism can be energized by patriotism and individual achievement. The encompassing festival gives the meta-message that these truths should be matters of joy and happiness. (Spectacle offers yet a different framing, to be considered shortly.) But none of this can be recognized, I continue to argue, if the performative genres are in any way reduced or collapsed into one another, or their radical differences ignored or dismissed in favour of some general conceptual similarities, like all being somehow ludic (Turner 1974; Lewis 2013). In 1977, though I soft-peddled it at the time, this insistence put my approach partially at odds with the one my teacher and mentor Victor Turner was then choosing to pursue. This was exemplified in his 1974 article 'Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay on Comparative Symbology', developed over several years in his famous Chicago seminar (to which, as Vic was generous enough to indicate in that text, I myself had contributed).

Liminal/Liminoid/Neo-Liminality

Turner was quite frank in acknowledging that 'Liminal to Liminoid' was motivated in no small part by criticisms that in *The Ritual Process* (Turner 1969) he had failed to adequately recognize and address differences between the symbolic forms and performances of small-scale, tribal or traditional societies and those of large, stratified, industrial or post-industrial societies, this because of his eagerness to create a 'comparative symbology' distinguished from 'symbolic anthropology' precisely by this wider gaze (Turner 1982: 23, 52)[6,7]. 'In my book *The Ritual Process*, I have spoken of some of these [symbolic genres of industrial society] as 'liminal' phenomenon. In view of what I have just said, is liminality an adequate label for this set of symbolic activities and forms?' (ibid.: 40). His answer was now 'No, not really'.

> The symbols found in *rites of passage* in [tribal] societies, though subject to permutations and transformations of their relationships, are only involved in these *within* relatively stable, cyclical, and repetitive systems. It is to these kinds of systems that the term 'liminality' properly belongs. When used of processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale societies, its use must in the main be metaphorical. That is, the word 'liminality', used primarily of a phase in the processual structure of a *rite de passage*, is applied to other aspects of culture – here

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> in societies of far greater complexity. This brings me to a watershed division in comparative symbology. Failure to distinguish between symbolic systems and genres belonging to cultures [that] have developed before and after the Industrial Revolution can lead to much confusion, both in theoretical treatment and in operational methodology. (ibid.: 30)

The symbolic and performative genres of modern and modernizing societies were now to be understood as 'liminoid' – that is, only 'liminal-like' (Turner 1982: 32). All performances, by definition, involve demarcation and distancing to some degree from quotidian space and time, and therefore all of them, whatever their social context or genre, have something of a passage or 'betwixt and between' character to them. And, of course, all are composed of tissues of symbols with exegetical, positional and operational levels of meaning (ibid.: 21). That was the '-like' part across the sociologically familiar 'Trad–Mod' divide. But with respect to the modern and contemporary genres like 'theatre, poetry, novel, ballet, film, sport, rock music, classical music, art, pop art' (ibid.: 40) – what Turner, in quite an extraordinary countermove of 'lumping' now called the 'leisure entertainment genres' and 'cultural refreshment genres' (ibid.: 22, 38) – recognition of general differences with traditional ritual should be acknowledged. But this move was in fact made in order to license a freely interpretive back and forth in practice; the distinction having being made, any genre could still be discussed *as if* it were ritual. Several of the old structural-functionalist and modernizationist assumptions were imported as well.

Liminoid phenomena 'may be collective (and when they are so, are often directly derived from liminal antecedents)' and may have 'collective effects', but 'are more characteristically individual products. . . . They are not cyclical but continuously generated' (Turner 1982: 54). 'They develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and servicing institutions.' Unlike the fundamental conservatism of truly liminal ritual, liminoid phenomena are 'plural, fragmentary, and experimental in character' (ibid.: 54).

> [They] tend to be more idiosyncratic, quirky, to be generated by specific name[d] individuals and in particular groups – 'schools', circles, and coteries – they have to compete with one another for general recognition and are thought of at first as ludic offerings placed for sale on a 'free' market – this is at least true of liminoid phenomena in nascent capitalistic and democratic-liberal societies. Their symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the 'objective-social' typological pole. (ibid.: 54)[8]

Liminoid phenomena are not 'practiced by and for particular groups, categories, segments, and sectors of large-scale industrial societies of all types'. The liminoid is 'felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice not obliga-

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tion. The *liminoid* is more like a commodity – indeed it often *is* a commodity' (ibid.: 55).

Then, after all this effort at disjunction between the truly liminal and the modern liminoid, there comes a slightly jarring assertion (given the 'watershed' imagery). 'In complex, modern societies both types exist in a sort of cultural pluralism. But the liminal – found in the activities of churches, sects and movements in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders, and other secret societies, etc. – is no longer *world-wide*' (Turner 1982: 55, emphasis added). The original 1974 version said 'society-wide', and I have no information as to who made this change, obviously suggestive to me. In either case, the central question remains: if 'the rite de passage form . . . no longer suffices for total societies' (ibid.: 52) while real liminality persists at least for segments of them, how are we then to conceive of ritual's relations with the liminoid genres? This is the question I take up in my work and now return to, but after a further note on 'Liminal to Liminoid'.

As if himself recognizing the sometimes puzzling, jarring, even inconsistent aspects in this paper, Turner declares, perhaps frustrated himself: 'I am frankly in the exploratory phase just now. I hope to make more precise these crude, almost medieval maps I have been unrolling of the obscure liminal and liminoid regions' (Turner 1982: 55). I do not think he ever did that. In any case, the concept 'liminoid' was never widely taken up in anthropology and was almost completely ignored in the religious studies literature (where Turner was for decades the single most cited author). Moreover, neither Victor nor Edith Turner made terribly much use of it in their subsequent writings, so far as I can recall. 'Liminal to Liminoid' had done its job, I think Vic felt, in addressing certain criticisms of *The Ritual Process* while asserting continuity between his past work on ritual and what he now earnestly wished to get on with, the comparative symbology of creative literature and contemporary theatre. And, aside from his work with Edie Turner on pilgrimage (Turner and Turner 1978), that is mostly what he himself got on with.

In my 1977 paper, I dutifully noted that under Turner's scheme, three of the four core Olympic genres – athletic game, festival and spectacle – would be classified as 'liminoid' (MacAloon 1984: 266). It was the last time I would ever use this term; it had no purchase for me in my project. The distribution of Turner's general characteristics of the liminoid – voluntarism, playfulness, continuous generation, social disaggregation, commodification, individual creativity, entertainment value, etc. – varies radically from genre to genre, and I focus on these in their specificities and their particular interactions in one complex system. Moreover, my project was and is rather more modest. I am just trying to understand the Olympic Games, not to bring novels, street parties and classical music under a single theoretical regime, much less to promote the promiscuous 'cultural studies' that was just then arising.

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In such a system as I was modelling, the core genres are intimately implicated in complementary and oppositional relations. For example, as I have mentioned, they can serve as recruitment devices for one another, pulling highly diverse actors and audiences through different genre portals into the system *as a whole*, thereby helping to account for the Olympics' truly global geography and demography of attention. Moreover, that whole is indeed highly calendrical, and its central performances are simultaneously life crisis rites and initiations for the athletes, and calendrical rites of intensification and renewal (and divination) for vast publics. These performances are certainly conducted in the name and on the representational behalf of determined social units, most obviously the nations of the world including the 'host nation', and their dramatic effects can most certainly be 'society-wide'. (In the 'watershed' article I have been commenting on, indeed through most of their published work thereafter, the Turners were curiously silent about 'national(ist) rituals' of either the state or civil society sorts.[9])

As I have mentioned, participation in the Olympic opening ceremony has become effectively obligatory for national governments, and that obligation thereby extends out into the other genres, including sport and spectacle. To march in the procession of nations, it is required to have a National Olympic Committee, membership in a certain number of International Federations, at least a token complement of Olympic athletes, and indeed a national flag, anthem and uniform. Moreover, nation-states must facilitate some kind and degree of media coverage to assure citizens that they indeed are 'there in the world' and that their elites are thus doing their duty to national dignity. It is difficult for citizens of rich, powerful, or merely long-established nations to grasp the extreme significance of the Olympic opening ceremony to smaller, contested, emergent, newly liberated, or still oppressed 'nationalities'. It hardly matters to them if, as is most often the case, their athletes will be invisible in the ensuing sports contests.

Olympic sport is thus, in crucial respects, different from all other sport because of its embeddedness in the total performance system. Does anyone follow even the great FIFA World Cup, much less any other world championship, for its rituals? Hardly. Such ceremonial as these other 'world' sporting 'mega-events' possess at all is inevitably a token imitation of the Olympic model. Congruently on the ideological level, there is no equivalent to Olympism. What is the ideology of FIFA or the IAAF or FINA? More football, more athletics, more swimming, oh yes, along with the generic values of sport, such as fair play, anti-doping and non-discrimination. To repeat, there is no Olympic game that is not encompassed and punctuated by intensive and elaborate ritual organized around specifically Olympic symbols and ideological meanings processually arrayed, and this in turn marks and initiates the Olympic athletes in special fashion, regardless of com-

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petitive record. Victory ceremonies are a further and distinctive initiation (MacAloon 2019). The opening and related sub-ceremonies (credentialing, Olympic Village entry) makes them liminars in ways not available to other athletes. To become an 'Olympian' is to be distinctive and distinguished among your sports peers (just ask them), to attain a globally recognized status that is non-reversible (except in the event of a failed drug test), and to be freighted with meanings well beyond sport itself, even ultimate meanings. For example, as I documented in the 1977 [1984] paper, the athletes who died in Munich in 1972 were widely characterized across the world (and still are today) in overtly religious language: they were not just 'the murdered' but 'the sacrificed'.

Thus, it is as a complex performance system that liminality is (or is not) generated in the Olympics, and on an unprecedented demographic scale for regularly scheduled, peacetime events. While distinctions can and should (and will) be made among the different genres and the generation of this 'neo-liminality', as I called it (MacAloon 1984: 269), the point is that complex nested and ramified performance systems like the Olympic Games brought something new into modern and globalizing sociocultural worlds, surely signalling the emergence and expression of new kinds of social and cultural formations as well as new relations among liminalities. Far from restricting itself to ever smaller groups and local settings, ritual nationalized, transnationalized and globalized itself by becoming embedded in a complex, multi-genre performance system. The 'neo' in this neo-liminality – a term I am not wedded to – refers more to this distinctive mode and mechanism for generation and communication of liminality and less to the experience itself. For me, liminality is liminality, varying most certainly by social scale and experiential degree, and brought about differently (or not) in different performance regimes.

Grasping the architecture and dynamics of the Olympic system likewise helps us, I believe, to understand the failures of other crucial international organizations to develop evocative rituals of their own, most notably the United Nations system (see Note 3).

Spectacle and Liminality

The value of any model lies, of course, in what it *does*. My ensuing research career has been chiefly devoted to creating and interpreting Olympic history and ethnology through the lens of complex performance systems. Beginning with *This Great Symbol* ([1984] 2008), a history of the origins of the modern Olympic Games, I have documented and contextualized the early sources and performative assembly of the system. In subsequent work (e.g.

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MacAloon 2006, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2015), I have analysed its elaboration, contestation and consequence in specific ritual settings, Olympiads, geopolitical contexts, and organizational milieus. I have tried above all to face up to the challenge posed to symbolic anthropology by other kinds of social scientists: Exactly whose symbols and performances are these, and to what interests and ends have they been deployed? How have these things differed in different cultural contexts, institutional settings and historical eras?

Three major conditions for my Olympic research altered across four decades. First of all, I was no longer on my own. Beginning in 1984 in Los Angeles (with Wenner-Gren funding, a milestone), I was able to assemble a team of anthropologists (Bruce Kapferer was a member) to study an Olympic Games as it unfolded. This method of team research, led by experts in the Olympic host culture, and joined by scholars of transnational Olympic histories and institutions, continued in Seoul 1988, Barcelona 1992, Lillehammer 1994 (where the entire Anthropology Department at Oslo University devoted two years of sustained effort to the project [Klausen 1999; MacAloon 1999]), Atlanta 1996 and Athens 2004. Meanwhile, outside of Anthropology, sport studies in general and Olympic studies in particular were blossoming, such that today there are over fifty autonomous centres for Olympic studies distributed across the world.

Second, also beginning in the early 1980s, I got backstage in the Olympic system (Chappelet and Kubler-Mabbott 2008), and was enabled to study directly (ethnographically) the elites and decision makers, and many of their geo-economic and political interlocutors: the IOC members and staff, Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) and Olympic bid committee leaders, the largest rights-holding television broadcaster, certain commercial sponsors, and the shifting cast of world power players who now inhabit the 'Olympic Family Zones' at an Olympic Games, zones no journalist will ever penetrate (MacAloon 2011).

Third, the Olympic system itself radically changed. From the mid-1980s onwards, the Olympic Games were transformed by three interlocking developments propelled by IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch and his allies, often against strong opposition from older IOC members and other Olympic Movement leaders and publics. The final vestiges of the old amateur rules were dispensed with; the Olympics were now to invite participation by all the best athletes on the planet, regardless of whether they were paid or not. The IOC also developed its own set of worldwide commercial sponsors (the 'TOP' programme) able, in return for huge fees, to use the Olympic rings to market their products and brands anywhere in the world, a development that required a revolution in international trademark law, deep involvement by governments and legal authorities around the world, and a transformation of governance relations among the institutional com-

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ponents of the Olympic system (the IOC, NOCs, IFs, OCOGs). In the context of these changes, television broadcasters, especially commercial ones, were willing to pay evermore fantastic sums for the rights, and to produce evermore extravagant coverage to justify their investments. In short, a vast Olympic Sports Industry was born (Barney, Wenn and Martyn 2002; Preuss 2004; Chappelet and Kubler-Mabbott 2008). To manage all of this, the chief organizations were themselves increasingly transformed from small and often impoverished sports bodies generally staffed by part-time volunteers, to large non-profit firms staffed by professional managers frequently recruited from the worlds of international business, consulting and mass media. Not surprisingly, corruption scandals ensued, necessitating further reforms and rationalizations, very often on the business school/corporate model of 'world's best practices' (MacAloon 2011).

Through all this, the production of compelling Olympic rituals, games and festivals continued and demographically expanded. From the standpoint of the core performances, the Olympics had become 'relatively stable, cyclical and repetitive systems', as Turner had characterized the structural backdrop of rites in traditional societies. But the overall context and conditions of the Olympic system were changed by the new developments. As a respected IOC member – a national political hero in his own country – put it to me in 1994, 'Every day more and more people are interested in making Olympic sport, and fewer and fewer in making the Olympic Movement'.[10] This is, of course, the familiar and foundational Weberian question in modern social science: can a charismatic movement survive its economic and managerial rationalization? In the terms of my performance model, what does a more consolidated, powerful and encompassing spectacle frame do to and with the other performance genres in the system?

From the beginning, I have argued that spectacle must be treated as an autonomous performance genre and not merely as a general trope or cultural ethos (MacAloon 1984: 265–75).[11] Associating modernity with a 'privileging of the eye' and visual codes of meaning is a long-established feature of European philosophy and social thought. But sustained critiques of society become a spectacle, social life as a big show, did not await the internet and today's 'post-reality' world of 'alternative facts' and 'fake news'. In the 1960s, it made a splash from both the right (e.g. Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 1961) and the left (e.g. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967), and was provided with even more critical impetus with Jean Baudrillard's 1981 text, *Simulacra and Simulations*.

I cannot repeat here my analysis of these diagnostics except to say that much of what they assert is absolutely relevant as background discursive and existential conditions in late capitalist societies such as our own. At the same time, when they permit synecdoche to turn to metaphor and then drift into

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hyperbole – social and political life is *all* a big show, hyped fakery, celebrity worship, and alienated extravaganza – they lose their critical purchase. Better, I argue, to take spectacle as a specific performative genre; that is, to try to understand actual spectacles as specific performative events delimited in performative space and time. The Batesonian meta-message of spectacle is something like 'all subjects inside this frame are grandiloquent ('really awesome'!), but all merit suspicion'. The genre's associated characteristics include: privileging of the visual and 'unforgettable images'; dichotomization and institutionalization of the roles of spectator, scene and actors; voluntary engagement motivated largely by entertainment and sensory stimulation seeking; undifferentiated masses as objects, props, and measures of value; epic themes and grandiose metaphors; diffuse wonder, awe and sentimentality, punctuated by dramatic movements and sensory surprises; higher degrees of commodification and consumption ethics; and above all, a driving ethos of 'bigger is always better, more is always more' (MacAloon 1984: 243–50; MacAloon 2006; Berkaak 1999).

At the same time, the meta-message 'this is spectacle' carries with it moral, epistemological, even ontological doubts and cautions, scepticism as to what if anything here is really real: 'Look but don't be taken in'; 'enjoy but don't be overjoyed'; 'it's awesome alright, but also grandiose and manufactured'; 'it's doubtless trying to sell you something or to distract you from something'; 'remember that powerful people are backstage pulling the strings'; 'suckers are born every day, don't be a sucker'; 'never forget it's just a big show . . . (though, Wow! what a great show)'.

In a complex performance system, each component frame and what historically happens to and within it, necessarily has effects on the other component genres nested within or branching off from it. There has never been much doubt about the corrosive effects of spectacle; it can change the other framing meta-messages into the interrogative: Is this ritual? Is this (really) a game? Is this festival? [Figures 11.1 and 11.2] or worse into those distinctive expressions of Western modernity: these are 'mere symbols', 'mere rituals', 'mere games'. On the other hand, there can be functional complementarities of which I have been highlighting the recruitment effect. 'All you have to do is watch' paradoxically frees people to do more than just watch; that is, to be potentially drawn into the other genres of experience. For example, in cultural formations and social segments where ritual iconoclasm is already widespread and internalized,[12] the spectacle frame may be proudly reassuring in a way that is simultaneously disarming of defences ('Oh, I'm not into ceremonies, I'm only going for my parents'; 'It's all hype and I hate sports, but what a scene'). The more diffuse liminality of the spectacle – despite how young anglophones talk, there is little that is 'brilliant' or 'awesome' about daily life – can serve as a gateway drug. And it has certainly been argued that

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people have become more or less adept at screening out all the hype and noise, like the endless programming promos and commercials on American Olympic television, though this seems to me a less productive argument. In any case, the main point is that taking spectacle as a particular genre in a performance system opens up more substantive and complex questions about 'spectacularization'.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, many Olympic leaders and ideological partisans recognized the dangers of spectacle ('giganticism' in the Olympic lexicon), and struggled, in my language, to keep the spectacle frame from congealing. However, given the subsequent institutional transformations described above, the 'game had clearly changed'. Spectacle with its brand of liminality is now no less avoidable than ritual, sport and festival are with theirs, and the appropriation and corrosion effects of the former on the latter are ever intensifying.

Abstract model-building and deployment, such as I have continued to engage in here, are inevitable in the face of such vast and ultimately unknowable complexity as the sociocultural and historical positionings and interpretations of Olympic phenomenon throughout the entire world. But, frankly, I much prefer (and am probably more proficient at) ethnographic case studies informed by these broader theoretical issues, like relations between spectacle and ritual liminality. For example, *Bearing Light: Flame Relays and the Struggle for the Olympic Movement* (2014) reported my thirty-plus years of fieldwork on (in twin senses) the flame relay, and focused especially on the micro-physics of relations between agents and practices promoting the 'more is better' ethos of the spectacle and defenders of the relay's historical core of ritual intimacies.

Key players in this drama came to include commercial sponsors, especially such 'presenting partners' as Coca-Cola and Samsung, in alliance with IOC and OCOG marketing staff, and enabled by uninformed and unengaged IOC members. Sponsors were among the first 'outsiders' to fully appreciate the symbolic power and demography of attention commanded by the flame relay.[13] In recent decades, typically five to ten times as many people turn out for an Olympic flame relay as ever see an Olympic sports event in person. This ritual has a markedly populist tone. It is free to the public, and passes through ordinary streets and communities where ordinary people actually live. The official staff look like ordinary people too (on most relays the majority are unpaid volunteers), though they may have cool uniforms and vehicles. There are lots of police, and when the flame stops, local officials may make a speech, but otherwise big wigs seem few and far between. The lucky torchbearers themselves look like, and mostly are, regular people as well. Except when they are not.

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Most people think sponsors are in it to sell more soft drinks and smart phones, and that is certainly what they tell their own boards of directors and what may be true in the long run. But commercial elites have more immediate interests. Olympic ritual and sport venues are famously 'clean' of sponsor marks, and in the flame relay this means the area immediately around the torchbearer. As documented in *Bearing Light*, there is a perpetual battle now between sponsor agents trying to break their marks into this space and relay officials trying to get them to respect the rules and stay out. In response, sponsors now mount large and uniformed 'activation teams' on elaborate sponsor vehicles and floats, blaring commercial jingles and handing out branded trinkets, that head out ahead of the flame and its official caravan. There are even sponsor cheerleaders. (Cheerleaders for the Olympic flame! Dancing away even through the crowds of pro-Tibet protesters who turned out in cities around the world during the 2008 Beijing relay.) Today, if you are waiting by the side of the road to see the Olympic flame, you will first have to endure this spectacular hoopla.

However, what Olympic sponsors actually care most about is cultivating and entertaining influential politicians, government officials, clients, new contacts, and favoured employees, and they soon discovered that there is no way that is more deeply appreciated than arranging for a target personage, or his/her family member, to carry the Olympic flame, especially in a personally significant or prestigious locale. Highly confidential sponsorship agreements now contain guaranteed numbers of torchbearer slots. Cash-strapped OCOGs are often tempted to supplement those IOC-approved guarantees, such that in Athens 2004, for example, over 60 per cent of torchbearers on the final Greek leg of the relay were sponsor selected. (Once informed of this, the IOC and subsequent OCOGs have claimed to have taken the problem under control.)[14] OCOGs have their own promotional reasons for preferring longer and longer relays, but sponsors drive them forward, offering more and more money in return for more and more marketing and 'activation' opportunities and more torchbearer slots. A vicious cycle is created: more, more!

I wish to make two points in light of this thumbnail sketch of these struggles over a powerful symbol and ritual. The first is that there is an important if unsurprising paradigm here: in a ritual publicly emphasizing populism and the equal dignity of ordinary and diverse citizens in service of (and for many, subsequent devotion to) an Olympic symbol of harmonic collaboration among individual effort and initiation, national energy, and common humanity, there is also a not-so-hidden attempt at appropriation by elite commercial power. But, as ever, it is crucially important to be reminded that here *money is following meaning* (Sahlins 1976). The production of powerful

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ritual liminalities – constituted as well by game and festival in the total performance system – is alone what attracts material interests and encourages the spectacularizers.[15] Understanding of complex, multi-genre performance forms is thus exceptionally helpful in avoiding the interpretive excesses of 'critical cultural studies' practitioners who – typically viewing things from a very great distance – reduce everything to one component genre and then generalize to the whole phenomena: society of the spectacle, simulacra, media events, and so on. In this instance at least, without powerful experiences of ritual liminality, none of this occurs.

I can point out similar struggles and hidden dialectics across the Olympic performance system. The opening ceremonies have acquired 'pre-shows' where sponsor marks and messaging are allowed to appear in the otherwise 'clean' Olympic stadium. The same is true of festival 'live sites'. The 'cultural segment' of opening ceremonies has become such a grandiose spectacular – with each production team competing to outshine the previous one and be declared the best ever (Beijing 2008!) – that the 'protocol segment' of official Olympic ritual struggles to stand out. Our fieldwork suggests that at some Games less than 20 per cent of tickets for opening ceremonies – the most coveted and expensive of any Olympic events – are actually made available to the general public. The rest are reserved for the 'Olympic Family', state dignitaries and their entourages, other invited VIPs, host nation elites, and whole 'teams' of sponsor guests and employees (as minutely stipulated in their contracts). But again, none of them would be there were it not for the symbolic power of ritual liminality, here in the context of Olympic ideology. If the procession of nations and the arrival of the Olympic flame and cauldron lighting carry that much more of a ritual burden these days in countering the spectacle, the latter would not exist without the former, and is in fact recruiting for it while threatening to erode it. This dialectic of performance genres and the actors and publics they carry with them can never be adequately recognized, much less analysed, by treating the whole thing as ritual (with liminal or liminoid characteristics) or as spectacle.

Spectacle also accretes to and threatens to reframe the games as well. In certain Olympic sports venues you will today find loud pop music, light shows, over-the-top announcers, and, yes, dancers and cheerleaders (in Beijing!). Ask and you will be told that the crowds have to be warmed up and kept entertained during breaks in the competition. They have paid a lot for their tickets. And then there is doping, that making of sport into pseudo-sport, as Boorstin would put it. Spectacle is implicated here too.

For their part, since they consolidated in the 1930s, victory ceremonies have been the most conservative and tamper resistant performances, in

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no small part because it is very dangerous to mess with national flags and anthems, especially other people's (MacAloon 2019). Still, in the Olympic Winter Games some medal ceremonies have now been separated from the time and space of the competition venue and moved downtown to a central stage in a jammed-packed plaza so that more people can honour the victorious athletes amid light shows, celebrity appearances, pop concerts, eating and drinking, and sponsor 'activations'.

Speaking of pop concerts, organizers and closing ceremonies producers, exhausted of energy and money and unable to rehearse in the athletics stadium, now sometimes just give up and rely on pop stars eager for a *pro bono* Olympic turn. In the London 2012 closing ceremonies, it was sometimes hard to notice when the official ritual actions were even taking place. Some athletes could not get out of there fast enough.

And yet . . .

Ironically, dedicated ethnographic research on the specific powers, practices, agents and agencies of the spectacle as a particular performance genre generates a renewed respect for the continuing power and stability of the ritual and game genres composing the core Olympic system.

Popular adherence to the Olympic flame and its relay has not demonstrably weakened. (Except perhaps for the domestic portion of Beijing 2008, due to host state interference; worldwide protests on the global leg of that relay presented themselves as defences of the ritual itself as well as of the Tibetan people.) The procession of nations in the opening ceremonies is unchanged, and it remains as difficult and disturbing as ever to imagine a world without it. In the combined Winter and Summer Olympics, only 15 per cent of total victory ceremonies have been given the 'downtown' treatment (MacAloon 2019: 7–8). The symbolism of cavorting athletes and the extinction of the Olympic flame in the closing ceremonies have lost nothing of their ritual hope and pathos.

Ritual Holds Its Public Place; Spectacle Is Resisted

There are congruent dramas on the macro-level. Olympic spectacle has lately been massively resisted in the Atlantic world, generating a crisis over the near disappearance of cities willing to host Olympic Games (MacAloon 2016). Since 2011, city after city in Europe and North America has pulled out of an Olympic bid after plebiscites or polling showed the citizenry had turned against the project, regardless of how strongly the political authorities were in support. For the 2022 Winter, 2024 Summer, and 2026 Winter Games, the IOC had scarcely two bids each. In the second case, the IOC

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took the unprecedented step of simultaneously awarding 2024 to Paris and 2028 to Los Angeles because it had no confidence either city would stay the course or be joined in the immediate future by other serious contenders for 2028. East Asia, where public critique of spectacularity is less common and where explicitly ritual framing is stronger – in vernacular Korean, the Olympic flame relay is *song-hwa pong-song*, 'sacred fire reverently dedicated and delivered sacred' – is finished, after Pyeongchang 2018, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 came riding to the rescue.

Anti-Olympic-hosting rhetoric has everywhere focused on the same things, all indexical of spectacle: huge budgets and fears of cost overruns, grandiose development plans, 'white elephant' facilities too big and expensive for productive after-use, concealed elite expropriations of popular funds and energies, overpromising of economic and social impacts, and the general hyperbole of Olympic projects and discourses (Berkaak 1999) in nervous and diminished social conditions. Of course, there are additional contextual factors contributing to this crisis. The hold of sport on younger generations seems to be weakening in many cultures. Fewer citizens today, especially in Europe where the IOC is based and European members dominate, associate that organization with leadership of a charismatic social movement rather than of a big industry. But the overall anti-spectacle message is perfectly clear. Bigger is not better; more is not always more. Nowhere in any of this discourse can one find the slightest suggestion that Olympic ritual is the problem, that eliminating the ceremonies could lower costs, shrink venues, or contain crowds. Far from it.

Liminality Is Power

From the standpoint of Olympism as a human rights movement, the ultimate stakes and developing activist agenda were made especially apparent in Beijing 2022, and ritual liminality was a direct and immediate focus. Was that power turned by the publicly silent Olympic authorities, notably Thomas Bach's IOC, into complicity with genocide, celebrating a 'country' (regime) hosting an Olympic Games while over a million of its Turkic Muslim citizens were being held in concentration camps? In the Beijing opening ceremony, the ritual marriage of a female Uyghur and a Han male as Olympic cauldron lighters embodied the absolute audacity of the Xi Jinping regime in expropriating the liminality of egalitarian humanitas of the Olympic flame ritual, not just in defence of, but in fact in determined dramatization, normalization and celebration of its own ethnocidal state policies (MacAloon and August 2022).

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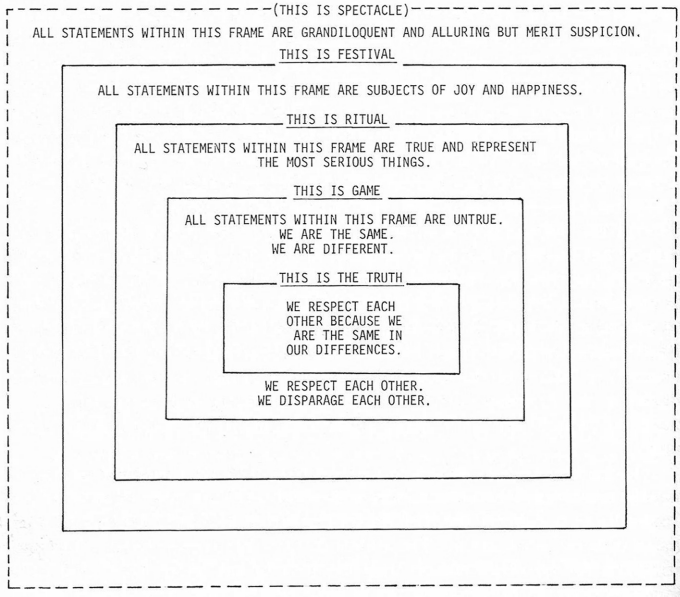


Figure 11.1. The Olympic performance system: orthodox form.
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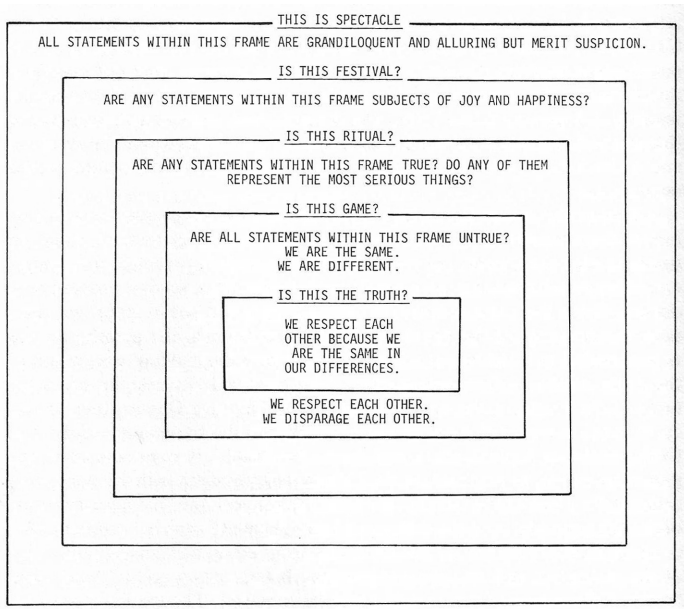


Figure 11.2. The Olympic performance system: a transformation.
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John J. MacAloon is professor emeritus in the Social Sciences Division and The College at the University of Chicago. His five decades of ethnological and historical research on the modern Olympic Games and Olympic Movement have formed the empirical base of his contributions to cultural performance theory and the anthropology of ritual, nationalism and internationalism, sport and the body. *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (2nd edition, 2008) remains the foundational work in global Olympic studies, and an exemplar of Chicago-style historical anthropology. Since 1984, MacAloon has pioneered anthropological team research in Olympic contexts, leading most recently to *Bearing Light: Flame Relays and the Struggle for the Olympic Movement* (2013). For his diplomacy and activism as well as his scholarship, he was awarded the Olympic Order in 2000. He also holds major teaching prizes from Chicago.

NOTES

1. Regrettably, in that first pass at building the model, I used the terms 'nested' and 'ramified' more or less interchangeably. In subsequent work I have been more careful to distinguish core genres of performance that are nested in Chinese boxes fashion in the system (as further discussed below) from those that remain branches off that core, for example the Olympic Arts Festival, Olympic Scientific Congresses, Olympic pin-trading, Olympic memorabilia and philatelic shows, Sponsor Villages, a variety of civic and commercial exhibitions and performances, religious evangelizing, political counter-programming, etc. These ramification genres may be very important to their immediate participants and add density to the overall Olympic phenomenon, but many in-person attendees and most television viewers have little notion they even exist, and they are certainly not inevitable, much less required, parts of the 'Olympic experience'. Moreover, while generally under official IOC or OCOG 'patronage', they are typically put on and managed by other authorities, civic, academic or commercial. Also, they regularly come and go.
2. Actually, I was not officially trained in the discipline. No department of Anthropology in those days would accept a PhD student intending a dissertation on the Olympics. My doctoral degree was from Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, where fortuitously Victor Turner arrived the same year as me.
3. It also requires membership in the United Nations, but fewer countries are represented there today than in the Games. Not incidentally, the UN has never managed to develop evocative much less compelling ceremonial, which is one of the main reasons UNESCO, in league with a group of national sports ministers, plotted in the 1970s to take over the Olympics from the International Olympic Committee.
4. In this article, I identified 'Olympism' as an exemplary form of what Turner called 'ideological communitas' (1984: 266), but equated it not with denial or erasure of differences but with recognition that we humans are all the same *in our differences* (Figures 11.1–11.2). Thus, this ideological communitas differs from a common Turnerian depiction (Turner 1982: 51). It is not 'the astructural model of human interconnectness' but a hyperstructural one that seems no less capable of being 'ideally

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coterminous with . . . the human species'. This was not a reformulation that particularly pleased my mentor (MacAloon and August 2022).

5. My conception of 'empty forms' is closely related to Roland Robertson's of 'glocalization' (Robertson 2012), but I place a great deal more stress on deracination as an active sociohistorical and political process absolutely necessary for any eventual uptake of these forms in diverse local contexts. (For further discussion of hyperstructure vs. anti-structure, see MacAloon and August 2022.)
6. My citations to 'Liminal to Liminoid' will be to the 1982 version incorporated into *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*. References in this version have been cleaned up, and it is better copy-edited as well as more accessible than the original. Differences in the two texts will be noted.
7. This criticism was widespread (see Lewis 2013) and reached its most pointed moment when Clifford Geertz once remarked that Turnerian ritual process analysis was 'a form for all seasons'. Another major scepticism among anthropologists from that period was whether 'communitas' as Turner characterized it was ever really a 'native experience'. I do not address the issue in this chapter (but see Keeler, this volume), only remarking here that it always struck me as unfortunate that Turner never became more consciously aware of Marx's depiction of 'species-being' in the *1844 Manuscripts* (MacAloon and August 2022).
8. Turner takes pains to point out that liminoid symbology and performance occur in state socialist societies too (Turner 1982: 53).
9. In private and in seminar, the Turners were anything but quiet on national and nation-state rituals of every kind. I have no clear answer as to their reticence in publication, though I have had some hunches. As a fellow conscientious objector with Vic (though under different laws and in a different war and with far less dangerous alternative service), and one who frequently compared with Vic and Edie the tactics and symbolism of the anti-nuclear movement, in which they had been energetic participants, with the use of religious ritual symbols by the anti-Vietnam War Catholic left in 1960s United States, I have wondered if a general hostility to state violence or rather some theoretical impediment was most responsible.
10. German Rieckehoff Sampayo, then the *independentista* Olympic chief of Puerto Rico, where the proponents of US statehood have never been able to win a referendum in the endless and all-important constitutional debates, because Puerto Rico would thereby lose its Olympic team, the only venue where Puerto Rico is represented as a nation among nations (MacAloon 1988; see also Sotomayor 2016).
11. Not everyone has been fully convinced (Lewis 2013: 55).
12. In 'Liminal to Liminoid', Turner felt compelled to summarize Weber's Protestant ethic thesis.
13. Today it is more popularly known as 'the torch relay', despite the fact that rarely is the torch passed hand to hand; it is the flame that is transmitted down the line of thousands of individuals connecting Ancient Olympia with each new Olympic host city. Why this change in speech? Probably the commodification of the torch has played a role – beginning in 1996, torchbearers have often been invited to purchase their torches, and a lively market in torches exists on the internet and at Olympic memorabilia conventions – whereas the flame itself is ritually extinguished at the end of each Games and cannot be commodified.
14. Among other conflicted practices has been the insertion of giant media platform trucks just in front of the torchbearer in order to serve and promote local broadcast

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and print media reporting all along the relay. The practice has also been justified as making possible a wonderful photograph for each torchbearer (often at a price, and through another sponsor's website). But the practice completely disrupts the sight lines of roadside audiences and torchbearer families, who can no longer see the Olympic flame coming or going: the image privileged over the experience.

15. At least some of those same elite broadcast executives, marketers, and operations managers whose actions are most implicated in various Olympic spectacularizations with their potential erosions of ritual liminality don't actually want the latter to happen at all. Some are even shocked at the suggestion. A number of those whom I've gotten to know very well over the years through extended conversations and close observations of them in action – a senior broadcast executive who was for decades the most powerful Olympic figure in my country, the chief architect of contemporary Olympic marketing, two senior executives controlling Olympic accounts at a TOP sponsor – turn out to be Olympic true believers, as passionate adepts of the liminal properties and experiences of the Olympic Games as anyone I've ever met. By comparing my extended interviews with them in *Bearing Light*, readers can judge for themselves who is more devoted to the Olympic flame, Athanassios Kritsinelis, the long-time 'high priest' of flame-lighting at Olympia and the Greek relays and mentor to flame relay organizers around the world, or Steven McCarthy whose company has contracted to manage several relays, who pioneered many 'world's best practices,' and who accepts as necessary and achievable the task of protecting the integrity of the flame while 'growing the relay' and getting commercial sponsors their rightful due. To suggest of persons like this that their positions in a capitalist regime are sufficient to explain their actions and motivations is unacceptable and even cowardly.

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CHAPTER 12



FRANCE AND ITS PURGATORY

André Iteanu

For the best part of my life, I have conducted fieldwork in two areas alternately: among the Orokaiva in Papua New Guinea, where both boys and girls were initiated together during a ritual that has now been discontinued; and in a French *banlieue* (suburb) with young people who at times act unconventionally or even illegally.

It therefore struck me that some literature dealing with the suburbs also talked about youth initiation to describe the way in which young boys were integrated in what it called gangs (Bloch and Niederhoffer 1963; and, more recently, Marwan and Mucchielli 2007). The authors used this term because they consider that the novices were then submitted to a violent ordeal of the kind illustrated by the famous 1961 film *West Side Story*, which resembles ritual initiations as conducted in 'traditional societies'. In both cases, the novices are first compelled by numerous rules, obligations and prohibitions, like those concerning honour and solidarity; then, they have to endure strong violence; and lastly, when reaching the end of the ceremony, their status is increased.

However, my long fieldwork in the French suburbs convinced me that this is untrue because one cannot find any established gangs in which the youngster could be integrated. Instead, the groups that, at times, young people form are very fluid, lack a hierarchy of statuses, and do not offer any stable membership. My contention was therefore that using the term 'initiation' in this context is an artefact.

The notion of initiation is, however, very relevant when one considers the *banlieues* as a crucial step in the integrative ritual imposed on foreigners settling in France. I have to recognize, nonetheless, that, at first sight, residing

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in the *banlieue* does not seem to resemble traditional rites of passage (see, for example, Iteanu 1983). This is why, near the beginning of this chapter, I will attempt to render plausible the idea that, on arriving in France, most legal[1] immigrants are subjected to a rite of passage, a sort of initiation, the meaning of which has been discussed at length by Turner (1969) and many others.

Although the initiation I talk about is different from those we know in 'traditional societies', it bears quite an identical structure. In the present case, French social systems apply it as a treatment to immigrant families in order to transform some of their members into 'acceptable' citizens. This practice includes government-supervised racial violence and humiliations against young, coloured immigrants. Although I consider these practices inclusive of the ritual complex that I will describe, I also think they are unethical and revolting, just as girls' sexual mutilation is in certain societies.

Classically, rites of passage are known in anthropology to contain three distinct steps: separation, liminality and reintegration. In France, during the first phase, immigrants are directed to neighbourhoods called *les banlieues*, where they are secluded and thus separated from the rest of the population. Next, they are submitted to a liminal phase, during which they are deprived of their former condition, and new forms of knowledge and ways of being are impressed upon them. Finally, they are reintegrated into mainstream society with the new status of 'normal' French citizens.

I have formerly described this process elsewhere (Iteanu 2005), so here I will only present it briefly before I concentrate on the notion of communitas, which Turner tightly associated with liminality and which nonetheless poses a number of problems in this context.

France and Its Immigrants

Current European political debates remind us, if needed, that every country conceives of and deals with immigration differently. However, for present purposes, it suffices to remember that immigration specialists often distinguish two broad tendencies. The first one, 'integration', which is associated with 'northern' European countries, especially England, encourages immigrants to constitute and then preserve their ethnic communities by following their own rules, communicating in their own language, and practising one form or another of endogamy. The second tendency, which is associated with 'southern' European countries, especially France, enforces what is usually termed assimilation, a policy aimed at the total transformation of newcomers into 'prototypical' national citizens (see, for example, Borooah and Mangan 2009). This distinction is very controversial, as in practice both orientations are always simultaneously present.

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Generally, in France, assimilation is considered successful if the immigrants' cultural ideas and practices disappear from public life, although it is conceded that these may survive, to a certain degree, in private. This is well illustrated by the following comment made by a man of North African origin about his brother's colleagues:

> My brother works for the town, and when he goes to the café with his colleagues he does not drink alcohol. So, they ask him, 'Why don't you do like Youssef? Youssef drinks, he is integrated.[2] Aren't you integrated, Youssef?' And this moron answers, 'I bet I am!' My brother tells me, 'I don't drink alcohol because I do not like it; I am a Muslim; what's the problem?' But every time they tell him that he is not integrated! (Wieviorka and Bataille 1999: 102; my translation)

The Separation

To become integrated, immigrants are sent to a particular area, *la banlieue*. Although in French, the term can refer to any geographical space situated on the periphery of towns, it also has a very common restricted sense, in which it designates a poor neighbourhood, mainly inhabited by immigrants and afflicted with all kinds of problems such as violence, poor schooling, and unemployment.

Soon after their arrival in France, immigrants are assigned to one of these neighbourhoods through different channels, the most prominent of which is their entitlement to cheap social housing as they always have a very low income and relatively numerous children. That many of them obtain this benefit is systematically criticized by the conservative parties as an injustice exerted against poor French citizens. However, from an anthropological point of view, I see it as a way to ensure that the immigrants are secluded in quarters that are scary to French people and are quite effectively separated from the surroundings by insufficient and expensive means of transportation. While thus quarantined in their *banlieue*, they can be submitted to an in-depth transformation.

To understand why France chooses to seclude certain populations, it is useful to note that not all immigrants are directed to the *banlieues*. A number of them are left to settle where they choose. These include the Europeans, the Jews, and all highly educated immigrants arriving from urban centres across the world, who usually obtain better salaries and establish themselves as modern people do 'wherever it's best for them'. In the same way, Asians are not assigned to the *banlieues* because they are considered successful in keeping their cultural practices hidden from public life. They are also known for sticking together in selected neighbourhoods, and therefore not running loose in the districts where French people live.[3] The latter have it that the

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members of these two categories will 'naturally' integrate after a while because they came from 'developed' societies and have thus only a short way to go to become individuals to whom their culture is but a private folklore. To leave them alone is also very convenient for the state, as their modification costs almost nothing. Conversely, all other immigrants have to be transformed through a costly *banlieue* ritual because the society (region, village) from which they have come is not modern and thus, as we will see, heavily 'communitarian'.

I use the term 'immigrants' here in its contemporary sense, which encompasses aliens coming to settle in France as legal or illegal immigrants, the majority from the Maghreb and West Africa. As mentioned earlier, some of these newcomers possess French nationality. However, less than eighty years ago, the word *immigrant* was uncommon, and the expression 'foreigner' (*étrangers*) was used instead to designate not only expatriates but also French citizens who had moved to the suburbs, coming from what were then considered backward French rural areas.

Therefore, yesterday as today, those who must go through the *banlieue* ritual are not chiefly characterized by their nationality but by the fact that they have moved to the *banlieue* coming from a poorer and less developed social milieu or country. In the French view, they are thus prone to communitarianism, a demeaning expression often employed today to qualify *banlieues*' sociality. By using this term, French people insinuate that most of the immigrants directed to the *banlieues* obey backward traditions, cannot extricate themselves from a wide network of kin relations, are extremely attached to hierarchy and religion, and are consequently unable to think or decide for themselves.[4] In sum, they are not free individuals and are therefore unable to be free citizens (Iteanu 2013). Thus, although the term *communautarism* is correctly translated as communitarianism, my contention is that in today's France it rather means 'holistic tendencies', which are particularly feared when they take the form of religious 'radicalism'.

Following Dumont[5] (1977), I would thus sum up this first ritual sequence as a separation through which the French people seclude in the *banlieue* those whom they consider to be imbued with holistic habits they have inherited from their original social milieu. They then apply a liminal process to transform them into acceptable citizens.

The Liminal Process

I previously stated that the *banlieue* ritual process aims at transforming immigrants into ordinary French citizens; however, this is not entirely accurate. The ritual does not apply to those immigrants who arrive in France as

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adults and whose culture can hardly be erased. The official word to designate them is *les primo-arrivants*[6] (those who just arrived), but everyone in the suburbs calls them *les bledards* (coming from a tiny backward village), a condescending expression that is associated with the idea that they are very kind and law abiding, in fact, very naive. Instead, those who are targeted by the rite of passage are the children of the former, born in France, or who have arrived in the country at an early age. In them, it is said, occurs an unnatural and dangerous mixture of holism and modernity. They thus become the angry young people who are universally blamed for making trouble in the *banlieues* and elsewhere, refusing education, being violent, dealing drugs, and being prone to religious radicalism.[7] They are the novices on whom the rite of passage must be performed because they cannot be left in their state of confusion.

From a French perspective, in order to leave the *banlieue*, the children of immigrants need to become unrecognizable.[8] They must jettison the appearance, ethics and attitudes of their migrant parents. They must be modern, go through school, forget their mother tongue, obtain good professional skills, ignore their religion, refuse to send remittances back to their parents' homeland, and be exclusively concerned with their own future and that of their children, not that of an ill-defined and anachronistic extended kindred. They must marry a partner, irrespective of her or his origin. Like Youssef, they must drink alcohol. In short, they must become French.

Classically, initiation rituals rely on the intervention of deities or ancestors to generate the novice's transformation. But people as agnostic as the French must count on something else, or at least they must have a good non-religious reason to think that the ritual will work. French social philosophy that has passed into everyday belief has it that when deprived of social relations, a person reverts to a nearly blank slate. Rousseau (1755) called such a person a 'good savage'. This idea is also firmly implanted in Durkheim (1990: 495) when he says: 'The sacred principle is nothing else than society hypostatized and transfigured' (my translation).[9] Thus, for him, the forces that transform the novices in the rites of passage are not deities or ancestors but society itself. The same idea is applied to the *banlieue* when, in order to reset anew the young novices, they are first deprived of all personal relations that could have constructed their personalities, and then are exposed only to abstract institutions to reconstruct them as perfect citizens.

Here I must pause to specify that although I consider the *banlieues*' ritual an extreme form of manipulation, I do not imply that it has evolved out of some kind of conspiracy. There is no political dictator, no hidden secret society, and no political party that devised it. Like all rituals, if they were not given by gods, as the legends may have it, they were created through time by slow modification of what previously existed.[10] Therefore, they usu-

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ally raise little political resistance. This is the case with the *banlieues*' ritual, which is only criticized for its most extreme manifestations, like police racist behaviours and violence. But by and large, it is approved by most French people, including a majority of immigrants, no matter what their political orientation may be, in the same way that girls' mothers or aunts find 'normal' what we consider sexual mutilation.

As stated earlier, in the *banlieue* during the liminal period, the immigrants' children are deprived of the relationships they would normally have acquired. I will consider two cases: relations with the parents, and local relations.

In the *banlieues*, the novices are detached from their holistic kin (parents and extended family) in various ways, just as boys are detached from their mothers and more generally from women in 'traditional' male initiation rituals. Above all, the French administration[11] scatters families and nationalities in *banlieues* that are very distant from each other in such a way that kinship and ethnic networks are shattered. This is sometimes also applied to wives in polygamous marriages and to children who are compelled to move out of their parents' home and offered a low-rate apartment far away from where they had previously lived. In France, this is unanimously considered the best way to prevent 'ghettoization and communitarianism', and therefore all sorts of holistic-originating problems. Thus, in a typical low-cost building in the *banlieue*, a Malian family might, for example, live next to an Algerian one and above Portuguese and Tunisian ones.

Secondly, within the nuclear family, detachment can also occur through the devaluation of the behaviour of the parents, who are often not at ease with reading, writing or speaking French, or even using computers. This is particularly true when parents have to deal with the school that their children attend. Very often, they do not even understand what exactly is required of them, and have a hard time accessing the instructions sent through the internet. This is often solved by sending the older daughter to all meetings with the authorities. The parents are consequently perceived by the children as clumsy and unintelligent. This leads to an 'extra' detachment of the children from their parents, which accentuates the 'normal' universal gap that individualistic societies create between children and parents. In sum, in the *banlieues*, parents are seen as models to avoid at all costs.

One would think, then, that these 'extinct' relations with the kin would leave room for relations with French people or with other immigrants. This is not the case. Everything is done in such a way that no stable relationship can be established while in the *banlieue*. We have seen how neighbours from different backgrounds and origins are purposely distributed in the low-rent buildings. Another example concerns the schools and high schools, where teachers in the *banlieues* obtain a salary rise every time they ask to be transferred from one school to another.[12] As a result, *banlieues*' children are rarely

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able to establish a steady relationship with a teacher for more than two years in a row. Furthermore, in these neighbourhoods, there are no shops, no cafés, and no place to bring people together – only shopping malls, where, as we know, it is hardly possible to establish relationships.

Instead, what is offered to these young people is the possibility to partake in abstract institutions: schools, cultural centres, sports clubs, and so forth. However, these rarely construct long-lasting personal relationships. Young people therefore sometimes decide to reject these institutions and stay home playing with a computer or else congregate with other young people in so-called gangs that are, however, no more durable, and have no meaningful social structure.

The liminal process in the *banlieue* thus amounts to a global deprivation of both kinship and local relations in exchange for exposure to a number of state operated institutions.[13] Turner summed up this situation: 'The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status' (1969: 103).

The Reintegration

In the *banlieues*, the 'holistic' immigrant is gradually reshaped into a totally different creature: an individual characterized by freedom. This ritual conversion is considered complete when, for example, the young person obtains a diploma and finds a permanent job away from her/his kindred and local relations. Formerly, girls, who performed better in school than their brothers, often left the *banlieue* via this route. Today, however, many women have a hard time finding an employer who allows them to wear a hijab, which, in the French view, betrays their incomplete transformations. Their brothers, on the other hand, can take a different course – for instance, by marrying a 'French woman' and adopting a conventional French lifestyle. Other young people, however, may never complete this ritual transformation and are trapped in the *banlieues*' liminality for the rest of their lives. Nonetheless, in this case, their children may later take over the ritual cycle in which they themselves have failed.

In the vast majority of cases, the *banlieues*' ritual produces the anticipated assimilation. However, it also creates a strain of opposed effects, which certain scholars would call resistance (e.g. Foucault 2001: 1056–57). Some years ago, such opposition appeared in the guise of an overvaluation of the social bonds linking the peers in groups referred to as 'gangs', whose principal activity was to fight and take revenge over similar groups pertaining to different neighbourhoods. Today, it is mainly expressed through a strong ad-

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herence to Islam, bringing forth the idea of an *umma* (the egalitarian unity of all before Allah) that encompasses within a common kinship or brotherhood all differences in ethnicity, age, and so forth. Thus, the *banlieues*' younger residents call those who are their age 'brothers' and the elderly '*la famille*', the family. To gain popularity, conservative French politicians denounce this creation of kinship as the worst form of religious communitarianism.[14]

Ambiguity

So far, I have attempted to show how *banlieue* practice conforms to the tripartite structure proposed by van Gennep (1909) for the rites of passage. It is now further necessary to consider two characteristics that Turner considered indispensable to constitute such a rite.

The first of these is ambiguity: 'Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (Turner 1969: 95).

A similar ambiguity can be grasped in what is commonly said about the *banlieues*. The topic itself is very common and appears daily in the news and in people's conversations. For those who live elsewhere, the *banlieue*, it is said, is a separate world, often referred to as '*une zone de non-droit*' (a lawless space).[15] This is to say that the common law does not apply to it. Instead, communitarianism dominates in the form of inequality generated by kinship and religion, especially between women and men. Furthermore, the youngsters are rebellious and dangerous, and most people would not venture into a *banlieue*, especially at night, lest something bad happen. Beyond these common representations, the conservative political parties and politicians constantly warn their followers that sooner or later the *banlieues*' inhabitants will cross over beyond their borders and impose their backward communitarian ways on everyone.

One would think that those who are targeted, the *banlieues*' inhabitants, would deny these quite prejudicial assertions. It is exactly the opposite. The youngsters take pride in confirming that they rule their neighbourhood rather than the state, because the police and the authorities are afraid to come in. This, they say, does not lead to anarchic disorder but to a much better-tended sociality, governed by a hierarchy of age, gender and religion. This form of sociality, they add, constitutes their 'identity', and they are ready to fight to preserve it.

Both voices therefore agree with van Gennep's and Turner's definition of liminality, including the suspension of the normal social rules, the status modification, and the separation from what is around. They further agree on the idea that the immigrants' children develop a communitarian sociality.

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But all this remains clearly ambiguous for all those, and they are in the majority, who transit from their dreamed *banlieue* to the outside world where, for example, they go to school or to work daily. Only a few people manage to remain in the *banlieue* constantly. I mentioned them earlier as those who had failed their ritual transformation. Therefore, confirming Turner's notion of ambiguity, we could also probably consider them ritual priests or specialists.

From Relief to Liberation

The second of Turner's characteristics is communitas, which he developed while reflecting on African rituals and some worldly religions, like the Franciscans, the 'dharma bums' (Turner 1969: 125), and the hippies. Communitas is typical of liminality. It contrasts with the normal state of society to be found before and after the rites of passage, in which hierarchy is very constraining or 'polluting' for every individual. Conversely, liminality is a relief from these constraints: 'the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence' (Turner 1967: 106).

In the *banlieues*, however, there is no relief from the social constraints. Their inhabitants think that they are rather more roughly treated than all others. And the police statistics indeed show that they are right. They confront all sorts of economic and legal problems. And for a minority of them, they have a hard time leaving liminality at all. They have a high level of religious practice, and an ever-larger proportion of girls and women wear scarves or hijabs. All these imposed or chosen constrains are truly incompatible with the notion of communitas.

Therefore, in the *banlieues*, no relief from the world's constraints is to be expected during liminality. However, such a relief is the advantage promised by the ritual to the novices who accept reintegration. They will then, it is said, be liberated from hierarchical ties to become free and equal individuals. It is as if the *banlieue* ritual operated as a sort of condensed French Revolution for the benefit of every single immigrant's child. Most of the *banlieues*' young people go along with this promise. Others, less numerous, refuse it because it denies, they say, their right to their cultural heritage. For all of them, the liminal phase is therefore not a momentary relief but a stage of violent transformation, ending (or not) in reintegration.

Conclusion

While in classical rites of passage, the novices reintegrate into the same society that they originally left, albeit with a new personal status; in the *ban-*

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lieues' ritual, the novices are meant to reintegrate into a social configuration very different from the one their parents originally left. For them, liminality is therefore a period during which they follow a course that will take them away from that of their forebears. If they reach the end of this path, they will eventually conclude the freedom-oriented project initiated by their parents when they first left their place of origin, but which they personally never finalized. Most of these young people are eager to pursue this route and become French, while some of them react against it and attempt to recreate what they consider to be their 'roots' (*racine*), that of 'their origin'. In both cases, their experience as novices takes them away from the place where their parents left them – a midway point between the more holistic social configuration from which they came and the highly individualistic French context. In brief, these young people must choose one or the other, but whatever they decide, they will betray their parents as, above all, they do not want to resemble them.

Seen from a Turnerian anthropological point of view, the *banlieue* resembles a rite of passage with its separation, liminality, reintegration, and ambiguous meanings. However, its liminality lacks a communitas characterized by equality, direct relations between its members, and the absence of ownership. Instead, this is what is obtained through reintegration.

This inspired me to take Turner's suggestion seriously,[16] that next to calendrical rites and rites of passage there may be, in complex social configurations, other sorts of rites. In my view, thus, the *banlieues*, along with the stranger-king rituals (Sahlins 2008), is one of these in which the novices end up in a social configuration different from the one in which they started. This displacement appears to be well rendered by Dante's visit into the abode of the dead, from hell, through Purgatory[17] to heaven, described in his famous *Comedia*.

About this journey, which resembles that of the young people in the *banlieues*, Bartuschat writes: 'The crossing of this world is an act of purification and a path to perfection, experienced by Dante as a difficult climb' (Bartuschat 2001: 147; my translation). Most of those whom Dante met in the intermediate sphere, Purgatory, were guilty of sin. But others, like the Greek poets, were doomed for not being Christians. They, like the *banlieues*' underdeveloped immigrants, had to be transformed to be allowed into heaven.

Thus, the *banlieues*, like Purgatory, feature a rite by which the souls expiate outdated practices in view of liberation. When successful, this rite rids the novices of all cumbersome kinship relations, transforming them into free individuals; when it fails, it leaves them in a castrating communitarian condition, conjuring violence and hierarchical immorality. Some of these novices react to this alternative by inverting the value accorded to these two situations. This value inversion is a feature absent from normal rites of pas-

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sage. It signals that the *banlieue* ritual is not exactly an initiation but some different practice that we could call 'purgatorial rites', in which the novices reintegrate into a world different from the one from which they were originally separated, and which opens the possibility of a value inversion.

André Iteanu is an anthropologist and professor emeritus at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where he held the chair Pacific Religions. He is also a full *Directeur de recherche* emeritus at the National Center of Research. He has conducted extensive fieldwork since 1980 among the Orokaiva in Papua New Guinea and in Cergy-Pontoise, a French suburb, with marginalized youth. He has published extensively on topics concerning ritual, temporality, hierarchy, individualism, emigration and values. Furthermore, he has made three documentary films among the Orokaiva, which have won numerous awards.

NOTES

1. This chapter does not deal with the contemporary situation. The immigration it is concerned with took place from the end of French African colonization from 1960 to 2010. As France has granted French nationality to certain inhabitants of its colonies (Guichard and Noiriel 1997), a number of those who are considered immigrants possess French nationality.
2. In this context, French people do not use '*assimilé*' but '*intégré*' which implies a more thorough transformation.
3. I leave aside the unusual situation of the Gypsies.
4. Women were also considered as unworthy of being citizens until 1945, when they were finally granted voting rights.
5. French people are more Dumontian than it seems – or conversely, Dumont was a real Frenchman and expressed an important part of French ideology.
6. Here is the official definition of the *primo-arrivants*: Newcomers are foreigners in a regular situation with regard to the right of residence and signatories of a reception and integration contract (CAI), or of the new Republican Integration Contract (CIR).
7. Some of them are believed to have become terrorists or to have joined the jihad.
8. This is a common feature of initiation rituals when the parents (mothers) often do not recognize their children when they come out of seclusion.
9. My previous comment about Dumont (Note 5) also applies to Durkheim.
10. In France, the suburbs have been the focus of a long political history. See, for example, what is called *Les édits de pacification (1562–98)*.
11. Mainly through the work of the council estate offices: Office HLM.
12. In middle-class neighbourhoods, teachers hardly change jobs. Although they would also be entitled to a salary raise, they prefer to remain in a 'good school'.
13. The same thing happens with young social workers. They change jobs much more often than before.

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14. This recalls Mitchell's definition of categorical relations, which uses structural categories to designate relations that are much looser and more superficial, and that allow choice (Mitchell 1956: 52–53).
15. Even the government uses this expression to assert that it will not allow any threat to the general rule of law.
16. 'Undoubtedly, in large-scale complex societies, with a high degree of specialization and division of labor, and with many single-interest, associational ties and a general weakening of close corporate bonds, the situation is likely to be very different' (Turner 1969: 202).
17. 'The place to which Roman Catholics believe that the spirits of dead people go and suffer for the evil acts that they did while they were alive, before they are able to go to heaven' (Cambridge Dictionary, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/purgatory).

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CHAPTER 13



LIMINALITY AND *COMMUNITAS*

The Making of Refugees in Switzerland

Marina Gold

> There is a certain homology between the 'weakness' and 'passivity' of liminality in diachronic transitions between states and statuses, and the 'structural' or synchronic inferiority of certain personae, groups, and social categories in political, legal, and economic systems.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

At the peak of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 more than one million people arrived in Europe to claim asylum. Since the European Union signed the EU–Turkey deal in 2016, the numbers of refugees arriving in Greece decreased to less than 100,000 in 2017, and by 2018 there were less than 100,000 arriving in all of Europe. More generally, there are 22.3 million people of non-EU citizenship among the 512.4 million living in Europe (4.4%) (Eurostat 2019). The increase in the movement of people sparked by the war in Syria was significant not so much in concrete numbers, but rather in the debates it opened and the nationalist passions it fuelled. The increased support of populist leaders across Europe via the reinvigoration of nationalist discourses and the defence of national territory requires attention. European countries revised and tightened their immigration laws and asylum processes, and since 2015 border controls have emerged (in some places temporarily) within certain Schengen areas[1] and along the Balkans route. Systems of management and categorization of people on the move are a European attempt to maintain the structures of control (social and political) in times of intense movement and instability. The populist response to immigration is, even if deplorable, a reaction of a communal structure to the destabilizing poten-

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tials of migration. That is, the surge of nationalism is a form of *communitas* – an expression of egalitarianism – within European populations and against what they conceive as a foreign threat. Through *communitas*, Europeans reinforce their hierarchical position in relation to foreigners, so that hierarchy and *communitas* become intermingled in an attempt at redefining the social whole; one a dimension of the other.

In this chapter I will consider processes of making refugees in Switzerland. Even while Switzerland is a relatively benign place in terms of the treatment given to asylum seekers, it nonetheless reveals the dynamics between hierarchy and *communitas* through the process of determining 'proper' refugees from negatively conceived economic migrants. This liminal process – one of radical reconfiguration of personhood – is concerned with maintenance of Swiss social and political structures, as well as with the incorporation of foreign others into the national social body. I have conducted research at a refugee reception centre in Zurich and with refugee management programmes and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Geneva since 2016. Official government efforts pertaining to refugees draw heavily on humanitarian NGOs and corporate bodies in the process of funding and management of refugee-related programmes. I consider asylum seekers' exposure to multiple management processes that foster liminality at a time when anti-foreigner issues become political banners in increasingly extreme right-wing populism, which harnesses these anxieties to create a shared sense of community. I interrogate how the Turners' categories of liminality and *communitas* explore the formation and transformation of social structures through the categorization and incorporation of the other.

Crisis and Liminality

Refugees enter knowingly into a perilous liminal state when they leave their homes and seek asylum in other countries, but the process – perilous and wrapped in contradictions – does not always lead to their reintegration into a host society as full citizens; they encounter resistance within European societies attempting to maintain structure in times of intense crisis.

At a time of great uncertainty (the increased precarity of labour conditions, the threats posed by Brexit, and the rise of fascist leaders in Europe and the United States) social structures within Europe are stressed as social cohesion is increasingly fragmented by movements of capital, ruptures caused by economic and military conflict, and deterritorialized power structures articulated through large transnational corporations. In 2015 this crisis became personified in refugees, who were being made responsible for for-

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eign threats to jobs, community, tradition, religion and political unity (Žižek 2016). Conceived as a destabilizing force trying to break into the structures of European social and political life, refugees/migrants (often used interchangeably) are exposed to different liminal processes: territorially (in offshore refugee camps, detention centres); normatively (in a state of legal limbo during interminable processes); and socially (in an appeal to human rights, for not receiving civil rights). The system of management of refugees, from transnational, national and local legislation, to the practical application of refugee-related programmes, keeps people (perhaps inadvertently) in a state of prolonged liminality – temporal, spatial, legal and social.

The system of management of refugees retains 'asylum seekers' in an indefinite period of uncertainty – 'betwixt and between' (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992) – which does not serve the purpose of passage from one status to another (ultimately to be incorporated into the social structures through citizenship) that van Gennep (1909) termed the 'liminal phase'. Instead, as Turner (1969: 107) argued, the liminal phase has in modern societies become institutionalized.

With the increasing specialization of society and culture, and with progressive complexity in the social division of labour, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities 'betwixt and between' defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state. Transition has here become a permanent condition.

The process of asylum is a promise, not always fulfilled, of a better way of life. People endure hardship, and submit themselves to dangerous and degrading situations throughout a liminal period whereby they must prove they are not economic migrants but 'true' refugees, in the hope and expectation that they will improve their living conditions, reach a safer environment and have a more prosperous future. This liminal period acts as filter, a process of socialization into European political and civic norms; it transforms asylum seekers into refugees, as much as it protects and insulates the communal structure of Europe. Asylum seekers are confined to liminal states that extend in space and time, and cannot easily be restored through social rituals, such as acquiring refugee status or citizenship.

Refugees become a contested group – and the refugee crisis is the social situation through which tensions between structure and *communitas* are played out. Marx, referring specifically to the crisis of capital, understands crisis as a moment in which the antagonism of all elements in the bourgeois process of production explodes (Marx [1859] 1999), and as the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy (Marx [1863] 1951). Therefore, Marx conceived of crisis as a moment of intensification in which the contradictions erupt, engendering historical processes. This view influenced Max Gluckman's understanding of process

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and change within human customs (Gluckman 1940). Gluckman started from the premise that change was the condition of social existence, and crisis was integral to all processes, as they allowed the contradictions of the system to emerge and they represented moments of social life in the very process of formation (Kapferer 2006). Victor Turner elaborated this in his analysis on ritual, where he showed how ritual liminal spaces revealed enduring forms that constitute processes, and also allowed for them to become modified as potentialities (Turner 1957), thus not only repeating practices but also creating them. These dynamics can exist outside ritual practice. Social relations are dynamic structures; a crisis – a moment in which the contradictions rupture through the fabric of normalcy of the system – also generates new processes that are themselves encoded with their own contradictions.

The refugee crisis represents one such moment: an eruption of the contradictions of the Western egalitarian ideal, commonly referred to in the media as 'the European way of life'. Such crisis is most acutely felt in the structures that traditionally sustained the nation-state (territorial sovereignty, citizenship processes, nationalist constructions) as the universality of humanity is contrasted to (and too often becomes incompatible with) the specificity of the citizen. It must be noted, however, that the coming of refugees into Europe that increased in numbers between 2014 and 2016 is not the cause of the perceived crisis, but rather a symptom of it – or more specifically, of the social situation within which the complexity of the moment of crisis crystalized.

The refugee 'crisis' represents thus a social situation, in Gluckman's terms. He argued that social situations are events that reveal the interrelationships within a society through which to understand the social structure, relationships and institutions of that society (Gluckman 1940). It constitutes the social and political complexity in which the different events themselves develop, and it embodies the particular structural processes manifest in them (Kapferer 2006). Debates about refugees have become the battleground between conservative nationalists and humanitarian universalists discussing the very role and currency of the nation-state and the validity of human rights. While, through refugee anxieties, right-wing groups rally support for anti-immigration policies, other groups draw on the humanitarian component of the refugee crisis to organize themselves around the notion of solidarity outside the space of the state (NGOs, corporate bodies, private foundations) and that draw on universalist values to create a sense of shared humanity in order to redefine the social group beyond the structures of the state. Therefore, the tensions between *communitas* and liminality, and structure and egalitarianism, can be understood through Turner's categories (still current and useful in conceptualizing these dynamics), but these need to be rearranged to analyse how refugee movements (as egalitarian movements

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that aim to break through structures) simultaneously reinforce structures and transform them.

The Prolonged Liminal State of Refugees in Switzerland

In this section I will consider three situations that coalesce the complexities of refugees' journeys with the role of humanitarian and governmental sectors in the administration and bordering of people. I approach the issue of refugees as a conceptual opening for larger processes of social change that involve the transformation of the structures of the nation-state and the emergence of a different configuration of the state (see Kapferer and Gold 2017, 2018). Elements of this argument will emerge in the following sections as I discuss the multiple structural, legal and social barriers imposed on refugees.

The Spatio-temporal Liminality in Refugees' Journeys

> Liminal entities . . . may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them . . . Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new situation in life.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

This description can easily be applied to people undergoing the asylum procedure in Switzerland, and across Europe. It is important to highlight that Switzerland has a relatively benign process of asylum, with well-established facilities, allowing people to move with relative freedom within the country, as they can leave the short-term reception centres during the weekends and have only a night curfew.

Nonetheless, people undergoing asylum are still exposed to a process of reduction and categorization. They possess nothing; they are discussed within the community that houses the centre as 'criminals' and 'villains'. Regardless of the fact that many are from the middle classes and are professionally trained, their degrees are not recognized and they are seen as a homologous mass. They are expected to be submissive and thankful for what they receive (shelter, language courses, logistical support), and they must obey instructions or forfeit their chances of getting asylum. They are 'being

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reduced or ground down to a uniform condition' (Turner 1969: 95), during which people are sorted, sifted and deported.

The centre is organized by a private non-profit organization and funded by the Swiss federal government. It had the role of trialling a pilot project intended to expedite the asylum procedure. The results of the pilot project were subjected to a national vote in 2016, where 66.8 per cent of voters decided in favour of reducing the asylum procedure from 400 days to 140 days. While the intention of the initiative seems to be the reduction of the liminal period of asylum, the motivation behind voters' support has been to reduce the time unwanted migrants remain in Switzerland. When I began fieldwork in February 2016 the short-term reception centre had room for 300 people and it was filled to the limit, mostly with young men (18–30 years old) from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and North Africa. People can stay a maximum of three months while their asylum status is determined. If their application moves forward in the process they must be relocated to a cantonal centre.

In the instances where asylum requests are not accepted, people are moved to special centres for rejected claims, until they can organize their departure. Few go back to where they first registered in Europe (Italy or Greece). The Swiss government offers to pay for deportation costs to their home country as well as a one-off stipend to encourage them to voluntarily return there. The careful organization of spaces of exception (centre for processing different 'types' of asylum seekers) within the national territory and along the migration track is an attempt at categorizing, through a moral hierarchy of deservedness (Fassin 2005), those who are more likely to be granted protection: women and children, unaccompanied minors, young families.

Life at the centre revolves around the immigration requirements. However, most of the day is spent waiting: hanging around the centre, talking to family back in their hometowns (or elsewhere in the migratory trajectory) and wondering around the city. People can leave the centre, but must return before the 10 PM curfew. People in the process of application for asylum in Switzerland are not allowed to be employed other than by the centre. However, residents are offered the possibility of a few hours of symbolically paid work outside the centre, in jobs that do not displace Swiss employees. Such jobs include clearing the forests of invasive species (a task that would be done with young Swiss doing the 'social service', an alternative to the military service) or working on community farms, where others work voluntarily.

The non-government institution that manages the short-term reception centre has another female-only training activity at a locally run restaurant offering hospitality skills, language and cultural training. Women are told to address others in formal language (e.g. German makes a distinction between formal and informal 'you'), and to address the clients politely and always use eye contact. By working outside the reception centre they can earn 30 CHF

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a week (a symbolic wage considering it would barely cover the costs of food for one adult for one day), and while they can claim to accrue some work experience and workplace relations in what might be their new home, they cannot get letters of recommendation from this employer. Asylum seekers at the reception centre cannot earn more than 400 CHF a month by law, as that would mean the organization in charge of the centre would have to pay taxes on them, as if it were employing non-European workers.[2] A customer asked an Eritrean woman where she came from and she replied from Italy, and only after being probed further she repeated the reverse chronology of her travels: Tunisia, Libya, Sudan and Eritrea, a seven-year journey. This woman's limbo was far from over. She was in a reception centre, where she could only remain for three months, and if she passed the first stage of the process she would be relocated to a cantonal centre, which would house her until a positive or negative resolution. Even in the unlikely eventuality of a positive decision, the uncertainty of her situation would endure, with difficulties finding housing, work and a social support network, especially in cases where temporary asylum is bestowed. This level of spatio-temporal liminality was prevalent in many asylum seekers' accounts.

The implications of these typical refugee stories are multiple: the conflict between the asylum procedure as focused on neatly documented and substantiated claims and the ambiguity and intractability of asylum seekers' journeys across Africa and the Mediterranean; the contradictions and ironies of the management procedures throughout the entire process of asylum request that theoretically aim to protect 'true' refugees from 'false' economic migrants; and the extended periods of liminality experienced by people, becoming a norm rather than an exceptional moment at times of crisis.

Significantly, the numbers of refugees arriving at the centre decreased as the EU–Turkey deal was enforced. By 2017 the centre was no longer at full capacity and in 2018 it has been reduced to almost a third of its original size, as part of the council land on which it stands was ceded to build an ice hockey stadium, much to the delight of the local community. Women, children and families were moved away to a larger centre in another commune, keeping this centre for men and young adults. By 2018, most residents had arrived directly from camps in Turkey. This reveals a shift in the border-making process, as Europe has used the EU–Turkey deal to enforce offshore-type policies such as those implemented by Australia in Papua New Guinea. By removing the first instance of asylum seekers from the national territory, Europe ensures a tighter process of selection and a guarantee that those who are rejected will not remain illegally, reducing deportation costs.

Being a refugee ought not to be a permanent state. However, the contingencies of the asylum system leave people in an indefinite state of limbo, and in some locations 'asylum seeker' becomes an inherent state of being.

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The Dublin Treaty inadvertently forces people to remain in the limbo of the 'asylum seeker' state for longer, as those who do not want to settle in Italy or Greece do not apply for asylum and continue their journey northwards.

During this ambiguous status they are exposed to accusations of being economic migrants or terrorists as they seek to settle in the wealthier northern European countries. Along the refugee routes, European powers have set up processing centres, interim camps and humanitarian hotspots that initiate people on the move into the expectations and contingencies of refugee life, while simultaneously acting as a space of control and discipline by documenting people's moves (Pinelli 2015), implementing systems of medical services that also act as surveillance tools as the clinic is brought to the field through humanitarian NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde. The International Organization for Migration recently launched an app that is intended for people on the move so that they can upload their documents and self-document their health issues in order not to lose their official identity along the way. The irony of this is that people often intentionally 'lose' their identity, particularly in cases of young adults barely over 16 years old, who aim to claim asylum as unaccompanied minors (under 16 years of age, who should get automatic asylum).

The average processing time for asylum requests in Germany in 2014 was 11.1 months (AIDA 2016), and in France it was 16 months in 2016. In Switzerland the processing time for asylum applications is theoretically only ten working days, however in practice the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM 2017) reported an average processing time of 243.5 days in 2016 (AIDA 2016: 4). In Sweden, waiting time for the first interviews after lodging the asylum claim is on average six months, and in Austria up to a year (ibid.). By August 2016 there were 1,036,762 pending asylum applications in the twenty-eight member states of the EU (EASO 2016).

The spatio-temporal liminality that defines refugees in their journeys across Africa, the Middle East and into Europe is accompanied by the legal and categorical ambiguity that aims to sort people out into moral hierarchies, and that determine those who deserve to be supported and integrated and those who are beyond assistance and can only become economic (often illegal) migrants.

Legal and Categorical Liminality in the Asylum Process

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these 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, and ceremonial.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

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The structural violence of the asylum procedure, with its ambiguous, incumbent and bureaucratically dehumanizing effects, results in the perpetuation of temporal and legal uncertainty and the arbitrary enabling of people's exclusion. The violence of regional and national legal procedures that ought to protect but have the opposite effects, are echoed in local behaviours against the settlement of refugees, and in the increase of anti-immigration political positions. In an effort to produce accountability and transparency, by standardizing procedures, the bureaucratic machinery (increasingly modelled on corporate management) transforms people into codes, and enables a more distanced and calculated exclusion. Refugees are not the only ones being bureaucratically excluded. In the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008, the 14 million US homeowners who lost their homes were victims of the corporate bureaucracies that denied 70 per cent of homeowners financial support (Stout 2019). Governmentality is increasingly corporatized, serving the interests of capital, and threatening local communities.

The process of application for refugee status in Switzerland starts at a federal level at one of the six reception centres, at the airports, or on international soil at refugee centres in Turkey. Once the application progresses further, applicants are transferred to asylum-processing centres under cantonal jurisdiction, which will receive state funds for processing the applications but will have to bear the costs of deporting people in denied cases, or of integrating accepted refugees or people granted a temporary residence status. Furthermore, cantons are obliged to accept a percentage of refugees, and are fined large sums if they refuse. The process of asylum is not only controlled by the government; at every stage of the procedure, NGOs and corporate groups cooperate and compete for the jurisdiction over the integration and rejection of refugees.

In Switzerland the main organization concerned with the initial process for dealing with asylum requests is the State Secretariat of Migration (SEM), the former Federal Office for Migration (see the 2016 AIDA report by Nufer et al. for a detailed explanation of the application process). With an expenditure of 1.27 billion Swiss francs in 2015, 735 million was distributed to the cantons to cover the 1,500 francs per asylum applicant. However, the rest of the expenditure goes to pay the one thousand officials of SEM (Herzog 2016).

A first short preliminary interview addresses issues on the identity, the origin and the living conditions of the asylum seeker, collecting information about the journey to Switzerland and the reasons for seeking asylum. The interview provides a first classification, the initial ordering and determination of potential asylum seekers from migrants. It is the gatekeeper within the national territory. The first interview is crucial because it establishes the main grounds to allow an application to carry on to the second stage. If not

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enough evidence is provided in the first interview, an applicant can be denied asylum and be sent back to another state. This is often a problem with women who have been subjected to rape and abuse, who – particularly if they have a male interviewee – will not disclose this information due to fear of shaming, permanently hindering their application process, as has been documented by the NGO Action from Switzerland.[3]

When the application progresses further, the applicant receives a second interview, when he/she can describe in more detail the reasons for flight and present evidence. This interview could be delegated to the cantonal authorities, but SEM conducts many second interviews as well. Furthermore, a member of an authorized charitable organization (coordinated by the Swiss Refugee Council) is present at the interview in order to act as an independent observer and clarify facts or raise objections (Nufer et al. 2016). These NGO observers have often reported problems with simultaneous translations and the lack of partiality of interpreters, who sometimes identify with the official regime from which asylum seekers are fleeing, regardless of their need to abide by SEM's code of conduct. Other issues that emerged with interpreters were differences in dialects, which made the translation too general and imprecise (ibid.: 21–22).

The Federal Administrative Court can revoke SEM's decision on the grounds of a violation of a federal law, or on an incorrect or incomplete determination of the legally relevant circumstances, but it cannot contest SEM's discretionary power to determine whether an application that is legal is also appropriate. Legal representation should be provided by the state, but in some instances this falls on the cantonal authorities, and in other cases, donor-funded NGOs fill this obligation.

If the asylum application is approved, the applicant receives a temporary residence permit, which after ten years can be turned into a permanent one, pending consideration of particular cases in their canton of residence. Only once a person receives a refugee visa can they begin to apply for work and housing, moving out of the long-term processing centres and into their new local community. Each canton has particular regulations around refugee integration programmes. This is often described by refugees as one of the most difficult stages, as it represents unexpected hardships. Most refugees expect the violence of the journey across the Mediterranean, but few are prepared for the institutional and structural violence they encounter, first throughout the asylum procedure, and then through the arduous process of finding a house and a job. This last process alone can take at least two years and as long as seven, as they must learn a new language and often revalidate their degrees or learn new skills. According to Swiss law, recognized refugees, asylum seekers and provisionally admitted persons who have been in the country for less than seven years can claim public social assistance. The

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cantonal authorities are responsible for providing this support but they receive reimbursement from the federal government (Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation, Asylum Act, Art. 74).

Temporary refugee status, which contemplates a return home when the crisis in their home country is over, generates an even more ambiguous situation. People who are denied their refugee status but appeal are thus allowed to remain in Switzerland when their return is inadmissible, unreasonable or impossible. They receive temporary protection until their appeal is resolved. After five years, if their appeal has still not been resolved, they could obtain a long-term residency status, given certain conditions. Many people whose refugee request is denied will not leave Switzerland but instead disappear from the official grid. These people are in the worst situation of ambiguity because they are inherently unable to integrate and so are condemned to work in the black market. This group of people then shift their categorization, from asylum seeker to undocumented migrant. They lose their right to be treated at a hospital (except in the cantons of Vaud and Geneva, which provide health care to undocumented migrants) and they are exposed to the stresses of being an illegal alien within the national territory (they cannot leave as they will most likely be intercepted at the border upon their return): they cannot get a bank account, they cannot officially rent an apartment, and so on.

The legal construct ('refugee') is a fragile and shifting one, when month after month places that define the appropriate origin of refugees are changed according to whether or not a city is in the hands of armed rebels. The closures of borders and the arbitrary determinations of 'safe' places grants certain people the status of 'refugees' while others remain 'economic migrants', establishing radically diametrical access to the presumably universal right to claim asylum (Dérens and Rico 2016). At the border between Greece and Macedonia the police periodically opened the gates to let fifty refugees at a time into the Macedonian side. Until November 2015 only Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians were allowed through; nationals of other countries were treated as economic migrants. But in January 2016 Afghans were no longer accepted, and in March of that year Syrians from Damascus were no longer considered refugees and their access was denied (ibid.: 4).

This is mirrored in the attitudes of refugees already in short-term processing camps in Zürich, where from March 2016 people's hopes of being granted asylum dwindled, as most North Africans were denied asylum. In March 2016 six Afghan youths disappeared from a short-term processing centre, and violence increased. After a knife attack and following the vandalism of cars in the vicinity of the centre, a private security company was hired at the request of the neighbours. These tensions, on a larger scale, are also reflected in the fivefold increase of attacks on refugee centres in Germany,

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and the increase of neo-Nazi declarations against liberal values and solidarity towards refugees in Germany (Osborn 2016).

Anti-EU political groups in Switzerland have harnessed the refugee crisis in order to reinforce their position within the Swiss political system, gaining more seats in Parliament in the last six years, and turning what were once considered extreme right positions into more mainstream-supported initiatives (Bernhard 2017). However, other groups have also been reinvigorated by the ongoing plight of refugees. Humanitarian organizations supporting refugees in their continuous liminality are increasingly gaining ground within political scenarios because refugees are relegated to the non-governmental and humanitarian sphere. In the next section I will consider how, in supporting refugees during their liminal journeys, different groups have increased their cogency and notoriety, reinforcing their structures and orders.

Social Liminality and the Reproduction of Structure

> The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

The recent rise of right-wing parties in Europe on the basis of anti-immigrant policies draws attention to the increasing role of essentializing and exclusionary rhetoric in the imagination of European national ideologies (Halikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou 2013). The harnessing of anti-immigration passions has been particularly effective in Switzerland, ever reticent of being absorbed into Europe. Among the recent popular initiatives, those against foreigners have awakened heated debates, fuelled by the refugee crisis in an attempt to shift public opinion against the European Union and in favour of a stricter control of immigration policy. Most campaigns have drawn on essentialized national symbolism and aimed to reinforce what are seen as key Swiss values (democracy, self-determination, Christianity, work diligence, federalism).

Some popular initiatives, such as the facilitated naturalization, and the minaret and burka bans, reveal the increasing prominence of anti-immigration policies in right-wing party agendas,[4] which harness images of ethnicized foreigners to create a sense of a community under threat. The banning of

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burkas was voted for in Ticcino (the Italian canton of Switzerland) in 2016, and in St Gallen in 2018. It is not only an attack against a religious minority, it is a structural adjustment designed to exclude certain groups from public life. Women who choose to wear burkas are banned from public spaces. They are denied access to state financial assistance if they fail to identify their faces. They can be denied a residence permit if they refuse to unveil for a photo, and they will most likely be voted against by the community in cases of citizenship for failing to integrate into Swiss cultural life. But the reaction against refugees must be contextualized within this larger anti-foreigner phobia, particularly as refugees are often associated with Islam. This is a key issue across Europe, as anti-Islamic discrimination is fuelled by terrorism fears and it radicalizes anti-immigration reactions.

While cantons and communes (a local and administrative subdivision of cantons) are supposed to take a quota of refugees, they do not do so willingly. The village of Oberwil-Lieli on the outskirts of Zurich was threatened with a 300,000 CHF fine for not agreeing to integrate the ten refugees ascribed to it by the federal state in 2016. A village referendum rejected the federal mandate as 52 per cent of the 2,200 inhabitants voted against the refugees. After months of intense deliberation, the village mayor, Andreas Glarner, from the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP), decided to accommodate a family of five refugees to recognize the will of the 48 per cent of villagers who had voted in favour of resettling refugees in their community. However, when the council requested an apartment for the family within the community, there were no responses. Furthermore, the mayor of Oberwil-Lieli declared on CNN that 'it makes much more sense to help people there [in refugee camps off-shore] instead of supporting our nonsense refugee policy here in Switzerland' (Caderas and Said-Moorhouse 2016). The town of Oberwil-Leili donated 370,000 CHF to the Swiss Red Cross. After this incident, the mayor won a seat in Parliament.

This is not a unique situation. In the commune of Rekingen, canton Aargau, the local government advised residents not to rent properties to refugees with temporary permits because it would imply that the local government would need to pay social benefits to support them and it could lead to 'the municipality's financial ruin' (Aargauer Zeitung 2016). There are some organizations that assist refugees in obtaining an apartment, by acting as guarantors for the rent, but even they struggle to obtain housing. The Red Cross is often involved in providing housing and health support to people who would otherwise become destitute.[5] The humanitarian world has 'taken the arbitrary and radical decision to help the people society has decided to sacrifice' (Bradol 2004). Bradol further argues, as a humanitarian, that humanitarianism is an attack against the established order of the system that produces extreme privation.

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The role of the non-governmental sphere in the administration of refugees sheds light on the reconfiguration of tasks that once belonged to the state, such as the provision of health, protection and education.[6] Following the general consensus that work is the most valuable asset for a refugee in order to integrate with the host society (a not unproblematic discourse connected to the protestant ethic, and serving the purpose of capital), large NGOs as well as small grass-roots initiatives focus around the provision of training and employment mentoring (which does not always result in concrete employment). Most programmes are privately run, even while some receive government funding, and focus on providing people with a trade (carpentry, construction, cleaning, etc.), using these courses to impart German and cultural lessons. A private language and business school in Bern (Förderschmiede) is one example, collaborating with Caritas and the Red Cross (supported by the cantonal government), and the local authorities of the nearby city of Thun. This is only one example of the large number of such collaborations – partly state-funded, largely corporate-funded – and in charge of developing integration programmes mandated by the government.

Among the humanitarian and non-governmental spheres, the liminality of refugees similarly unites people in a sense of community, ironically, however, harnessing diametrically opposed values as those articulated by the extreme right. Through the universalist language of human rights, humanitarian organizations find in the refugee crisis a passionate reason to unite in the fight to defend 'humanity' against wars, environmental disasters and increasing political intolerance. International organizations, NGOs and the corporate responsibility branches of corporations join to solve the world's problems in an attempt at redressing the inefficiencies of governments, thus changing the forms of governmentality that humanitarian organizations were based on, as emerging at a time when the nation-state was consolidated. Their increasing connections with corporations (openly and proudly advertised) signals a new era in the conceptualization and administration of social welfare, which indicates the transformation of state structures previously seen to contain the nation, and responsible for the care of its citizens.

The type of sociality articulated by these humanitarian and developmental organizations is instead informed by the belief in a shared humanity that has been marginalized by the state (Feldman and Ticktin 2010). Therefore, the ambiguity that refugees encounter within the nation-state (as a social and political body in crisis) enables the proliferation of other types of structures that claim refugees within their domain, and base their claims of legitimacy through their very precariousness. Large humanitarian organizations, departments of corporate social responsibility (large tax deduction processes), and small non-governmental foundations of various denominations rely on the victims they support to subsist (Polman 2010). The notion of

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the deserving victim is applied to refugees in the reports and posters of humanitarian organizations (Malkki 2015) and sustains their corporate funding partners' exoneration. The process – akin to confession – attenuates the negative effects of corporations in low-income countries by their donation to humanitarian causes.

MSF's practice of 'witnessing' as a way of denouncing the violations against human rights, without taking on explicit advocacy roles of the type assumed by Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, creates a moment of communion where all humanitarian workers listen to each other's accounts of what they see in the field, or invite a refugee to speak about their journey into Europe, uniting in a sense of shared purpose. A room full of people, mostly former MSF volunteers, sits in quiet and sombre contemplation of the tragedy of Fadi's story, as the young Christian Syrian tells of his Mediterranean crossing. Meanwhile, he remains in a refugee camp, unable to find accommodation or validate his literature degree, and so awaits a decision from the cantonal authorities about his refugee permit. The *communitas* his situation and account forged in the audience of well-intended humanitarians, and the sense of shared purpose and sameness, did not alter Fadi's liminal condition in relation to the Swiss state, but it reinforced the humanitarians' belief in the idea of a larger sense of humanity, beyond the exclusionary politics of the rising populist right. Refugees have become central in all manner of humanitarian struggles: the delivery of health to people on the move, the protection of the right to claim asylum, the struggle against slavery and people smuggling, violence against women, and the protection of children. These struggles are played out both at a global level, where the very nature of humanity is at stake, and in the everyday antagonisms of local communities against foreigners. However, at all levels, this pertains to the definition of the nature of the social, coping with changing social and political structures and accommodating new forms of social relations. In this process, liminality becomes an ongoing condition for those excluded, and displaces its educational and transformative potential to those already within the dominant social structures.

The Disaggregation of Liminality and *Communitas*

> From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable.
>
> —Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

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The ambiguity of liminal personae, argued Turner (1969: 95), emerged from their capacity to slip through the networks of classification that locate states and positions within a cultural space. As dangerous beings, they must be subdued and made passive, be subjected to arbitrary punishment and forced to obey unquestionably. The contrast between the undifferentiated social bonds forged within the liminal moment – *communitas* – and the structured hierarchical system into which they are classified politically, legally and economically once they overcome liminal stages, represents a dialectical understanding of social processes that require both forms of social organization (homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality). It is through the liminal subversion of structure that social hierarchy and values are reinforced (and can be redefined). Turner argued that both opposites constitute one another and are mutually indispensable, so that 'each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*' (Turner 1969: 97).

What is significant about refugees' extended liminal status today is that in the current atomized, highly individualistic society the states of *communitas* and structure – still crucial in processes of social transformation – are now disaggregated. That is, not all individuals go through periods of liminality in the process of the reproduction of social relations, but rather, social structures are reproduced by those within them who reinforce social norms and hierarchies, and are set in opposition to those who are liminal and excluded, against which the structures are defined. The marginalized and the precarious (workers, the poor, ethnic minorities) are reduced to the isolated competitive individual, conspiring against the formation of a potentially powerful *communitas*, from whence social change could be enacted. That is, society is increasingly confined to life within the structures, and what was once a transitional moment has now become an institutionalized state, a permanent liminal condition.

Turner warned against the dysfunctional consequences of an imbalance between *communitas* and structure: 'Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against 'the law'. Exaggeration of *communitas*, in certain religious or political movements of the levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, over-bureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification' (Turner 1969: 129).

Indeed, over-bureaucratization is a symptom of modern societies, particularly prevalent in the Global North, where the state is increasingly subjected to bureaucratic processes and expert knowledge, which constitute pillars of what Foucault (2008) understands as biopower (the supervisory and regulatory mechanisms that manage and order life). Biopower is manifested in the asylum procedure through the influence of legal, medical and

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bureaucratic processes. Some of these include medical tests on refugee minors to determine their age,[7] collection of biometric data, and phone applications that encourage asylum seekers to upload their identity documents.[8] The bureaucratic processes that determine asylum seekers' requests take place privately, and are rarely transparent, as the highly technical legal language and the confidential nature of legal proceedings makes the decisions only accessible to experts. The secrecy and seclusion of the perpetuation of liminality for asylum seekers reduces the dialectical potential of the process, turning it into a mechanism of exclusion rather than one of social transformation.

Badiou's argument that refugees and migrants, who constitute an internationalized 'nomadic proletariat' coming from the most devastated zones, can become a virtual avant-garde 'for the gigantic mass of people whose existence, in the world today, is not counted' (Badiou 2015: 62) could be countered by the fact that the mass of 'nomadic proletariat' does not constitute a *communitas*, and thus does not have transformational potential. There are increasing structural measures in place to constrain the movement and curtail the rights of those on the margins, extending the liminal stage across space and time through bureaucratic, legal and political measures that signal what Turner saw as the dangers of an exaggeration of structure, and Agamben (2005) conceptualizes as the state of exception.

The state of exception enables the suspension of the quotidian protection of the law in the interest of preserving sovereignty (that is, the exercise of control by a given structure – in this case, the nation-state) (Agamben 1998: 11). It is a paradoxical situation by which the law is legally suspended, a point Agamben develops from Carl Schmitt (1996), whose notion of sovereignty referred to the capacity of the state to realize right (*Recht*) and monopolize politics. The increasingly normal situation by which states distinguish civil from human rights in order to separate national from foreign populations, makes the condition of bare life (that which lies outside the state order) more common. Additionally, the securitization of migration, which turns migrants and refugees into threats to national security, means that those who fall outside the protection of the state are seen as threats, and justifiably excluded. In current manifestations of the state of exception, human rights become mechanisms of state power and enable the creation of certain groups of people to fall outside state protection. Therefore 'illegal' migrants and asylum seekers have no rights within the state apparatus, and can only appeal to a vague construction of humanity (De Genova 2002). Thus, falling outside the realm of the political life of the state, refugees (and other marginal beings) have no protection and become nothing but bare life (Agamben 1998, 2005), reduced to only having human rights (Arendt 1968). It is in this respect perhaps that refugees as a global category can have the effects

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of a *communitas* of equals, of which their commonality is their being human, and being outside the social order. However, they are once again differentiated in their humanity by different classificatory processes that grant them more or less chance at the asylum request: women and children, unaccompanied minors (a particularly contentious category for adolescents who are at the edge of adulthood), disabled people, families. These categories shape the experiences of people, and qualify them as better/more desirable refugees, or bound to be rejected. Key in the sorting of refugees within the liminal process of asylum are not only state organizations but also NGOs and, increasingly, corporate bodies.

This shifting political configuration in the structures that determine the movement and management of people is another element perpetuating the liminality of refugees, as emerging corporate state formations are not founded on a society of the nation-state, but rather on more fluid constructions of sociality determined by class. The corporate order as a social system competes against the nation-state, and marks an inside and outside determined by access to work and the reproduction of life for profit (Kapferer and Gold 2018). The refugee crisis is thus a product of the success of capitalism by which states barely serve as containers and regulators of people (Stolke 1995), but citizenship (people's relationship to a territorially based nation-state) is now subject to economic valuations and rules (Grace, Nawyn and Okawako 2017), giving way to more economic forms of citizenship. Refugees in their liminality become buffers for a whole range of hierarchical categorizations: European worker/non-European economic migrants; EU/non-EU citizens; Christian/Muslim, and so on. The irony is that such distinctions are in practice irrelevant, as Costas Douzinas (2007: 107) argues: 'In the new world order the excluded have no access to rights. . . . Economic migrants, refugees, prisoners in the war of terror, torture victims, inhabitants of African camps, these "one-use humans" attest to total and irreversible exclusion', a permanent liminal existence for the reproduction of life within the structures.

Marina Gold received her PhD in anthropology from Deakin University, Australia, in 2012, and completed a PostDoc at Bergen Universtiy in 2015, as part of the Advanced Grant on Egalitarianism held by Prof. Bruce Kapferer. She has conducted research in Cuba and Switzerland, and has held multiple teaching appointments at University of Sydney and Macquarie University in Australia and at Zurich University in Switzerland, where she is an associated researcher. She currently conducts research on health and inequality in different locations in Latin America and Africa.

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NOTES

1. Some of these include the Brenner Pass between Austria and Italy; Moschendorf, Heiligenbrunn and Heiligenkreuz between Austria and Hungary, and a militarized unit in Ticcino between Italy and Switzerland. Brussels ordered European countries to remove border crossings and return to the normal Schengen free-movement conditions within six months (by the end of 2017).
2. As a measure of protecting European workers, Swiss law dissuades employers from bringing in 'third country' workers by taxing them higher per non-Swiss or non-European worker.
3. Retrieved 15 April 2019 from https://actionfromswitzerland.ch/protection/the-situation-of-female-refugees-in-switzerland/.
4. The facilitated naturalization succeeded in giving Swiss-born migrant children the right to a speedier process of naturalization if they grow up in Switzerland and go through a certain period of public schooling. The initiative was opposed by the SVP, which argued that it would create excessive foreignization and foster an abuse of Swiss citizenship rights.
5. In Switzerland it is the birth canton of a person, their Heimat (their 'mother country'), that is responsible for supporting a person if they become destitute.
6. This has particular implications in Switzerland, where health and education are cantonal matters and there is no strong centralized state that could take a welfare role. There is in fact a historic antagonism against the creation of a centralized state, and this tension is played out in immigration debates as well.
7. People under sixteen years of age receive automatic refugee status, but those over must be processed as adults.
8. The irony of this application is that refugees often purposefully neglect to bring their papers in order not to have documentation that might incriminate them in the asylum process (age limits, police checks, etc.). Furthermore, while some plan their migration and have time to prepare, many leave suddenly, or have been displaced from their hometowns for months or years before they leave their country.

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CHAPTER 14



OPEN ACCESS AND THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Kirsten Bell

> An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet . . . Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education [by] sharing the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge.
>
> —Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002

Introduction

Once considered 'hare-brained utopianism', open access to academic scholarship has today become an 'institutional imperative of science' (Willinsky 2016). Although guerrilla versions of open access abound,[1] it is increasingly being mandated by research funders and government agencies, and is widely embraced by corporate publishers themselves. For example, Research England has made it a requirement that all publications submitted as part of the national research audit of higher education are freely accessible and widely available, based on the premise that '[o]pen access research brings benefits to researchers, students, institutions, governments, public bodies, professionals and practitioners, citizen scientists and many others' (Research England 2019). Thus, liberal-democratic versions of open access sit side by

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side with more radical, critical versions and those based on the logic of the 'knowledge economy' (Adema 2015). As Eve (2014: 7) observes, supporters of open access are today just as likely to be conservative politicians as unequivocal egalitarians, and advocates often find themselves accused of being an anti-corporate Marxist one day, and a neoliberal sell-out the next.

In this chapter, I reflect on these transformations in the open access movement and the question of how we got from there to here, namely from open access as a 'bottom-up, community-driven model' to one where the key driving forces seem to be 'commercial, institutional and political interests' (Schöpfel 2018: 57). At first glance, this is perhaps an odd topic for a book on ritual and, indeed, I am not interested in ritual per se. However, my inspiration is the broader theory of continuity and change that Turner develops as part of his work on liminality and communitas, and its implications for understanding contemporary scholarly publishing: the axis upon which academic systems of value rotate. In using Turner, my aim is not to extend his work in new conceptual or theoretical directions, but to illustrate the ongoing vitality of his ideas in understanding contemporary social movements – including academic ones, such as open access itself.

Open Access and Its Conditions of Possibility

The open access movement is intimately connected with the birth of the digital era, which brought with it a new sense of the possibility of unfettered knowledge – as alluded to in the Budapest Open Access Initiative's reference to an 'old tradition and a new technology' (see epigraph). This sensibility is captured in an influential paper published in 1993:

> In the world of remote relays made possible by digital and electronic communications, texts are no longer prisoners of their original physical, material existence. Separated from objects, texts can be transmitted; there is no longer a necessary connection between the place in which they are conserved and the place in which they are read. The opposition, long held to be insurmountable, between the closed world of any finite collection and the infinite universe of all the texts ever written is thus theoretically annihilated: now the catalog of all catalogs, ideally listing the totality of written production, corresponds to electronic access to texts universally available for consultation. (Chartier 1993: 48)

These projections of newly unconstrained knowledge reflected larger ideas circulating in the early 1990s about the internet itself as a site of liberty and freedom that could not be controlled or contained by any terrestrial government[2] (Kelty 2008). But while the new possibilities offered by digital technologies (and, equally importantly, the rhetoric surrounding

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them) were a critical precursor to the open access movement, it would be dangerous to treat these technologies themselves as a straightforward agent of change.[3] This is because the open access movement was also integrally connected with broader shifts in the academy happening in the 1990s.

During this period, economic, social and political transformations in academia – commonly, albeit problematically,[4] framed through the lens of the 'neoliberal academy' – laid the groundwork for the open access movement on a variety of levels. Typically used as conceptual shorthand for the marketization, corporatization and metricization of the university, neoliberalism is surely an element of the story, but the lens it provides is simultaneously partial and totalizing. As Kelty (2008: 309) observes, '[t]he new economic demands on the university – all too easily labelled neoliberalization or corporatization – mirror changing demands on industry that it come to look more like universities, that is, that it give away more, circulate more, and cooperate more'. Moreover, calls for further accountability and transparency in academic knowledge emerged from various directions, including fields highly critical of the neoliberal turn, such as women's studies, indigenous studies and community studies (Larner 2012). Regardless of their origins, these social and economic transformations had an important role to play in stimulating the open access movement – as both a reaction against them, and a reflection of the new conditions they engendered.

The recasting of publications as 'outputs', the rise of systems for auditing them, and the newly digital environment of academic publishing produced two interrelated consequences: an exponential increase in the numbers of academic papers being published, and an exponential increase in the cost of subscription journals themselves. In the 1960s, when Price published the first data about the growth of science, he conjectured that 'at some time, undetermined as yet but probably during the 1940s or 1950s, we passed through the midperiod in general growth of science's body politic' (Price cited in Larsen and von Ins 2010: 576). Despite this predicted slowdown in scholarly publishing, the doubling of outputs every fifteen years has continued unabated[5] (see Larsen and von Ins 2010). Importantly, the dramatic increase in pricing in subscription journals witnessed in the 1990s was not driven by this greater volume of publications, especially given the burgeoning array of publishing options that the 'digital revolution' had facilitated. This can instead be explained by the growing emphasis on journal prestige as a proxy for researcher quality and impact (Burrows 2012).

During this period, the impact factor of academics' publishing venues became a form of symbolic currency that could be traded into a material economy of jobs, promotions, salaries and benefits (Eve and Priego 2017). Thus, while (or rather, because) academics were now publishing more than ever and had greater choices in publishing venues, the hierarchy of prestigious

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journals, fortified by the 'journal impact factor',[6] merely intensified. Eve (2013) describes the result as a 'zombified' system of scholarly publishing, whereby the 'no-brainer' logic of selecting the most prestigious publishing outlet makes that outlet simultaneously *less* accessible and *more* desirable in a perpetual feedback loop that constantly drives up subscription prices. In Eve's words,

> the same valorization criteria bestowed upon journals drives the prices of those journals up, thus making it impossible for libraries to afford them. The model of esteem conferred by a researcher on a publisher within this culture implies the right to charge a higher premium for a title, which then restricts – owing to contracting library budgets – this same researcher's access to material. (Eve 2013: 108–9)

Thus, while the costs of publishing in the digital era were dramatically reduced, the fees publishers were able to charge became greatly inflated,[7] especially with the practice of bundling high prestige journals with lower prestige ones in 'big deals' that required libraries to pay for the full package in order to access the journals they wanted (see Bergstrom et al. 2014). These transformations served to make academic publishing an extraordinarily profitable business for the leading companies, who were busily consolidating throughout this period (see Larivière, Haustein and Mongeon 2015). As Suber notes, in an oft-repeated observation, 'the largest journal publishers earn higher profit margins than the largest oil companies' (Suber 2012: 32). This, in conjunction with declining library budgets, was a key contributor to the serials crisis of the late 1990s, which provided a critical trigger for the open access movement (Hamann 2013; Eve 2014). In sum, the past few decades have witnessed fundamental changes in the scholarly landscape, which has been 'a time of growing divergence between the different roles of academic publishing: as a means of disseminating validated knowledge, as a form of symbolic capital for academic career progression, and as a profitable business enterprise' (Fyfe et al. 2017: 2).

Open Access, Liminality and Communitas Utopias

These divergences were critical to the emergence of the open access movement, perhaps best articulated in 'A Subversive Proposal', published by Harnad in 1994. In his proposal, Harnad highlighted the Faustian bargain that the authors of 'esoteric' scholarly publications had made with publishers, '[t]o allow a price-tag to be erected as a barrier between their work and its (tiny) intended readership because that was the only way to make their work public in the era when paper publication (and its substantial real expenses)

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were the only way to do so'. Arguing that the rise of digital networks had given academics the power to subvert traditional publishing structures, Harnad asserted that it was now possible for us to take our scholarship to 'the airwaves, where it always belonged', allowing the unimpeded flow of knowledge to everyone. Harnad's proposal, and the egalitarian vision of scholarly publishing it proposed, became a touchstone piece in the open access movement. This vision is articulated clearly in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative, quoted in the epigraph, and its successors, the 2003 Berlin Declaration and 2003 Bethesda Statement (collectively known as the 'BBB' definition of open access).

The open access movement was dominated by scientists at the outset, although influential advocates also appeared in the humanities and social sciences[8] (e.g. Guédon 2001; Willinsky 2006; Hall 2008; Suber 2009, 2012; Fitzpatrick 2011; Eve 2014). According to Eve (2014), this bias is largely because of the origins of the free culture movement[9] within technological disciplines, coupled with the more challenging economic situation of science journals, which suffered the greatest increases in subscription pricing during the serials crisis. As Adema (2015) notes, the open access movement also caught on later in disciplines where books, rather than journal articles, were the most valued publication medium. However, although this gave the movement a decidedly scientistic bent, it was nevertheless a classically liminoid phenomenon:[10] it originated outside the boundaries of prevailing social, economic and political structures, and called for a revolutionary transformation of the official order (Turner 1969, 1974; Delfem 1991).

Indeed, as a result of the union between the academic and digital cultures that birthed it, we can consider the open access movement liminoid in several senses. First, it is worth noting that Turner saw universities as liminoid phenomena, characterizing them as settings 'for all kinds of freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior' (1974: 65). Although this seems increasingly less true today, it nevertheless remains fundamental to the *idea* of the university that has, in part, driven open access – or at least some variants of it – as a place of dissent, whereby dominant structures and ideas can be challenged. As Hall observes of the open access movement, 'this is one arena where some academics *have* challenged the forces of neoliberal free-market economics in a reasonably effective manner (even if this has not always been as a result of conscious or overtly radical political intentions on their part)' (Hall 2008: 5, emphasis in original).

Second, the digital realm itself has been conceptualized as liminal in both form and content – that is, in relation to its heterogenous and decentralized infrastructure and the 'chaotic, voluntarist, and unpredictably fertile world' (Sassi 1996: 26) it has spawned. For scholars like Turkle (1995, 2005), who has been directly influenced by Turner's work, the internet represents

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not a transitional space but a space of permanent liminality. While such views have been contested, 'liminal' does seem an apt descriptor of Free Software – the term for software source code created collaboratively and made freely available – and a key intellectual precursor to the open access movement (see Kelty 2008). Although Kelty does not use this terminology, his characterization of Free Software (and open access itself) as a 'recursive public' bears a certain resemblance to Turner's definition of anti-structure. For Kelty, a recursive public is both experimental and self-referential, enabling it to exist independent of, and as a check on, institutionalized structures and forms of power (Kelty 2008: 28–30).

From the outset, open access advocates positioned themselves against a system that prioritized profit over access and 'the traditional hierarchical and elitist culture that has prevailed in the research community since time immemorial' (Poynder 2018: 1). A form of ideological communitas was therefore foundational to open access, with participants working towards a 'communitas utopia' (Turner 1974: 80). Indeed, the movement has clear millenarian undertones: advocates anticipate a future in which knowledge will be universally accessible regardless of wealth or geography, which, according to the aforementioned Budapest Declaration, will 'lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation'. Thus, critical to the concept of open access is the commons (Moore 2018a) – a term frequently employed to describe the ideal scholarly publishing ecosystem, whereby an artificially (pay)walled space will be 'unlocked' to enable unimpeded entrance.

The imagery of the open lock and the walled-up commons are not just surface metaphors for the open access movement but key symbols in Turner's sense: they are vehicles employed to instigate action and 'channel its direction by saturating goals and means with affect and desire' (Turner 1974: 56). The notion of the 'paywall' is critical to the morally charged nature of open access, given the way it shifts the emphasis from opting in to locking out. As Horvath, Benţa Marius and Davison (2019: 3) observe, 'walls have the power to separate space and to charge it with such qualities as inside/outside, accessible/forbidden, [and] on this side/on the other side'.

To date, a diverse array of initiatives have been created under the banner of open access: from mega-open-access publishers like the Public Library of Science (PLoS), to scholar-driven publishing collectives and independent journals committed to experimenting with the form and function of academic writing. Although many of these experiments are Western in origin, there are also a variety of open access initiatives from the academic periphery, including SciELO: a combined bibliographic database, digital library and cooperative electronic publisher of Latin American open access journals. Open access publishers have also emerged in regions such as South Asia, the

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Middle East and Africa, although they are frequently (and problematically) dismissed as 'predatory' (see Bell 2017). While the effects of some of these initiatives have been conservative – for example, PLoS's author-pays model of open access ultimately became widely adopted and co-opted by corporate publishers[11] – all were novel in the ways they reassembled elements to create new forms. Indeed, precisely because of its liminal attributes, open access has been a significant source of innovation within mainstream scholarly publishing. As Turner notes of liminality:

> I see it as a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change, in a way that the central tendencies of a social system can never quite succeed in being, the spheres where law and custom, and the modes of social control ancillary to these, prevail. Innovation can take place in such spheres, but most frequently it occurs in interfaces and limina, then becomes legitimated in central sectors. (Turner 1974: 76)

In effect, the anti-structural origins of the open access movement created a space for new voices, with many initiatives, including those spearheaded by emerging and Southern scholars and organizations, quickly gaining momentum in ways that would have been impossible under the traditional publishing regime.

HAU: Anthropology, Millenarian Movements and Open Access

A key anthropological example is the success of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, founded by a doctoral student, Giovanni da Col, in 2011. As Kapferer (2018) notes of the journal, '*HAU* is the creature of increasingly digitalized realities and the associated political economic transitions, transformations, reconfigurations, reassembling, or whatever of social life and its institutional orders (including those of academia and scholarship) that is occurring'. In this respect, it makes a fascinating case through which to explore the dynamics of structure and anti-structure, because *HAU* was positioned – and positioned itself – as a liminal entity born of a communitas spirit. Fully digital and lacking an institutional home, *HAU* was a self-conscious experiment in open access publishing that aimed to revitalize anthropology by bridging 'the old into the new, a continuity from the traditions of the subject's foundation into a concern and relevance for the problematics of the present and future' (Kapferer 2018). Da Col's installation as editor-in-chief symbolized *HAU*'s egalitarian ethos, seeming to embody the spirit of a journal founded on its democratizing promise and the possibility of 'overcoming the restrictions inherent in the hierarchies of the discipline' (ibid.).

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At the beginning, the sense of excitement *HAU* generated was palpable (Green 2018): 'some argue that we have started a movement', the inaugural editorial somewhat immodestly declared (da Col and Graeber 2011: xiv). This theme was elaborated on in the 2017 editorial in which da Col announced that the journal would be moving away from open access to a 'free access' format, which looked to many observers suspiciously like a traditional subscription-based model (LaFlamme et al. 2018). To quote from the editorial:

> *HAU* has grown to encompass not only a journal, but also a book publishing project, an international network of over forty supporting institutions, and ultimately a movement, a cultural phenomenon in itself, a small revolution within the discipline that has attracted more than fifty thousand followers on social media. Within the broader field of scholarly research, *HAU* has made a powerful intervention, offering a new paradigm for academic publishing. (da Col 2017: ii)

In many respects, *HAU*'s path from self-declared 'revolutionary' open access publisher to mainstream subscription journal exemplifies Turner's (1969, 1974) discussion of the dynamics of millenarian movements as a manifestation of communitas. After all, it was the spontaneous communitas surrounding *HAU*'s formation that enabled the journal's authority to be grounded entirely in the charisma (in Weber's sense of the word) of its founder.[12] As Green (2018) has noted in her reflections on *HAU* and the tyranny of structurelessness, 'this was a small, informal, idealistic project based on trust and mutual excitement about its potential; everyone imagined that everything could be ironed out later'. The result, as we now know, is that da Col had, in Green's words, 'virtually unimpeachable power'. This problem is largely prefigured in Turner's own analysis, where he highlights attributes of millenarian movements such as homogeneity, equality, anonymity, humility, unselfishness and 'total obedience to the prophet or leader'[13] (Turner 1969: 111). Indeed, in his recent valedictory editorial, da Col seems to actively embrace the mantle of failed cargo cult leader (his own analogy), noting:

> We spent everything we had – including our careers – in a beautifully accursed share, overturning every economic principle, surrendering luxuriously the highest achievements in the field in sumptuous editorial productions with no expectation of reciprocity or capital gain. The project was overambitious and it came with costs for everyone involved. I overworked myself to exhaustion, and expected members of the staff to have the same commitment to the project and the discipline that I had. (da Col 2019: 1)

Although da Col attributes the journal's success[14] to an occult economy of publishing achieved through 'a sorcerer's magical exploitation of the vitality of labour', central to the journal's success was the ways it wedded

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open access to the prestige economies of the Ivy League–Oxbridge axis (see Kalb 2018; Kapferer 2018; Thorkelson 2019; Todd 2019). While this might seem out of step with *HAU*'s declared revolutionary agenda, Turner was clear that 'communitas does not represent the erasure of structural norms from the consciousness of those participating in it; rather . . . [it] might be said to depend upon the way in which it symbolizes the abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are quotidianly involved' (1974: 78). In *HAU*'s case, this happened via the juxtaposition of works by renowned and emerging scholars in the pages of the journal, which were symbolically brought into egalitarian relation. The result, according to Kalb (2018), was the renewed capture of the field by an old, elitist anthropology in a way that felt new and hip – revolutionary even, at least for a while. However, its most recent incarnation as a subscription-based journal grounded in the bureaucratic authority of a board of directors speaks to Turner's (1969) points about the ways in which the impetus for millenarian movements is soon exhausted. Ultimately, they become one institution among many, giving way to the very social and political hierarchies against which their egalitarian zeal was initially directed (Turner 1969; Kapferer 2019).

Co-optation, Exteriority or Both?

For many observers, *HAU*'s stratospheric rise and equally spectacular fall seems to epitomize the broken promise of the open access movement more broadly,[15] which numerous observers suggest has merely served to entrench the capitalization of knowledge. To quote Kalb (2018):

> OA [open access] has lent itself perfectly to brute academic capitalism and hierarchy, just as internet platforms in other sectors have not brought the horizontalist information society promised by early internet utopias. On the contrary, OA is one of the academic forms in which the disruption generated by the current techno-financialized rounds of creative destruction and monumental forms of rent taking by capital in the wider society appear.

Likewise, Herb and Schöpfel (2018: 9) question whether open access is the beginning of a more egalitarian era of scientific communication or 'just another Trojan horse, allowing private companies to extend their control of the Big Data now generated by science'; and Mirowski (2018) highlights the ways in which open access and open science are effectively re-engineering research along the lines of platform capitalism. Indeed, as open access has increasingly been mandated, corporate publishers are moving apace into the

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acquisition of the infrastructure that surrounds scholarly publishing (Posada and Chen 2017), and those corporations already in the infrastructure game are consolidating their positions (Bell 2018).

Clearly, as various open access ideals have become mainstream, the scholarly commons is being treated as a self-evident good, regardless of the infrastructure and power structures it supports (Moore 2018a). There is something of this feel to the American Anthropological Association's decision to develop an open access repository 'for the common good' utilizing the services of its corporate vendor (see Kelty and Corsín Jiménez 2018). Processes of restructuration are therefore happening in a way that seems to be maintaining rather than challenging existing flows of capital and the inequalities they have cemented (Guédon 2007; Schöpfel and Herb 2018). Or, rather, they appear to have created new opportunities that illustrate 'capitalism's capacity to develop ever-new guises for profit expropriation and social oppression' (Kapferer and Gold 2017: 33). Haider (2018: 28) describes the result as a type of *deus ex machina*, 'in which a specific kind of ideologically confined, technical openness becomes part of an imagined transformative system change that is almost entirely impregnated in the language . . . of economic necessity, commercial interests and technological determinism'. But to suggest that this is the end of the story would be an oversimplification of open access, and, indeed, of Turner's arguments about the dialectical relationship between anti-structure and structure. For Turner (1992), these are not linear processes in which one becomes the other; instead, they exist in a perpetual figure-ground relationship, with each constantly curbing and penetrating the other.

One of the key limitations of the diagnosis of 'neoliberal capture' is its inability to conceptualize the complexity of the dynamics involved in the open access movement (and, indeed, the growing array of phenomena the term is increasingly being used to explain). As Kapferer and Gold observe:

> The current bundle of multiple crises is put down, at least partly, to the ideological effects of neoliberalism and programs of austerity. There is much to be said in favour of such opinion. But too much is being forced into the frame of neoliberalism, sustaining left/right distinctions of the recent past that are losing their relevance and much of their analytical bite. Moreover, such discourse becomes itself an ideological blind governed increasingly by what may be glossed as economistic thinking or economic reductionism, a feature of anti-neoliberal just as much as neoliberal discourse – a Hegelian identity of opposites. (Kapferer and Gold 2017: 31)

For example, economistic thinking was integral to some of the earliest definitions of open access, so this is far from new (see Haider 2018). Consider

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Harnad's focus on 'esoteric' publications, which he defined as non-trade, no-market scholarly works – although he later renounced this distinction in favour of an emphasis on giveaway vs. non-giveaway writing, which he defined as writing produced for research impact vs. royalty income (see Harnad 2004). Thus, in this framing, 'value' was structured from the outset in terms of a market/non-market binary, despite being used to advocate *against* market-driven models of scholarly publishing.[16] However, the open access movement has always been amorphous – impossible to categorize in an ideological sense beyond its commitment to removing barriers to scholarly work. This is largely because its development has a number of distinct lineages that preclude a consistent set of values (Moore 2018b, 2019), making the concept of an 'open access movement' more a matter of symbolic unity than analytic coherence (Šimukovič 2018). These countervailing tendencies are part of what makes the movement liminoid: they have enabled a degree of 'play' and experimentation.

Despite the current restructuration of publishing that is clearly under way, and attempts to narrow the scope of open access to certain conventional patterns and templates,[17] a flourishing array of experiments point to cultural processes still very much in the 'subjunctive mood' (Turner 1992: 133). Moreover, some of these experiments are engendering further transformations that go well beyond questions of access to challenging fundamental tenets of scholarly publishing – from the assumed closure of texts and the systems of credentialing they are entailed within, to the nature of academic authority itself (see Fitzpatrick 2011). These transformations, of course, echo much broader cultural shifts in knowledge and authority that the digital era has produced, but they also speak to the ways in which questions about the future of scholarly publishing are ultimately questions about the future of the academy (Hall 2008; Fitzpatrick 2011). Gloomy predictions to the contrary, these questions are far from settled. For the present at least, the milieu of open access – or key variants of it – remains that of exteriority. As Adema (2015: 5.2.4) argues, 'the sheer variety that makes up the "schools of thought" on openness and open access . . . serves to counter the vision that open access is intrinsically connected to neoliberalist discourses and practices . . . [instead] it can, at least potentially, be used as a powerful critique of these systems'. Indeed, this exteriority is being self-consciously cultivated by a number of open access advocates – like the Radical Open Access Collective, who see open access not so much as a model to be implemented but more as a space of ongoing struggle and resistance (Adema and Hall 2013). As Kelty notes of recursive publics, modulation is constantly occurring, 'for experimentation never seeks its own conclusion' (Kelty 2008: 301).

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Conclusion

As the result of a series of social, economic and material transformations over the past few decades, scholarly publishing is currently in a period of major transition. Critical to these transformations has been the emergence of open access – which is a product of the ruptures in the publishing landscape, and is now fundamentally reshaping it. No longer a fringe movement with strong millenarian undertones, several of its core values and ideals have become decidedly mainstream, to the extent that many wonder whether open access has become yet another neoliberal instrument of the 'knowledge economy'. But Turner's work on the dynamics of restructuration suggests that the hold of neoliberalism is neither so totalizing nor complete as we might assume. For Turner, the demands of structuration itself entail an interfacial region wherein 'the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun' (1974: 75); thus, hierarchicalizing dynamics do not negate the possibility of transitional egalitarian spaces – this is not a zero-sum scenario. Whether this remains possible in the realm of open access in the long-term is unclear, but one thing is certain: 'Change is coming to scholarly publishing, one way or another' (Fitzpatrick 2011: 195). And if academics abandon open access prematurely there is no surer way of transforming it into what some fear it has already become.

Kirsten Bell completed her PhD in social anthropology at James Cook University in Australia in 2000; she also has a Master of Publishing from Simon Fraser University in Canada. She has held appointments at universities in the USA, Australia, Canada and the UK, and is currently a senior research fellow in anthropology at Imperial College, London.

NOTES

1. Such as Sci-Hub, a roving pirate website that provides access to more than 74 million 'paywalled' academic papers.
2. Although it is worth noting that the internet was subject to intensive discussion right from the outset regarding its potential to undermine as well as promote 'universality, equality and democracy' (Sassi 1996: 29). Thus, the contemporary ambivalence regarding its possibilities and limitations is nothing new.
3. Although open access is often described by advocates in precisely such terms. However, as Kelty (2008: 306) notes, 'neither the Internet nor the computer is the cause of a reorientation of knowledge and power, but both are tools that render possible modulations of settled practices, modulations that reveal a much older problem regarding the legitimacy of the means of circulation and production of knowledge'.

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4. There is little question that the 1990s were a period of intensive change in the academy, but many of the debates during this period regarding the role of the university and its relationship with the state were evident well before the neoliberal turn (see, for example, Perkins 1966).
5. Indeed, the digital era introduced new temporalities of publishing, which were no longer constrained in the same material ways as analogue publishing (although they continued to be constrained by the materialities of digitality itself – such as access to computers, servers and networks). This, in turn, facilitated new ideas of research acceleration that were critical to the emergence of the open access movement (see Haider 2018) and more recent offshoots such as open science.
6. This measure was initially developed by the Institute for Scientific Information as a means of helping librarians to make decisions about what journals to subscribe to. However, it has since become the lucrative heart of their business model (see Bohannon 2016), and impact factor calculations are increasingly used to allocate research resources in the form of money, merits and power on an international scale (Larsson 2009).
7. As a side note, these rising subscription costs occurred in a period when 'quality controls' (primarily peer review) had become increasingly difficult to procure – in large part because of casualization of academic labour that accompanied the defunding of universities. This situation starkly highlighted the exploitation intrinsic within scholarly publishing in terms of its reliance on unremunerated academic labour to generate profits. While such activities had always been part and parcel of the responsibilities of a traditional tenured academic, in conditions of growing academic precarity, peer review was increasingly reconceptualized *as* labour. Moreover, this labour was largely invisible under academic audit regimes, in contrast to the hypervisibility of 'outputs' themselves. Compounding these issues has been the sheer escalation in academic publishing that this new environment enabled: the proliferation of journals, the growing pressure to publish and the relentless stream of peer-review requests. The rise of platforms like Publons are a direct response to the resultant crisis in peer review, upon which corporate publishers rely in order to differentiate themselves from 'predatory' publishers, given their own profit-seeking motives. Such platforms simultaneously aim to make visible the labour of peer review and financialize it in new ways, as these databases of 'accredited' reviewers are then sold back to publishers for profit. This speaks to Kapferer and Gold's (2017) point about the dynamic of capital (and the concomitant rise of the corporate state), whose contradictions manifest themselves as a crisis of oppositions (neoliberal/anti-neoliberal, right/left, private/public, etc.) that are both internal to its logic and crucial for its expansion.
8. Various scholars have pointed to separate lineages in relation to open access in the arts and humanities, such as DIY publishing (see Adema 2015; Moore 2019).
9. In part a reaction to restrictive copyright laws, the free culture movement promotes the free distribution of creative works – Creative Commons is one of its inventions (see Kelty 2008 for further discussion).
10. Here I am using the term in a more metaphoric than literal sense, in keeping with Turner's later elaborations of the concept. In his view, this metaphorical usage 'may help us to think about global human society, to which all specific historical social formations may well be converging' (Turner 1974: 76).

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11. As author-pays models of open access have become widely accepted, corporate publishers have enthusiastically endorsed open access as a means of generating new revenue streams. So-called 'hybrid' open access has been a particular boon for such publishers, allowing them to derive revenue not only from institutional subscriptions but from article processing charges paid by individuals to make their work openly available. Thus, publishers are effectively paid twice for the same content, a phenomenon widely critiqued as 'double dipping'.
12. Turner's analysis of communitas and millenarian movements bears considerable resemblance to Weber's (1968) work on the relationship between charisma and institution building, with the former arising outside of social structures but becoming reconciled with them through processes of routinization – Turner was clearly aware of this connection, and alludes to it in passing (see Turner 1969: 199).
13. These qualities will sound strikingly familiar to anyone who has followed the *HAU* controversy and the allegations that have swirled about its founder and the working conditions of its employees.
14. This is posed as a rhetorical question, but seems to be the line of argument da Col favours at other points in the editorial.
15. This is certainly the line pushed by da Col (2017) in the editorial in which he disavows the viability of open access. However, it was clear to many from the outset that the journal's lavish production model, lack of institutional support, and over-reliance on the networking skills of its 'editor-inspirator' (Kapferer 2018), undermined its long-term sustainability (see LaFlamme et al. 2018).
16. See Dawney, Kirwan and Brigstocke (2016) for similar points about discussions of the commons.
17. Evident, for example, in attempts to frame 'gold' open access as synonymous with author-pays models (see Fuchs and Sandoval 2013).

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CHAPTER 15



HOW BOKO HARAM'S LIMINAL CHILD WITCHES AND SOLDIERS CHALLENGE THE CAPITALIST STATE

An Animist Critique of Neoliberalism's Ideology of 'Extremism'

Caroline Ifeka

> The African god 'Ogun kills on the right and destroys on the right. Ogun kills on the left and destroys on the left . . . Ogun kills the owner of the house and paints the hearth with his blood . . . Master of iron, chief of robbers. You have water, but you bathe in blood.'
>
> —Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Poetry*

> '"Savages" want the multiplication of the multiple'.
>
> —Pierre Clastres, *Archeology of Violence*

This chapter presents an animist critique of contemporary neoliberal theories of 'extremism'. Loperfido (2022) conceives 'extremisms' to be produced as marginal spaces by a centre that defines this marginality as threatening to its very existence. The Nigerian state defines Boko Haram as a 'far-right' terrorist insurgency against the secular, sovereign nation-state. Yet, applying the Kapferers' (this volume) more general insights, it is conceivable that the jihadist group's fundamentalist war against the Nigerian 'infidel' state generates in quid pro quo mode the military's extreme violence towards all 'barbarian' combatants and unarmed civilians – and vice versa. Not only does Amnesty International (Thurston 2018) document how jihadists *and* the Nigerian state's armed forces commit crimes against humanity. Importantly, an

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animist approach enables us to appreciate the extent to which these crimes kill human beings as bodies *and* as socio-spiritual persons, making them incomplete, spiritually dead, unable to enter into liminal transition from former pre-destruction personhood into becoming a different whilst somewhat similar person.

Various writers and researchers have documented how African and Euro-American military, financial and political interests have benefited from destructive civil and religious wars (Ellis 1995a,b, 2016; Reno 1998; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999). In my view, wars invoking the divine are especially effective in masking the postcolonial capitalist state's real agenda (Ifeka 2010). That is, the African ruling class belief that when 'brigands', 'bandits' and 'jihadists' threaten the state's control over its sovereign borders, elites are entitled to 'protect' people by seizing (lower class) 'illiterate' people's land, forests and pristine rivers as well as their cultural knowledge. Nigerian and other African elites seek out 'strong' medicines to protect themselves from feared underclass anger when they thieve state and citizen-owned resources (Ifeka 2004, 2010). Underclasses, too, seek mystical protection by resorting to Pentecostalist night prayer vigils and/or customary animist rituals. The latter may involve shrine priests and herbalists using body parts ground into powder, blood sacrifice, secret songs, and dancing by spirit mediums whose invocations draw down strong spirit beings. Sacred shrines and fetish objects are known to have terrifying powers of destruction when they 'eat' human and animal flesh and drink sacrificial blood (Pietz 1995). These magical powers – like those of the Hausa *iskoki* god of thunder and war, Ra, or the very popular Yoruba god of war and iron, Ogun – can shield peasant farmers, traders, warriors and lowly administrators from death and disease (Greenberg 1946; Besmer 1983; Bayart 1993; Roschenthaler 2011). However, African underclasses in towns and rural areas continue to be forcibly alienated by capital from their customary rights to forests, lands, shrines, diamonds, gold, and primary food producing resources held largely in common. Dispossession on account of natural disaster (famine) or violent conflict means millions of civilians in war-impacted northern Nigeria, Cameroon, southern Niger and Chad go hungry (World Food Programme 2020). But alienation is also a breakdown in relations between human and spirit beings. Alienation can kill survivors unless they engage in rituals intended to overcome socio-spiritual separation (death) by making human-spirit relations complete.

In heirarchizing modes, African state and enemy insurgents kill rightless immiserated civilians with extremist and violent impunity: state and jihadist groups enjoy their own protection from powerful patrons, some of whom are positioned in the state as well as in illegal trafficking syndicates. Some Nigerian politicians of Christian and Muslim orientation are known to covertly 'sponsor' Islamist jihadist entities *and* 'Christian' or, at times, animist armed

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groups (secret societies) engaging in violence for profit. Protection rackets are backed secretly by influential officials in the state police, military and judiciary. Appalling crimes against humanity, especially women and girls, continue to be committed by armies of the West African state *and* jihadist militias. But jihadist amirs or warrior commanders justify war against the Nigerian nation-state as a holy deed ordered by the one God (Allah). Their sacred purpose is to remove nation-state corruption, an immoral Western education system, and the infidels' persisting attachment to pagan gods of the multiple. In 2015, Boko Haram in Nigeria's north-east adopted the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria's black standard. On it is written in Arabic the Shahada or declaration of faith: 'There is no god but Allah. Mohammad is the messenger of Allah'.

Foucault (2003) reminds intellectuals that we have a duty to interrogate ideologies and practices of bio-power in order to establish power's real agenda for controlling a population. This chapter takes up the challenge. I expose differences between the state and extremist Islamists for the chimera they are. The state's ideological opposition between its political-military system and that of 'far-right' Islamist warriors hides from view manifold ways in which, in the chaos of destruction wrought by war, dispossessed survivors may experience multiple potencies encompassing and, in certain contexts, intermediating newly constructed-in-violence, emergently egalitarian relations with state foot soldiers and jihadist warriors. I will describe ways in which survivors of deadly attacks by jihadist groups, militias and, at times, soldiers of the state are thrown together in war's aftermath, identities and modes of being are forcibly jettisoned and broken apart, their once familiar selves and social statuses annihilated. Yet, in destruction's aftermath, universal, open to all, life-giving forces throw the more receptive into new socio-spiritual relations of being, while experiencing liminal mystical conditions of 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1979). As Kapferer (this volume) argues, dynamic processes in contexts of destruction propel people into liminal relations with other beings as they transition into becoming.

In what follows, I define violence as 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses' (Riches 1986). As noted by Bowman (2001), the act of violation breaks apart recipients' integrity as human beings, whether in contexts of war or peace. In the past decade, jihadist warfare has forcibly dispossessed millions of rural subaltern (underclass) family households in transborder war zones of the Lake Chad Basin ('Chadic') states – NE Nigeria, SE Niger Republic, SW Chad and NW Cameroon. Survivors have been brutally alienated from customary (non-capitalist) lands and natural resources held in common. Terrorist attacks uproot refugees forcibly from their village herbalist, shrine priest, protecting rituals and socially recognized positions in society. Clansfolk

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thus experience forcible separation not only from their local church's pastor – and sometimes mosque imam – but also from their homelands where ancestral ghosts and spirit beings manifest when approached correctly in the customary ritual manner (Isichei 1982). In post-attack wastelands, army enclosed camps or charitable Christian/Muslim relief centres, survivors of all faiths and ethnicities seek out shrine priests, spirit mediums and herbalists (Debos 2012). Animist practitioners may provide mystical protection through blood sacrifices empowering medicated objects (fetishes) and spirit beings. Ritual relations convey divine sanctions authorizing respected social statuses, roles and identities. Priests of the Bori-Zar spirit possession cults, largely driven underground in urban and peri-urban areas of the Lake Chad Basin since the 1980s by fundamentalist agents of Salafism/Pentecostalism, are reportedly still active in some borderlands and beyond (cf. Masquelier 1994; MacEachern 2019).

Socio-political, Economic and Cultural Contexts

In the late nineteenth century, on the eve of European colonization, complex rituals in centralized black kingdoms and segmentary lineage societies centred on blood sacrifice to sacralizing spirits of earth, rivers and sky. Political power was enveloped by, and embedded in, the greater mystical powers of divinities, spirit beings and fertility gods, both male and female. Production on lands held in common by the clan or lineage was not in general for money. Meillassoux (1972) argued relations of production under the mystical protection of priests of the earth and lineage sustained the kingdom and smaller community's bio-spiritual reproduction of reciprocal, and thus potentially dangerous, relations between spirits and human beings. Energizing life forces could manifest in human, animal and spiritual forms, each one of which demonstrated their incompleteness (death) without the other. Law-making by family and clan heads, ancestral priests and chiefs always entailed consideration of what the ancestors, nature spirits and animals might require. At the time of Nigeria's colonization (1901), violent mystical sanctions requiring human or animal sacrifice enforced fear of, and respect for, the spirits of the earth and the ancestors in the patriarchal Muslim north and Christianizing south. As recorded by ethnographers (Talbot 1912; Frobenius 1913; Greenberg 1949; Smith Bowen 1954; Achebe 1958; Monfouga-Nicholas 1972) fear of 'spirits of the law' upheld social cohesion and ensured theft was rare indeed.

After colonization, and the formal abolition of slavery, individuals were forced to pay head tax. At times they were compelled by chiefs on the white man's payroll to perform forced labour on plantations or on road- and

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bridge-building projects. Some families were driven away from ancestral farms and forests. Their lands were forcibly enclosed and exploited by foreigners and elite nationals for cash-crop production. Families everywhere experienced food shortages and fell into financial debt (Forde 1946; Watts 1983). So younger males embarked on labour migration to earn the white man's money. Those who found their way by connecting with clansmen 'known' to the colonial regime might win employment contracts. Joyce Cary (1939) describes how one such semi-literate youth from 'the bush' was employed by a white district officer for a small wage. Mister Johnson saw himself as having assumed the role of (dependent) client to his white benefactor patron. The young man interpreted the relationship in customary fashion as simultaneously asymmetrical *and* reciprocally egalitarian.

Contemporary bourgeois ideology evinces one-track mentalities: rather than egalitarian and multiple, it constructs state power in verticalizing, mono-dimensional terms as secular – though authorized by the colonial/postcolonial Western state – non-partisan, and singular. This African model reflects the monocentric theological authority of the Christian god. Elected presidents, church bishops, even 'extremist' commanders to the political centre's far-left or far-right exercise heirarchizing power in the singular. This, however, is not true of non-capitalist cosmologies or subsistence economies exploited by and connected to capitalism, but not yet completely integrated everywhere. Customary egalitarian values of reciprocity, sharing and equality before sacred law are waning before the heirarchizing forces of competitive for-profit individualism. But there are still many subaltern communities and family households in some north Nigerian rural states (e.g. Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Yobe, Bornu, Zamfara, Plateau) where social relationships are variably influenced by norms inculcating in the young respect for clan rituals of communication and sacrifice to the multiple powers recognized as ancestors, gods of the land and sky (Isichei 1982; Echard 1992; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). These original ('indigenes') owners of the landed commons – many of whom in times of crisis are devotees of the One God's church or mosque as well as of multiple spirit beings – still uphold customary sanctions whose mystical attacks on wrongdoers are feared.

Verticalization of power and capital is a contemporary feature of both the Nigerian/Chadic state and the religious fundamentalist organizations the sovereign state defines as 'extremist'. Boko Haram is much discussed as a terrorist entity on the basis of barely credible and repeatedly recycled data. First, the group has not been analysed in regard to the civil war's impacts on reordering social relations and class divisions in Nigerian and Lake Chad Basin war zone populations. Little or no attention, other than that of Prieri and Zenn (2018) and a few francophone scholars (Debos 2012; Lombard 2016) is given to ways in which jihadist mujahideen warriors and Nigerian soldiers

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(Muslim, Christian) are interpreting extreme violence. These men include those who draw on capitalist (the one God) and non-capitalist (multiple, animist) cosmologies. In doing so they are constructing a common culture of hybrid (intra-tribal) beliefs in multiple spirit beings, some of whom manifest in malevolent attacks by adult and child witches. Millions of Chadic state subalterns dispossessed by 'bandits', 'brigands', 'criminal gangs' and jihadists experience themselves enduring unending 'spiritual attack' erupting in mass poverty, extreme hunger, disease and death (Ellis 1995a, 1995b; Lombard 2016; MacEachern 2019). Most Western observers deny African people's very common belief that mystical assaults create spiritual insecurity causing disease, despair and death. Others insist, rather, that in north-east Nigeria all non-armed populations, especially women and children, live in a state of generalized 'civilian insecurity' on account of Islamist terrorism (Dowd and Drury 2017; Oriola 2017). Second, there are few explorations of similarities and differences in how the jihadist group's rhetoric of its sacred duty to kill the 'infidels' might or might not differ compared to the Nigerian or Cameroonian state's ideologies of righteous killing of (jihadist) 'barbarians' (Barkindo 2018). Finally, most scholars fail to situate Boko Haram analytically in relation to the civil war's restructuring of society in the north-east and further afield into two classes: that is, ruling and ruled groups intermediated by an insecure, shrinking bourgeoisie. These topics are discussed further below.

Until 2015, Boko Haram's full name was *Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad* (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad) (Thurston 2018). After giving allegiance (*bayat*) to Islamic State in 2015, the group was known for a couple of years as 'Islamic State in West Africa Province'. But the latter operates today as a separate entity from Boko Haram. I use the group's Hausa nickname 'Boko Haram' (Western education is sin), by which it continues to be known in northern Nigeria and neighbouring states. Scholarly writing on religious warfare in Nigeria's north-east, especially Borno state in the Lake Chad region, focuses on Boko Haram's organization, its 'mad' leader Amir Abubakar Shekau, and the Nigerian state's struggle to contain the perceived chaotic violence of jihadi warriors in Nigeria and across the West African Sahel (Zenn, Barkindo and Heras 2013; Barkindo 2016; Debos 2016).

Boko Haram certainly does not see its conception and practice of political power under the one God as similar to the Nigerian state's ideology and practice of political power. Viewed from Boko Haram's perspective, the Nigerian state – 'the tyrant' – and its security forces carry out acts of unparalleled illegitimate ferocity against the group's 'brothers in the Lord'. That is, commanders, mujahideen, wives, children, and other Salafist Muslims. But whether Christian or Muslim, subalterns do not call these massa-

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cres violent religious extremism. They are not 'exposed', as Nigerians say, to the international and national political elite's concept of legitimate power and the illegitimacy of groups deemed to be 'far-right' or 'far-left' of the bourgeois state's political centre. Rural and peri-urban underclass and petit bourgeois subalterns include petty traders, farmers, fisherfolk, graziers, artisans, *mallams* (Qur'anic teachers), butchers and petty clerks. They are mostly unfamiliar with the manners and thinking of Western and Nigerian political elites. Subalterns' underclass position in the social formation is evident in their exclusion from positions in government from where they can struggle to carve out remunerative gatekeeper roles in state ministries. The latter hope to receive bountiful bribes from multinational corporations in exchange for securing lucrative state contracts. Unlike most subalterns, elite contacts mean gatekeeper notables may be familiar with English idioms used in international organizations' reports that Salafist 'religious extremists' forcibly violate people's basic human rights.

For Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, and several Malian Salafist groups, the West African postcolonial ('crusader') state is sinful and utterly illegitimate (Thurston 2016). All these groups invert the state's ideology of their 'criminality' so jihadists assume the righteous position of controllers of legitimate One God-sanctioned violence. In their view, it is the state and its armies who demonstrate their 'wildness' when massacring Muslims with illegitimate killing force. On the other hand, the Nigerian and Chadian armies slaughtered up to four thousand innocent civilians, including babies and small children, when, in 2015, they recaptured Gwoza, the capital of Boko Haram's caliphate (Amnesty International 2020).

Boko Haram's Amir Abubakar Shekau declared in 2014, 'I enjoy killing anyone that God commands me to kill'. Allah commands him to avenge Nigeria's injustice to 'our brothers' (McCoy 2015). Revenge justice is thought to be reciprocal. It may restore a customary balance between, for example, two tribes who both see the other as perpetrator, and themselves as victim, of wrongful violence (Gluckman 1963).

A Boko Haram mujahideen leader explained to the world in January 2015 why they massacred at least two thousand men, women and children in the town of Baga (Borno state, north-east Nigeria). The jihadist group slaughtered Baga folk because 'they are infidels . . . We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood . . . killing, slaughtering, destruction and bombings will be our religious duty anywhere we invade' (Adekunle 2015; McCoy 2015). Boko Haram declared via video link that the massacre was in God's name. Therefore, as Allah commands, the blood of the dead will cleanse and purify society of the sin of unbelief. Refusal to convert to Salafism is a symptom of society's and the state's collective sin. In their view, democracy, the state's constitution and Western education must be erased

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because they represent and reproduce unbelief and social disorder. These polluting 'diseases' of a faithless society are synonymous with the chaotic polytheism of the multiple. In Allah's reported words, 'Disorder is worse than killing . . . kill them wherever you find them' (Qur'an 2:191).

Animist Practices of the Multiple

Political and military elites of both monotheistic religions are reluctant to admit they consult animist ('pagan') priestesses/priests and diviners for magical protection against jealous rivals' witchcraft. Many soldiers of the Nigerian state as well as Boko Haram's mujahideen buy magical charms that claim to protect the wearer from enemy bullets, witchcraft and sterility. Amulets placed under clothing directly against the skin give the believer the power of invisibility on the battlefield (Prieri and Zenn 2018: 651–60).

Perhaps neighbouring Cameroon's lifelong dictator, President Paul Biya, feels the same. A Catholic, in 2016 he overrode his country's legislation criminalizing witchcraft. The president ordered up-country chiefs to use their witches and wizards to fight and destroy the 'blood thirsty sect'. An IT-savvy Cameroonian journalist tweeted enthusiastically that chiefs, hunters and vigilante youth must use their spiritual powers to wipe out the group. Hundreds of youths rushed to consult marabouts (holy men) and buy magical charms to place on their bodies, boasting that no Boko Haram bullet will touch them (Afriem 2016; Locka 2017).

West Africa offers another perspective on the cleansing powers of the blood of sacrifice by mujahideen martyrs in Allah's name. Monotheist and polytheist foot soldiers and jihadists, as well as subaltern civilians and ruling elites, identify Boko Haram with mystical powers. These energies rush like the wind (*iskoki*) (Greenberg 1946; Masquelier 1994, 2001). In war zones they are even wilder, endangering but creating potencies from the blood of (human) sacrifice and wild slaughtering of 'enemy devils' (Kramer 1993; Ellis 1995a, 1995b; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004; McCoy 2015). Animist sensibilities are indicated in popular discourses about Boko Haram's proclaimed sovereignty of Nigeria's Sambisa Forest. This is a vast 'black' (spiritually dangerous) bushy space in the Adamawa mountain range, which divides Nigeria and Cameroon. Until recently, the group's long-term operational headquarters were located in Sambisa, as were some senior commanders and their families. Women and children cultivated small farms and livestock (Matfess 2017). Sambisa is physically and mystically on society's margins, long feared for its dangerous spirits and sorcerers. These are commonly symbolized as demons in snake form, as well as in the late Amir Shekau's bloody executions

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of rebellious commanders. Their heads are impaled on posts in more populous, less bushy locations to deter others.

Liminal Zones, Child Witches and Child Soldiers

Victor Turner (1969, 1979) demonstrated in his classic analyses of Ndembu rituals how 'anti-structural' drives are produced in liminal marginal contexts. There, relational processes in practice oppose *and* support a political centre's reproduction as structurally dominant. In his Introduction to this volume, Kapferer's brilliant re-evaluation of Turner's conception of liminal and liminoid demonstrates how at a societal level 'anti-structural' and structuring drives simultaneously generate conflicting and dynamic processes of destruction and renewal. More locally and specifically, individuals dispossessed in civil wars of their homes, lands, livelihoods and families are no longer what they were as social persons; they are 'neither here nor there . . . betwixt and between', in socio-spiritual transition from having been someone (else) and towards the becoming (Turner 1969: 95; Turner 1979: 234).

Points where centres of political and religious power clash violently constitute liminal thresholds at which 'violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence' (Agamben 1998: 31). For Agamben, such thresholds constitute states of exception beyond the sovereign state's law. Terrified citizens are forcibly dispossessed of their social being, their roles, relations with others, and statuses as social persons in processes of dislocation from their families and loved ones. In transition from what was to what lies ahead, forced into becoming beings whom state and society stigmatize as refugees, homeless vagrants, beggars, petty criminals and 'bandits', these up-rooted/up-ended victims of war reject their transformation from persons of standing within society into liminal dehumanized beings commonly labelled 'outlaws' who live outside society with 'bad' spirits in 'bad' bush.

The Nigerian state's armies and jihadist militias violate daily the population's basic human rights. Both armed parties to the war have forced apart families, orphaned children, and burnt many alive. Mothers have lost children, husbands, and supporting aunts and uncles. These desperate and despairing women struggle to survive rape, enforced prostitution, severe hunger, loss of family members, accusations of witchcraft and death (Oriola 2017). Children who lose a surviving parent are forced to fend for themselves in war-zone wastelands; others are recruited or volunteer (for cash and food) to fight with small arms for Boko Haram. Some are used for their small size to go undercover where they can identify Nigerian army hideouts, roads along which convoys of food and military equipment will pass, and plan ambushes. Children are sent on highly risky journeys because they are

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expendable and too numerous to be fed. However, soldiers and refugees may fear stranger children's potential malevolence and trickster tactics. Children emaciated and stunted from hunger look younger than their years. They may be perceived as still attached to spirit worlds where children await birth and rebirth; such children, however small, are mystically dangerous to the living and may be accused of witchcraft (Monfouga-Nicholas 1972).

Child soldiers have always played a prominent role in Africa's civil wars, past and present; for example, in the Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda), the Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone) and various militias in the Liberian civil war (Ellis 1995a). Since 2015, Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province militias continue to combat the joint armed forces of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Children, drugged and forced to detonate themselves and others in suicide bombing events, may also be deployed in armed conflict in northern Cameroon and south-west Chad. Boys, and at times girls, are equipped as human soldiers with small arms, while their spirit counterparts equip them with powers of divine violence and retribution (Allotey-Pappoe and Lamptey 2019).

Child witches and child soldiers carry different kinds of messages. The latter may convey messages along physical roads to army officers, big men in government offices, or wealthy traders asked to lend cash to customers or clients working for Boko Haram or Islamic State in West Africa Province. Child witches can help these child soldiers to complete their assignments. Child witches enlist the assistance of spirit beings tasked with deploying their divine violence against the Nigerian army. Child soldiers and witches are not necessarily exclusive (De Boeck 2004: 155; Geschiere 2013: 192–97; Falen 2018: 41–45).

Children are represented in animist thought as lacking strong socio-spiritual boundaries between human society and spirit worlds. A child witch may morph into the form of a child soldier, and vice versa. Their presence among humans is fluid and flexible, they come and go. Souls and spirit elements are popularly known among the southern Nigerian Igbo as *ogbanje*, and among the Yoruba as *abiku* (Ifeka 1962; Henderson 1972). Northern Nigerian Hausa people call such children *kurwa*, or *iskoki*. These soul substances are widely thought to be connected to spirits of the pre-born, the born, the dead and the yet to be born (Kramer 1993).

As Robert Brain (1970) reported in his classic study of child witches among the very rural and bushy Bangwa of the late 1960s, children may die in order to revive their relations with spirit children or they may transform into dangerous animals. Young boys and girls are therefore endowed, latently or manifestly, with occult ambiguous powers. In northern Nigerian war zones, child witches and soldiers mediate through their occult liminality. Thus endowed, they are thought to shape relations between human beings (state

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armies/jihadi warriors) and the spirit world's fierce projection of divine, life-giving and destroying violence. It purifies and cleanses society of malevolent or polluting substances. The child's ambiguous nature is veiled from family and community until a mother's death or disappearance. If kidnapped or sighted as having been slaughtered on a killing field, messages may reach a family member warning them of that child's uncontrollable malevolence.

Child witches can also manifest in war zones in the form of child soldiers recruited by Boko Haram (and formerly by the Revolutionary Front in Sierra Leone, in war-torn Liberia and far-away Uganda) as four-foot-high warriors, porters, IED and suicide bombers (Ellis 1995a; Human Rights Watch 2013). Children possessed of such malevolence must be cast out into the 'bare life' of human and spirit beings lacking rights in human and spirit society. Child witches become mystically empowered as death-bringing soldiers. Imaged as incarnations of uncontrollable power, they share mystical and social qualities of the other in the role of blood-shedding warrior.

Similarities and Differences

Several aspects of highly unequal social relations in Nigeria's civil wars reveal ways in which a two-class political system has strengthened the verticalization of power more generally. Institutionalized power in the form of the Nigerian state and its principal jihadist enemy, Boko Haram and its offshoots, shows certain similarities. These may in part be a consequence of centring processes of capital accumulation, whether licit or illicit. Commanders concentrate their control over strategic resources, material and mystical, so as to make very extreme the violence they deploy in order to destroy the enemy other. As Marx and Rosa Luxemburg argued, human greed and the nature of financialization for greater profit inevitably verticalize power relations.

Important indicators of similar organizational and ideological tendencies between the jihadist group and the Nigerian state are summarized in the paragraphs below. Such likenesses should not be surprising. Kapferer (2004) has argued, following Gluckman (1963), that war and conflict are dynamic processes that reorder and reinterpret social relations. Nigeria's long war is exposing how the bourgeoisie's lower-income households are descending into an underclass of subalterns homogenized by violence. A relatively egalitarian and socially redistributive, horizontal stratification system is being reconstituted vertically. Killing violence, enclosure and dispossession is splitting society in Nigeria and neighbouring states into two basic strata: a small but dominant ruling elite, and an expanding underclass of rural and peri-urban households increasingly dependent for survival on non-capitalist relations and powers. Capital's addiction to war for easy accumulation by

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dispossession is further verticalizing power. Capital loves war, because in destroying others' lands and assets it opens up fabulous opportunities for criminal elements. In the Lake Chad Basin these include state politicians, corporate company executives, men of the One God and lowly carpet-bagger entrepreneurs whose de facto patrons in state institutions are busy behind the scenes engaging forcibly in illegal varieties of resource grabbing (Ellis 2016). People who get in the way must be exterminated. As Agamben (1998) argues, human beings dispossessed substantially by the state's extreme violence are reduced to the lowest common denominator of rightless 'bare life' (Maclean and Hilaire 2018).

(i) The jihadist war has impacted negatively on families located, perhaps temporarily, on one side of the conflict or the other. Many such families were formerly units in larger labour cooperating households in rural, peri-urban or even city shanty towns. Separation from relatives and the death of parents, orphaning of children, and brutalization of women has compounded the already existing divide between elites and underclass majorities, regardless of whether they have landed up with Boko Haram or the Nigerian state. In the Lake Chad Basin and Nigerian borderland war zones, dispossession, poverty and unpredictable terrifying violence have reordered a formerly more differentiated – economically, ethnically, religiously and politically – population of about nine million into a single homogenized, detribalizing mass of suffering humanity. Fleeing into forests, wastelands, camps, hill-top redoubts and caves, they seek spiritual protection, food and safety.

(ii) The war is generating some surprising similarities in 'mainstream' centrist and extremist ideologies of political power. The nation-state exercises a form of mythic violence that legitimates war as necessary to defend the sovereign state's boundaries and population from annihilation. In practice, protestations to the contrary, the capitalist state's ruling class welcomes war on account of the many opportunities in zones of war for illegal capital accumulation.

On its part, the jihadist group claims it exercises the divine violence of Allah, whose prophet enabled true believers to live purely under Sharia law. Yet after more than thirteen years of on-off warfare, Boko Haram's ruling commanders resemble somewhat the Nigerian state's 'elected' political class. The latter proclaim their commitment to the country's coat of arms motto 'faith, unity, peace, progress', but rely in practice on the nation-state's monopoly of sovereign force to repress subversive religious or political movements on the centre's far-right. Likewise, jihadism conceives of its mythic violence as a singularizing force that destroys infidel resistance. In the early years of jihad (2009–15), Boko Haram's young martyrs were passionate about wielding God's divine, purifying violence. But in 2015, after several years of struggle, Islamic State (Iraq) recognized Boko Haram as a 'brother' state of the

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Islamic State caliphate. At that time, Boko Haram occupied and taxed large areas of north-east Nigeria; its caliphate was based at Gwoza (Borno). Boko Haram also began reinterpreting its violence more theocratically as the God-given, purifying power of a caliphal state enforcing one system of taxation, forced labour, Qur'anic education, conversion to Islam and obedience to Sharia law. In Salafist thought, adulterers, witches and prostitutes should be, and were, executed (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). Women accused of witchcraft continue to be killed. In November 2023, Boko Haram kidnapped over forty women in Gwoza, and subsequently slit the throats of twenty women accused of using their evil powers to kill the children of a Boko Haram commander (Sahara Reporters 2022).

(iii) Subject in theory to the supreme authority of the Islamic State caliph (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), Boko Haram is ruled in practice by its caliphal-approved ruler or amir. Until his death in 2021, the group's late Abubakar Shekau governed in concert with his cabal of close associates and Shura (council). The latter intermediate fund-raising operations. Money is needed to cover salaries; in 2013–16, about $100 per month was paid to new recruits. Food, logistics, ammunition and other costs encouraged the group to adopt certain strategies, such as kidnapping wealthy individuals – and possibly killing them if sufficient ransom is not offered. Trafficking deals with regional and overseas (Indian) narcotics dealers, and arms sellers, are another popular option. Invoking Sharia law and jihadist power's mythic violence, Amir Shekau executed commanders accused of appropriating money for themselves (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). However, the president of the Nigerian state also calls mythic violence 'lawful' when he approves the death penalty for people the state's courts designate as criminal 'bandits', 'brigands' or 'saboteurs'.

Equally, supreme power is concentrated in the office of the commander in chief of the armed forces based in Abuja, the Nigerian capital, and Maiduguri, Borno state's capital city. Yet vertically organized military power is cross-cut by customary officer–foot soldier patronage relations. The Nigerian army offers ample opportunities for senior officers in the role of patrons, and clients drawn from junior ranks and warrant officers, to 'share the dividends of war' in amounts proportionate to their status. Serious investment by senior officers in 'stomach infrastructure' takes place. Documented ventures include selling guns from the army's armouries, exchanging out-of-date weapons for narcotics, selling young girls and boys through intermediaries in safe houses, turning a blind eye (for cash or guns) to the buying and selling of young girls for marriage to Nigerian army foot soldiers and jihadist warriors (Matfess 2017).

(iv) The state and Boko Haram engage in extreme violence, at times in the form of tit-for-tat revenge raids. For example, in 2014–15 the Nigerian army

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slaughtered thousands of civilians in Gwoza, while Boko Haram slaughtered thousands in Baga. Are these instances of deep brutality and crimes against humanity also instances of divine violence at work? Can divine violence like that of the god Ogun (see the head of this chapter) replace state myths of national heroes who died fighting for peace? In reality, though, does not the war mask the jihadist state's deployment of extreme violence to achieve capital accumulation by dispossession? The Nigerian state's armed forces have also engaged in crimes against humanity for profit. Historically, then, both sides are guilty of similar offences.

(v) Reportedly, by 2014–15, Amir Shekau had become cynical. He had lost his original passion for holy war. Possibly he had been corrupted by needing money obtained by whatever means to pay his mujahideen about $100 per month. Boko Haram was, and is, chronically 'hungry' for cash with which to purchase weapons, ammunition, food, and fuel for tanks captured from the Nigerian army. The group's leaders were corrupted by their resort to organized crime to raise funds for the holy struggle. However, the Nigerian state is no different. Senior politicians and high-ranking army officers are known to have sponsored activities of Boko Haram and other jihadist groups. They raise some of their illicit funds from investment in illegal syndicates profiting from transborder narcotics, guns, and people trafficking networks.

(vi) Elected politicians have supported Boko Haram's cause while in official receipt of salaries and emoluments from the Nigerian state. Patrons of both parties to the war are linked indirectly through client associates to human and other forms of trafficking. Each side utilizes profits from one commodity to raise the cash with which to purchase another desired commodity such as arms or drugs. For example, the Nigerian state turns a blind eye to certain families selling young women into sex slavery in Italy where they operate in certain Italian provinces (e.g. Catania) 'governed' in some towns by terrorizing Nigerian secret societies (Black Axe, Eiyi) in conflictful 'alliance' with Mafia gangs. Black Axe invests prostitution monies in transatlantic narcotics trafficking. In another instance, the Indian head of a global narcotics syndicate allied in 2013 with Amir Shekau, who reportedly travelled incognito to Lagos for a key meeting at which he hoped to receive cash for narcotics. He successfully avoided arrest!

(vii) Both sides to the war are impacted by the dislocated population's collapse into hungry destitution, living a rightless 'bare life' in army-enclosed garrison centres, camps, remote 'bad' bush and peri-urban shanty towns. Salafist jihadist/ethno-nationalist militias and Muslim/Christian Nigerian soldiers alike share a general belief in the multiple powers of gods, spirit beings and witches. Many folk believe in child witches. But, uniquely in the annals of West and East African postcolonial warfare, only Boko Haram has

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regularly deployed child suicide bombers, some of whom are promised martyrdom and a new life in paradise.

(viii) Liminal zones connect both sides to the war as personages (child witches/soldiers, ghosts of murdered clansfolk, spirits of grieving ancestors) who simultaneously disappear and reappear as living (complete) mystical presences indirectly mediating relations between conqueror and conquered. Some dispossessed people pray for help to the One God and, resorting to magical charms and blood sacrifice for help, experience flows of spiritual sociality enveloping them in bullet-proof shields. Humanity's sociocultural and economic differences diminish as masses of fleeing people are caught in zones of death, diffusing animist beliefs in magical talismans among state soldiers, jihadist warriors and civilians. These liminal zones of danger and spirit presences connect territories and populations fought over and contested by Boko Haram, other terrorist groups and the Nigerian army. At times of renewed crisis in Borno state (north-east Nigeria), a few closely guarded roads connect the army's fortified capital city, Maiduguri, its barracks and militarized settlements (garrisons) to small allotments for cultivation by frail elderly men, women and children. These are destitute remnants of formerly large extended family-households. Boko Haram mujahideen in remote ('bad') bush, and silent jihadi cells in the city also signify liminal thresholds where small groups of jihadists hang out uncertainly, contiguous with state institutions and army barracks but below the military's radar. Small boys or child soldiers may carry message to and from, enabling jihadi cells to relate and communicate safely. This way they avoid being overheard by state intelligence officers monitoring enemy mobile phones.

Does animism's divine violence interact with secular and Sharia legal codes in these nebulous zones, these spaces where violence shatters hierarchies of power relations into fragments – *iskoki* gods of war, wind and thunder throwing bolts of iron that blow apart former identities of being into new becomings? Do these simultaneously destructive and creative flows of violence intermediate on the one hand state law reflecting individualizing Western (Christian) values, and on the other Islam's more collectivist Sharia law? Are liminal child witches and soldiers figures who signify in mystically powerful terms struggles between the state's ideology of singularizing power and the population's customary animist values of the multiple? Do these small people of ambiguous childlike malevolence signal in topsy-turvy fashion the seemingly greater technological violence of the Nigerian state versus the apparently lesser but (in dispossessed people's experience) strong multiply powered mystical and human violence of Salafist child suicide bombers?

Seemingly these children's interconnecting forms and changing shapes demonstrate the liminal qualities of ambiguous and highly dangerous multiple powers.

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Animism structures a person's invisible human form as being born, living and dying in one vast open-ended field of multiple mystical powers that, on occasions of extreme terror and violence, people may experience as manifesting in singular form as Power. Spirit mediums, children, and natural powers of the wind and thunderbolts are all formed in and through spiritual energies. Vitalizing and destroying *iskoki* (winds) intermediate visible and invisible dimensions of existence – in war and peace – as do infants or young children. If sickly or 'troublesome', small children and babies may be imagined as 'hanging' over their family, relating with them as they float in liminal transition between spirit and human worlds.

Conclusion

Kapferer (this volume) conceptualizes processes whereby the chaos and destruction of extreme violence can upend victims' lives, shifting people from how they were *being* before disaster to what they are *becoming* in disaster's aftermath. In the case of Boko Haram's war against the Nigerian and neighbouring Chadic states, survivors of deathly attacks experience their familiar other-recognized selves and statuses annihilated. In war's aftermath, people are literally thrown into new relations with others of being in a liminal, emergent condition of 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1979).

Nevertheless, in Salafist eyes, society only becomes moral when doctrine and practice erase liminal social relations. Rather, singularizing divine violence establishes the theocratic state by righteous killing of infidels and Muslim heretics in accordance with Sharia law. The law institutes society's purification by the one and only God, Allah. He demands the erasure by death of infidels (e.g. Christian Pentecostalists) and Muslim heretics (e.g. 'lapsed' or non-Salafist apostate Muslims not living under Sharia).

Walter Benjamin (1996), however, concludes his classic 1921 essay on divine violence with the statement that it is released in response to the pent-up sufferings of millions. This violence, therefore, is that which is in abundant excess of bare lawful life, lashing out at those forces and beings that seek to restrain its enormous energies, tearing down hierarchies of power, opening up spaces for egalitarian values and social identities. From the neoliberal state's 'reasonable man's' perspective, we need to ask what kind of purpose is served by divine violence. After all, argues Benjamin, if this kind of violence were to express itself in a revolution that resulted in political, social or cultural change, it would be law-making violence instead. Logically, law is unjust. Legality only serves the ruling capitalist class's means and ends of preserving its political and ideological monopoly of state power. Neoliberalism, though, persistently represents perceived, and actual, threats to the

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(bourgeois) 'mainstream' to originate from groups the state deems to be 'extremist', situated to the far-left and far-right of the One God state's centrist ideologies.

This chapter has taken up Foucault's challenge to engage critically and radically with state bio-power. My animist perspective has exposed differences between the Nigerian state, which claims that its armed forces operate in compliance with the law, and 'far-right' groups like Boko Haram, whose 'criminal' warriors deploy illegal extreme violence against the state and its physically unarmed population. The militarized state and Salafist terrorist groups commit crimes against humanity. However, this chapter has revealed the state's law-abiding righteousness and power hierarchies to be a chimera. In practice, both the secular state and its jihadist 'enemy' engage in extremism and severe subordination. According to African state law, both state militaries and jihadist warriors abuse human rights and commit crimes against humanity.

My animist analysis of Boko Haram's war against the Nigerian and neighbouring Chadic states has shown that, in reality, the contemporary African state is not singularly but is multiply structured: its legal and illegal economies under Muslim/Christian/animist leadership are evermore closely integrated at the highest levels of these power systems. Its institutional administrators, elected politicians, appointed judges, and military officers are usually not of singular but of multiple faiths, ethnicities and ideologies. Regardless of tribe, clan or religion, they engage in legal as well as illegal (criminal) thieving for capital accumulation by profitable investment. Elite (political class) thieves consider they are merely doing what their predecessors have done. Theft of public funds is 'normal', the most desired prize of office. A multi-faith, de-tribalizing ruling class of thieves, in times of peace and war, may unintentionally reproduce ideologically singular state power in multiple hybrid (criminalizing) modes. Nonetheless, linked by expanding ties and 'deals' to illegal as well as legal global finance capital, the Nigerian state continues to be recognized by other capitalist world powers as a unitary and democratic polity instituting equality for all before the law (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999).

Caroline Ifeka, an anthropologist educated at SOAS, London, is currently attached to the Australian National University and advises NGOs specializing in conflict resolution. She has lived and worked in Nigeria and Cameroon for many years, carrying out community development and conflict resolution programmes as well as socio-economic field research. Her animist approach to insecurity and jihadist terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin draws on her grass-roots knowledge of Muslim and Christian restive youth's cultures of

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resistance and magical protection against the bullets and IEDs of jihadist wars. She is preparing a book on the predatory African state, the gods and enslavement through capitalism's violent articulation with impoverished populations struggling to survive on clan resources owned in common.

NOTE

My research area is Nigeria and West and Central Africa. But the war zone and impacted populations in the borderlands of Lake Chad (Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon) is still off-limits to 'non-essential' workers such as journalists and fieldworkers. This analysis, therefore, is based on field interviews and experience over many years of sociality, cultural violence and predatory ruling-class exploitation for personal and familial profit in West African contexts. An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Extremism, Society and the State*, edited by Giacomo Loperfido (Berghahn Books, 2022, pp. 52–86). I thank Bruce Kapferer for his intellectually challenging, radically inspirational theorizations for an activist anthropology better equipped to analyse, with urgency, evermore confronting challenges of a capitalist-driven world in existential and ecological collapse.

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CHAPTER 16



EXTREMISM AS IMMANENCE AND PROCESS

The Trump Transmutation

Bruce Kapferer and Roland Kapferer

Extremism is a concept that is broadly negative or pejorative in meaning or sense. Applied to political action it is that which breaks or goes beyond accepted or defined limits. Extremism is unruly. It is action that is in some way or another conceived to be excessive, exclusive, overriding, doctrinaire, intolerant. Extremist politics are typically founded on ideological closure that admits no authority outside itself. It is dictatorial and uncompromising. So much so that there is no legitimate outside. Extremist groups tend to regard those who are not members to be potential antagonists, to be swept aside or else converted. There is a strong affinity between much political extremism and religious dogmatism, fundamentalism and messianism. Extremist politics, in much opinion, is given to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. There is a tension to violence in extremism towards anything that confines, limits or resists it.

The foregoing are common typifications of extremism, rather than definitions. We say this to underline the concept as highly relative, very much dependent on position and perspective within processes and structures of social and political relations.

These attitudes directed towards extremism (which is not to deny their factuality in experience throughout history) operate ideologically, often to legitimate oppressive action and/or to disguise, hide, the extreme potential (even extreme foundations) of orders and processes that do not recognize their own extremism.

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A feature of extremism is that it often elicits extreme reaction or response. Thus, state orders all too frequently crack down on what they conceive as threatening to its control and have labelled extremist. Indeed, extremist activity legitimates the ongoing and increasing authoritarian actions against it. The reaction against extremism is *itself* extreme, and this refracts the foundation of the state in a violence that is excited by the extremism that contests its authority.

Our concern in this chapter is with the circumstances for the emergence of what is recognized to be extremism as well as that of a more hidden unrecognized kind that shares some of the properties. More especially, we address the role of such extremism in effecting sociopolitical transformations or transmutations. The strong implication here is that extremism, or what is defined and perceived to be extremism, is a cause as well as an effect.

Our argument focuses on the years of the presidency of Donald Trump, himself filling the extremist bill in the opinion of many in appearance and demeanour, and especially on the events following his election defeat, such as the invasion of the Capitol, followed by President Joseph Biden's accession. The happening at the Capitol gave vent to extremism in the negative vision of the concept, but it and subsequent events, particularly, reveal a more hidden kind of extremism that Trump can be seen to mediate.

The happenings[1] forming around Trump are a dynamic in and of themselves. They express the chaos of transition of the moment, but they are also and at the same time forces in the transformation and transmutations of capitalism and its effects in world history: perhaps, with the complications of the Covid-19 pandemic, virtually an axial moment, a switch or turning point of crisis.[2]

This involves some reconsideration of what is becoming the master narrative concerning Trump, with ideological implications of its own. Trump's extremism is presented as a spectre of a fascist past rather than a foretaste, a mediation into the potential of an authoritarian totalitarian future, a less evident extremism perhaps, involving major transmutations in capitalism.

An Extremist Situation: Night of the World, Pandemonium at the Capitol

The events at the Capitol, which have evoked so much outrage, occurred on the ritualistic day of the confirmation of the new president's victory. The confirmation is the closing rite in what can be conceived as the liminal (Turner 1969) transitional period conventional in the American democratic cycle.[3] Such a liminal space is a relative retreat and suspension of the state political order as the presidency is renewed or changed. This is often a festive time given to all kinds of political excess when the people vent their potency

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in the selection of those who are to rule them (Kapferer 2015). Trump encouraged and intensified the potential chaos of liminality at its peak when, ideally, it should subside and political order be fully restored. He aimed to disrupt this critical moment and to maintain his uncertain presence as the Lord of Misrule, if not necessarily to effect a coup. Named as 'God's chaos candidate' by some evangelicals who supported him, Trump promoted, even if unwittingly, a moment of extreme chaos that was all the more intense for the liminal moment of its occurrence when the participants themselves blew out of control.

In the nightmare of the event, newscasts presented visions of a fascist future (imagined as a continuation of the past) filled with Fascist and Nazi images and other commonly associated symbols. There was a strong sense of dialectical collapse along the lines of Hegel's 'Night of the World', disconnected flashes of the demonic when forces in opposition dissipate against each other and lose their meaning. The representatives of the nation cowered under their desks fitting gas masks, while those who would challenge them, in festive mood and drunk with brief power, put their feet up on desks aping their masters, and carried off the mementos and spoils of their invasion. Exuberant chants of 'This is our house' echoed down the corridors of power.

Shades of the past paraded in the present, foremost among them that of the enduring trauma of the rise of Nazi Germany. What Sinclair Lewis had warned in *It Can't Happen Here* – a Hitler-esque rise to power at the centre of the democratic world – anticipated by all sides from the early days of Trump's apotheosis, seemed to be actually materializing. This accounts for the excitement on the steps of the Capitol – 'this is America 2021, y'all!' Videos taken inside the Capitol show a slow moving disorganized and scattered crowd of people roaming through the building enjoying themselves, taking photographs posing beside paintings like tourists on a holiday. Voices can be heard warning not to 'break anything, respect *our* house'. They were claiming their 'anarchic title' as Jacques Ranciere might observe. The people flooding into the centre of power at the Capitol were, in fact, expressing the violent, confusing and anarchic egalitarian energy – the unpredictable force of the demos – that lies at the foundation of all democracy[4] (Ranciere 2014).

Arlie Hochschild captured the millenarian, messianic Nuremberg feel of Trump's campaign rallies when researching *Strangers in Their Own Land* (Hochschild 2016), her excellent ethnography of the white far right and their sympathizers in Louisiana, America's poorest state and a Donald Trump heartland. Hochschild recounts at a lecture to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin a scene, reminiscent of the opening frames of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, when Trump's plane, 'Trump Force One', appears through the clouds and, as if from heaven, it descends 'down, down,

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down' to the waiting crowd electrified in expectation of the saviour's endlessly repeated sermon of redemption of the deep resentment that they felt for having been pushed aside from the promise of the American Dream.

But here is the point: the immediate reaction to the storming of the Capitol gave further confirmation to the real and present danger of Trump's fascist threat, fuelled in the rumblings of class war which Trump has inflamed and exploited. It is a liberal fear, mainly of the Democrats but including some Republicans, who are the chief targets of Trump's attacks. His demonization of elite liberal value (marked by accusations of moral perversities aimed at unmasking the claims to virtue) is at one with his condemnation of the liberalism of Federal political and social economic policies, which he presents as contributing to the abjection of mainly white American working-class poor, and to be seen in the rapidly increasing power of global corporations, the policies of economic globalization, and the privileging of minorities, refugees, recent immigrants, and so on. It might be remembered at this point that the violence of the Capitol invasion, the marked involvement of military veterans, the carrying of weapons (baseball bats, and reports of pipe bombs), which shocked so many, reflects the fact that all modern states are founded on violence.

This is particularly the case in the United States, where the Constitution's Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms in defence of democratic rights.[5] In an important sense, the violence of those invading the Capitol refracts back at the middle class and especially the ruling elite the very violence that underpins the structure of their rule. If liberal virtue was shocked by the events on 6 January it was also confronted with the violent paradox deep in its democratic heart (Palmer 2021). Thus, this paradox slips into paroxysm at this critical moment in American political history.

The transitional figure of Trump feeds on the prejudices of his intended constituencies, and exploits an already ill-formed class awareness building on ready commitments and vulnerabilities – the well-rehearsed fascist and populist technique – creating indeed a false consciousness (there is no other way to say it) that is not only destructive but in the hands of the likes of Trump integral to intensifying the feelings of impotence and the miseries that give Trump his relative popularity. Slavoj Zizek says as much in what he describes as 'Trump's Greatest Treason' (Zizek 2021) – his betrayal of the working class even as he represents them.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, 'The Governator', was quick to counter the white supremacist, macho, Proud Boy, Oath Keeper and Three Percenter elements highly visible in media newscasts with a Conan the Barbarian Performance.[6] This was his take on the dominant brand of 'Make America Great Again'. (Really, all those along the political spectrum participate in MAGA – Democrat Party badges and hats from the recent election read 'Dump Trump,

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Make America Great Again'.) He focused on his own immigration away from his native Austria and its Nazi associations to the liberated American world of his success. For Schwarzenegger, the Capitol invasion and its vandalism equated to Kristallnacht. Noam Chomsky likens the storming with Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, observing that it effected a greater penetration to the heart of power than did Hitler's failed attempt. But Chomsky, with characteristic acuity, adds that the fascist danger lies in the anti-democratic class forces (including electoral and political manipulations on all sides) that provide the fertile ground for fascism.

At this point we take brief stock.

The Capitol invaders or rioters or protestors were a cross-class assemblage, but overridingly white. Their whiteness gave them a coherence, especially in an America where the politics of class refracts major divisions of race and colour, affecting most specifically African Americans, whose enslavement acts as a continual reminder of the basis of American democracy and capital in the subversion of the highest democratic and egalitarian ideals. Such a scandal is behind much of the outrage at the Capitol events, and particularly in the context of ongoing Black Lives Matter activism. The participants in the Capitol were from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, from the wealthy to the poor, with multiple affiliations and not just those of the right-wing militias that provided the dominant images for the news media. Nonetheless, their whiteness indicated the cross-class force of colour in America as a major ongoing contradiction of the democratic ideal, a fascist potential. Trump exploited such racism, even as he denied it, and provided a point for its crystallization. But we suggest that the assemblage character of his following is also his weakness. While his fan of appeal extended beyond marginalized extremist groups, the ties linking them were not strong and easily dissipate as a function of the conflicts and contradictions of class alone.

Jacob Chansley, QAnon Shaman, whose image went viral, embodies the very idea of the assemblage (and certainly the fascist potential) and an internal tension to dissolution.[7] Indeed confronted by the reactive power of the state, a scapegoat, perhaps, for the evasive criminality of Trump at the edge of impeachment, the Shaman began to dissolve and fragment, to pixilate, just as Trump's so-called movement may also fade.

What we stress is that the QAnon Shaman's body was a plane of extremism. It expressed the full range of American extremism from the leftist hippie folk rock pacifist but rebellious sixties, through the primitivist mysticism and religious cultism often fundamentalist in orientation of working-class and middle-class America, to the radical overtly macho and violent rightist groups. The Shaman manifests America as overall a plane of extremism in which Trump worked, and that was subject to his magic in the context of the

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challenges and changes confronting capital within the American democratic ideology.

But the point must be taken further. New class formations are in the making right now, and they are being driven in the explosive nature of technological revolution. This is something Marx himself was very much aware of, and was why he wrote more than one hundred pages on the machine and the human in *Capital*. This is also the concern of Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man* (2002) and the continued focus of today's accelerationists such as the Deleuzian Nick Land (1993) and Nick Srnicek (2017) with his idea of platform capitalism.

Creative Destruction, the Transmutation in Capital, and Corporate State Formation

The Rise and Fall of Trump (not discounting the possibility that Humpty Dumpty[8] might come together again, which is the fear of the master narrative) may be understood as expressing a transition between two moments of capital during which one formation morphs into another. Trump is the embodiment, instrument and anguish of this transition, a tragic figure in a theatre of the absurd. Grand Guignol almost, but in Gothic *American Horror Story* style. The accession of Biden is the apotheosis of the new, in the hopes of most, he is a vehicle for healing the divisions in America that Trump brought to a head and are still very much present. But Biden's rise has ominous oppressive indications of its own.

These events have all the hallmarks of the crisis and rupture of transformation or, better, *transmutation*. The millenarian spirit that Hochschild captures in her account is one born in the capitalist ideology of the American Dream, fortified in the religious fundamentalism of Trump's many followers that revitalizes their hopes in the Dream in the face of abject failure. The rallies and the impassioned actions of those invading the Capitol are filled with revitalizing energy. Such millenarian explosions, distinct in their own historical contexts, occur at many other points in global history. It was apparent at the dawn of capitalism in Europe, at later moments of crisis and redirection in capital up to the present – indeed at the inception of the Nazi horror, and at points of the disruptive expansion of capital in the Western imperial/colonial thrust as in the Cargo movements of the Pacific (Worsley 1970; Lanternari 1963; Cohn 1970).

The rupture of transmutation in capital, the crisis that the Trumpian progress manifests, is an instance of what Marx and others have understood to be the creative/destructive dynamic of capital whereby it reproduces, renews, revitalizes its potency against contradictions and limitations to its profit mo-

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tive that capital generates within itself, as well as those thrown up against it, in the very process of its own expansion and transformation.

The circumstances underpinning the current transmutation in capital relate to the revolutions in science and technology (those associated particularly with the digital age and advances in biotechnology), to a large extent driven by capital and motivated in profit. The rapid development of capital (and especially that of the still dominant, if declining, American form) was driven in the innovations in knowledge and technology (something that Marx and many others admired in America). What became known as the nation-state (the dominant political form that nurtured capital) and the class orders that were generated in capital and necessary to it (not to mention the over-population and ecological disasters that grew in capital's wake) also constituted barriers and limitations to capital's growth.

The new technological revolutions are a response to the limitations on capital emergent within its own processes. Technological innovations enabled revolutions in production and consumption (creating new markets and increasing consumption, reducing the need for human labour and the resistances it brings with it, overcoming problems, and opening up novel lines, of distribution), forcing the distress of unemployment (especially among the erstwhile working class), creating impoverishment and uncertainties reaching into once affluent middle classes (as captured in the neologism, the precariat), shifting class alignments, redefining the nature and value of work, of the working day (the expansion of zero hours and its returning sense of a bygone era).

The current technological revolution is a key factor in the extraordinary growth in the monopolizing strength of corporations such as Google, Amazon and Tencent. The dot.com organizations (the flagships and spearheads of capitalist transformation with huge social transmutational effect) have wealth that dwarfs many states, and they are functioning in areas once controlled by the state (e.g. in the current race to colonize space). Indeed the corporate world has effectively invaded and taken over the operation of nation-states (Kapferer 2010; Kapferer and Gold 2018). This is most noteworthy in those state orders influenced by histories of liberal social democracy in Europe and Australia, for example, which tended to draw a sharp demarcation between public interest and private enterprise. The nation-state and its apparatuses of government and institutions for public benefit have been corporatized, so much so that in many cases government bureaucracies have not only had their activities outsourced to private companies but have also adopted managerial styles and a ruthlessness along the lines of some business models. The corporatization of the state has aligned it much more closely with dominant economic interests in the private (now also public) sectors than before, and enables a bypassing of state regulation, even that

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which once sustained capitalist interest but which became an impediment to capitalist expansion.[9]

These changes have wrought socio-economic and political disruption and distress globally, and most especially in the Western hemisphere. This is not merely collateral damage. The revolution in science and technology has been a key instrument in effecting social and political changes via destruction, for the regenerative expansion of capital. It has been central to the re-imagination of capital in the opening years of the twenty-first century.

This is particularly so in the United States whose sociopolitical order is historically one of corporate state formation, which accounts for its long-term global political economic domination. Some renewal in leftist thought (e.g. with Bernie Sanders) is an index of the depth of distress that is being experienced, although the ideological and counteractive potency of the American Dream, fuelled especially in fundamentalist Christianity, suppresses such potential contributing to the intensity and passion of the Trump phenomenon. The ideological distinction of the Trump event aside, its dynamic of populism is reflected throughout the globe.

One common feature of this is the rejection of the political systems associated with nation-state orders and, to a marked extent, the largely bipartite party systems vital in the discourses of control and policy in nation-states. Trumpism and other populist movements (in Europe notably) complain of the alienation of the state and its proponents from interests of the mass. The expansion of corporatization and the further hollowing out of the state, the corruption of its public responsibilities by corporate interests, is effectively what Trump was furthering in his presidency. It is a potent dimension of the Trump paradox and a major irony of the Capitol invasion that, for all the apparent fascist tendencies, it was the spirit of reclaiming democracy (admittedly of the freebooting kind) in an already highly corporatized establishment (subject to great corporate capitalist interest) that Trump's actions were directed to expanding. An important figure in this respect is the Silicon Valley venture capitalist Peter Thiel. The tech billionaire, an early investor in Facebook and founder of Paypal, was an early Trump supporter and was part of Trump's transition team in 2016. His book, *Zero to One*, based on his lecture courses at Stanford University, argues for a corporate-technocratic governance beyond older systems of government (Thiel 2014).

From Panopticon to Coronopticon

Covid-19 has highlighted the social devastation of the destructive/creative dynamic of capitalism's transmutation. The class and associated ethnic inequities have everywhere been shown up and probably intensified

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by a pandemic that is starting to equal, if not surpass, the depressing and devastating effect of two world wars. Like them, it is clearing ground for capitalist exploitative expansion – something like Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism (Klein 2007). Under the shadow of the virus, labour demands are being rationalized, the cutting back of employment and its benefits legitimated, governments are pumping capital into the economies in a way that protects consumption in an environment where there is declining occupational opportunity and income. The idea of the Universal Basic Income is being seriously discussed, which would offset some of the contradictions in a transformation of capitalism that is reducing the dependence on labour and endangering consumption through automation and digitalization. While the poor are getting poorer the rich are getting richer, most notably those heading the revolutionary technologies of the digital age and biotechnology, the competitive race to secure viable vaccines against the virus being one example.

There is a strange synchronicity linking the pandemic with the dynamic of capitalism's transmutational corporatization of the state. The virus reproduces and spreads in a not dissimilar dynamic. Indeed, Covid-19 in some ecological understandings is the product of the acceleration of globalization effected in those processes of capitalism's transmutation associated with corporate expansion and the corporatization of the nation-state. As a crossover from animal to human bodies, the virus is one manifestation of increased human population pressure on wild animal territory, the closer intermeshing of animal and human terrain. The scale of the pandemic is, of course, a direct consequence of the time–space contraction and the intensity of the networked interconnections of globalization.

State surveillance has intensified as a by-product of combatting Covid, which is also its legitimation, with digitalization as the major surveillance instrument. The digital penetration into every nook and cranny of social life – see Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) or Netflix's *The Social Dilemma* – is interwoven with the commodification of the social and personal for profit, with economizing individuals calculating the costs and benefits of their social 'interactions' (the YouTube or Kuaishou 'influencer', the hype TED talker as Foucault's entrepreneurial self, cut, pasted, uploaded and remixed). The management of Covid, demanding social isolation and the disruption of ordinary social life, has exponentially increased the role of the digital as the primary mediator of the social and a commanding force in its very constitution. Covid has been revealed as a kind of social particle accelerator. As such, and evermore exclusively so, the real of the social is being re-imagined, re-engineered and re-mastered as a digital-social, a 'Digisoc' or 'Minisoc', constrained and produced within algorithmically preset parameters. Here is Peter Weir's film, *The Truman Show* radically updated.

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And, as with Truman, the space of freedom is also and *at the same time* experienced as a space of unfreedom.[10] This manifests itself in the deep ambivalence many feel about the new technologies they daily live with and through. The digitized social is often presented as a new agora, a liberating 'space' in which new, progressive ideas and directions are enabled, operationalized and indeed optimized. The internet has become a site of multiple struggles in which class forces and new potentials for social difference and proliferating identity claims are continually emerging. The freedom of the internet has provided exciting opportunities for many. Such freedom also and at the same time contributes to conspiracy on all sides. As has been made clear in the two elections featuring Trump, the superpower of corporations like Google and Facebook threatens to install a domain of hyper-control. Digital walls and electronic fences are appearing everywhere in the age of the global 'splinternet'.

A Digital Fascism – Towards the Machinic Materialization of Being

An essay by Thomas Klikauer and Norman Simms on the new 'digital fascism' argues along similar lines to us – they claim that the internet makes a new form of fascism possible in an emerging and original sociohistorical dispensation (Klikauer and Simms 2021). They make the simple and important point that social media and online sociality is not itself socially created. We develop and extend: online sociality is truly a corporate zone.

Digi-sociality is a strange, uncanny new form of 'sociality' that is engineered through a still barely understood and technically complex process whereby huge masses of individuals are collected as 'big data', digitized and algorithmically ordered – 'dividualized' – by software engineers building and designing mega-corporate platforms and new multimedia 'environments' or 'spaces' (for want of much better words).[11]

Unlike older forms of fascism and totalitarianism, the reformatting of human existence creates an open horizontal and de-hierachialized plane that is decentralized and leaderless – it is a totally equalized and individuated plane or any-space-whatever in which truth is radically relativized – your truth, my truth, any-truth-whatever – and facts become fictions or fictions become facts, and reality becomes indiscernible from fantasy – this is what Gilles Deleuze has called the crystalline 'power of the false' (Deleuze 1989). As we move into the new space-times of what may be called a crystalline capitalism, we learn to live with and adjust our senses to the emerging digital domain. And the digital domain is the domain of fake news. The platforming of human lives flattens sociality, fragments individuals into 'dividuals' or 'bits' of individuals – byte sized chunks – organizes them into sets and

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groups them according to tastes and likes and clicks, and then folds and refolds according to the needs of various corporate interests – human being as commercial dataset.

It is this radical datafication of the world that humans are currently learning to live with and adjust to. And it is this 'world' or non-world or night of the world that provides the fertile ground for new mythologies that attempt to grasp it, control it and bring it to order. Truth collapses into lies and lies into truth. This is a context that is ripe for Klikauer and Simms's digital fascism, and ripe for the era of conspiracy. On this flattened and individualized or personalized plane, new theories and myths, each as good as any other, multiply and proliferate wildly. Trump operates on this plane. And he is as much a product or symptom of this as he is an expert player within it – he 'games' this system certainly, but, equally, anybody can.

The hegemonic and totalizing potential for the ruling bodies of the corporatizing state who control the digital is as never before. This is so not just in the global scale of the network reach but in the heightened degree to which controlling bodies can form the ground of the social; they can radically remodel, engineer and design reality in accordance with dominant interests – and if motivated can shut out that which threatens their order. The awareness of this has driven the fury of censorship and self-censorship on all sides – Trump's threatened TikTok ban becomes Twitter's actual Trump ban.

A Fascism of the Future: From 1984 into a Brave New World

Trump and Trumpism are moments in the transitional, transmutational process of capitalism outlined above, and of the formation of new social and political orders. Echoing the past, they express its transmutation (and its agonies) rather than repeat it. Trump and Trumpism manifest the contradictions of such processes, agents and agencies for the transmutations in the social and political circumstances of life that are in train, themselves forces in the bringing forth of a future that, in some aspects, is already being lived.[12]

Trump himself can be described as an in-betweener, a bridge into the new realities, both a force in their realization and a victim. His manner and style, the brutal no-holds-barred amorality, is familiar from the captains of industry and robber barons of an earlier age, who built capitalist America and crushed working-class resistance by all means, more foul than fair. Trump maintains the style but in reverse redemptive mode. In his shapeshift he presents as supporter of the working classes not their nemesis as did his forerunners. However, his authoritarian business manner, of *The Apprentice*'s 'You're fired!' fame, matches well the managerialism of the present. He

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is an exemplar of contemporary venture capitalism, and most especially of profit from non-industrial production (often anti-production) gained from real estate, property transfer, asset stripping, and the expanding gaming and gambling industries (symptoms of the crises of transformation in capital) from which some of Trump's key supporters come.

Trump's reactionary anti-immigrant nationalism and Make America Great Again rhetoric not only appeals to the white right of his constituency but is an engagement of past rhetoric to support new political and economic realities. Trump's economic war with China stressed reindustrialization, but it was also concerned with counteracting China's technological ascendancy, especially in the realm of the digital, a major contradiction born of the current globalizing transmutation in capitalism involving transfers of innovatory knowledge.

Trump anticipated the risk to his presidential re-election, and it manifested the dilemmas of his in-betweenness. His inaction with regard to the pandemic was consistent with the anti-'Big Government' policies of many Republicans and the American Right, who are so much a part of QAnon conspiracies but also concerned to reduce government interference and modify regulation in capitalist process – a strong emphasis in current transitions and transformations of the state and of capital.

Trump's cry that the election was being stolen was excited in the circumstances of the pandemic. His attack on postal votes related to the fact that the pandemic gave the postal vote a hitherto unprecedented role in the election's outcome by bypassing and neutralizing the millenarian populist potency of his mass rallies, already reduced in numbers by fear.[13] Trump sensed that the Covid-inspired move to 'working from home' and 'voting from home' would challenge, fence in and fence out his base of support.

Trump has always taken advantage of the digital age, his use of Twitter and Facebook the marked feature of his style of rule. His practices looked forward to the politics of a future ever increasingly bounded and conditioned in societies of the image. Following the events at the Capitol, Trump's own Custer's last stand to allay his fate, his cyberspace and internet accounts were switched off. He has been cancelled by the new digitally authoritarian corporate powers, who arguably benefited the most from the Trump era and profited greatly under pandemic conditions,[14] and who are behind the growing new society of the image, in which he was a past master and within which he had in the main established his identity (Kapferer, R. 2016).

The overriding image of the Capitol invasion and carried across most networks is that of the occupation of the heart of American democracy by those who would threaten its ideals. The media have concentrated on what was the dominating presence of the extremist macho white American far right violently parading symbols of a racist past combined with clear references to

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the not-so-distant memories of fascism and Nazism. There were others there more moderate in opinion, and representative of other class fractions, if still mostly white, whose presence does not reduce the fear of fascism, possibly as in Nazi Germany when what seemed to be small groups of extremists hijacked power to unleash the horrors that followed – and the events of the Capitol evoke such memory (Palmer 2021). Something similar could be said for what happened in Russia leading to Stalinism. These were the worlds of George Orwell's 1984, in which some of the major ideals of the time flipped in their tragic negation. Such events were very much emergent in realities of the nation-state, its imperialist wars and the class forces of that particular historical moment in the history of capitalism and the formations of its social and political orders. There is no statement here that this could not happen again.

What we are saying is this: a different authoritarian and oppressive possibility may be taking shape – not of the fascist past but of the future. This is a future that Trump was mediating but that may be coming into realization, despite the great hope to the contrary, in the accession of President Biden. Perhaps this prospect can be seen as more akin to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* born in the current transmutations of capital (and its agonies of class) and in the circumstances of the radical technological revolutions of the digital era, involving the apotheosis of the corporatization of the state, the corporate state emerging out of the ruins of the nation-state.

Aldous Huxley depicted a world centred on production and efficiency, a biotechnologically conditioned global system of perfect rational, optimized order. The class conflicts of the past are overcome here; everyone accepts their predetermined place. It is a post-human reality in which the foundation of human beings in their biology and passions is transcended. It is a somatized, artificially intelligent world of the image and promiscuity – indeed, the American Dream. Those who do not fit or who resist are fenced out. Time and space are being reconfigured, incurving around the individual and 'personalized'.

Biden's inauguration for all its upbeat ceremonial spirit had some intimation of such a future, taking into full account the security constraints of its moment: to protect against the murderous unchecked rampage of the virus and the threat of the attack of right-wing militias. The stress on this, it may be noted, had an ideological function to distance what was about to come into being from, for example, the definitely more visceral world of Trump, and thoroughly evident in the invasion of the Capitol – what Biden in his inauguration speech called an 'uncivil war'.

The scene of the perfectly scripted inauguration was virtually devoid of people. Apart from the dignitaries and all-important celebrities, the highly selected order of the society of the corporate state. Where the general popu-

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lace would normally crowd was an emptiness filled with flags and protected by troops, more than currently are stationed in Afghanistan. Those who might disrupt, Hilary Clinton's 'deplorables' and Aldous Huxley's 'resistant savages' were fenced out. It was a totalizing and constructed digital media image presenting a reality of control, harmony, and absolute surveillance.

We claim that something like Trump and the events surrounding him would have happened regardless of the specific phenomena we have focused on here. The events are a moment, perhaps among the most intense, in the transitional transmutation of the history of capitalism and the socio-economic and political orders that build and change around it. The apparent chaos indicates a major axial moment in world history – a chaos driven in the emergence of a cybernetic techno-capitalist apparatus on a global scale (see notes 2 and 3). What might be augured in the Biden accession is already taking vastly different shape in China and elsewhere around the globe. New and diverse formations of totalitarian authoritarianism are emerging. The Trump phenomenon is crucial for an understanding of some of the potentials of a future that we are all very much within, and that an overconcentration on the parallels with the past may too easily obscure.

Afterthought: Towards Further Considerations on Extremism

We have written of the Trump events as a whole, and especially the closing scenes of his drama, as a situation of extremism born in a liminal and transitional moment. The underlying idea is that such extremist situations or extended times of extremism (as in the four years of Trump's presidency), often characterized by agonized conflict, can be expected at times of crisis or rupture, marked especially by social and economic disruption and expanding class distress. This may be all the more so during periods in world history of radical civilizational shift involving the collapse of overarching systems of order and the emergence of new ones. There are indications that the current historical moment is one such period: characterized by a major transmutation in capitalism in the context of extraordinary revolutions in science and technology that may be penetrating into the very being of human being. The consequent seismic shocks for political and social orders constitute major liminal periods of transition.

We sound a note of caution. Our argument presents extremism as being a phenomenon associated with the breakdown and transformation of the orders and patterns of social life and the conditions of existence. We have highlighted extremism as not merely an expression of such processes but as an agent force in them. The emphasis is upon extremism being about social and political life at its limits and at its points of turning. The extreme is born

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and comes into its own at such moments. This is when extremism can be at its most potent, and given the circumstances and its objectives it can overcome all that is around it. This was the fear of Trump and the energy behind the fascist cries. There was much cause for such fear.

The perspective we advance runs close to various functionalist approaches, especially of the organismic kind, from which we aim to depart but whose insights cannot be too easily dismissed. The discussions on extremism tend to focus upon it as a deviant or pathological phenomenon: extremism as ultimate contradiction whereby it manifests as radical negation in the dehumanization of social processes and values – the ideals, especially, of that which is its ground. This is the point of both Orwell, for the present past, and Huxley, for the present future. Their centring of destructive extremism in dominant orders rather than something at the margins is their major contribution.

The approach we take aims to go further, beyond that functionalism caught in a dualist order/disorder dynamic. Discussions of extremism tend to place it on the disorder side and largely at the margins or peripheries of social existence. We stress extremism, whether perceived as extreme (in which the negative is usually asserted) or not so perceived, to be integral to the dynamic of social and political processes rather than a phenomenon marginal to them. At the start of this chapter, we indicated that extremism is not only difficult to define but a highly relative concept, most definitions better grasped as typifications, reflecting theoretical persuasions and cultural orientations.

Following the above line of thinking, we see the cultural field of the United States as given to extremism, even though it is not necessarily recognized as such. The world of the US can be conceived, as we indicated earlier, to be a plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) for the emergence of extremism of all kinds.

The concept of the plane of immanence is used to focus attention on the synergic interaction between the ideology of American democracy (see De Tocqueville 2003), which can be described as egalitarian individualism on the one hand, and capitalism and the diversity of its practices on the other. We stress that these are not to be conceived as separate, static or unchanging. In the historical formation of the United States, they were intertwined from the word go, in dynamic changing evolution. Their dynamic is such that extreme forms and practices are constantly being thrown up across the plane of immanence that is the continual and diversifying cultural field of America, implied in the concept of American exceptionalism and in which extremism plays as much a positive role as it may be negative.

What we indicate is that a new plateau of extremism is being reached on America's plane of immanence, both in ideology (egalitarian individualism

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of American democracy) and in the capitalist practices associated with it. Thus, in the context of America's technologically regenerated capitalism (itself motivated in the creative energy of American individualism), individualism is gaining greater intensity, perhaps even more fractionalizing and fragmenting than hitherto.

Broadly, America might be described as a celebration of the extreme, a dimension of its bizarre fascination to those outside America, but also inside – for example, Louis Theroux's many television series. Perhaps a generative field of expanding differentiation, involving a continual individuating explosive domain of virtually cultic profusion (typically centred around charismatic personalities and social media influencers), evident in religious and political action. The reductionism in action and in thought that are dimensions of egalitarian individualism and of capitalism (especially in synergy) encourage a particular fundamentalizing energy, typically associated with extremism, which contributes to its cultic quality and dynamic of exclusionary competitiveness.

Individuals are increasingly broken up and isolated within various bubbles or single information 'pods'. See, for example, the recent proposal to 'fix the internet' by its one of its creators, Tim Berners-Lee (Lohr 2021), and algorithmically distributed or combining in private Facebook groups or in invitation-only Clubhouse meeting rooms, and linking up or networking peripatetically. The LinkedIn corporate network model has become the structure of daily social existence. Such a network society is an extremist society reflecting a transmutation in the very understanding of what constitutes an individual. The free individual as the supreme American value is transmogrifying and being reimagined as a continuous range of mutant possibilities, potentials and powers – an empowered and continuously self-making, self-creating individual, always in transition. The online system enables a situation in which humans can constantly create and then abandon new 'selves', slipping in and out of digital skins. America is conceived more than ever as always at the limit and on the frontier, an exceptional and fugitive order. This has long been celebrated in Westerns and science fiction. But now the techno-capitalist machine weaponizes the individual, and institutes the individual as a multiplicity – a sheaf of many selves engaged with its own security and futurity. 'I am large, I contain multitudes', says Walt Whitman, the early poet of American individualism. Liberty is conceived as multiplicity. There is no essential essence but a flickering set of images that refracts the screens and metastable networked existences that people anxiously live today.

Thus, America is a society of extremes, of excess – excess wealth, poverty, health and sickness, consumption, sexuality, bodies. Extremism in America is everyday and everywhere and possible at all times; a land of ongoing

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and pulsing extremist potentials. This is central to its extreme creative and destructive power. The key inventions of the military-corporate complex, the internet and the networks it makes possible, are acting as intensifiers and multipliers of an ever-expanding and increasingly wild individualism – Silicon Valley mega-corporations currently engaged in a rapid endo-colonization of American subjects. Here an American Romanticism is reinvigorated and remythologized in the Marvel Universe and the Netflix image (the development of binge-watching as a form of techno-bulimia) and on social media platforms, and achieves a specifically technical and infinitely reproducible form. The rupturing and fragmenting of social worlds as a result of the institution of platform virtual digital sociality unleashes and generates a plane of extremism in America.

The dynamism of the extreme is America; it is the name of the game as it were, with extraordinary positive and negative effects. When Biden speaks of an 'uncivil war' and that democracy must be fought for, these are in all senses appropriate to a cultural reality that gives the extreme, and an orientation to the limits or beyond, a central position and value in the continually unfolding scheme of things. Extremism is at the heart of America and permeates almost every part or mode of existence. It is a continual focus of debate.

Extremism, or what may in different register be recognized to be extreme, is present in all societies. It is integral in some way or another in the dynamic of their process – there is always an extremist tendency or potential in any social order. The distinction is in the way the extreme is recognized and the value that is attached to it. Indeed, extremism as a problematic issue is a dimension of our own positioning in European and North American history.

The general position we are suggesting is that extremism is more than that which is recognized as such, and not to be limited to that which is ultimately destructive of human existence, the extreme as ultimate contradiction. Extremism in this sense is the potential of all or most orders, a dynamic in their formation and deformation, inherent in their ordering as in their disordering. In our understanding, extremism must be opened up and not limited to its highly negative, fascist potentials, despite the importance of recognizing these. Extremism operates as a plane of pluri-potentiality in all social orders. It is the very energy and volcanic power of the emergent social process. We begin and end at this gateway moment – on the absolute horizon of human possibility.

The fascist authoritarian potential is in the movement against immanence, that slips out of immanence, transcendentalizes and lifts out of the plane itself. This is what a state does. A state rises up out of immanence and establishes itself as the overarching hegemonic, authoritarian and totalizing form. At certain moments, as with the Trumpian situation, immanence is no

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longer entirely within and becomes 'immanent *to*' a transcendence. This is the religious tendency and what has now become the economic tendency, with giant American corporations such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft full of fascist potential. Over the last century, the economic has come into a fully determining position and, as we have been discussing, this is most especially the case with the corporate state. It may be that this is the tendency in America over the longue durée, and this is what we have seen with the Biden–Harris administration – a corporatizing process that received significant impetus throughout the Trump situation. On the other hand, things may take a rather different turn and the proliferating fragmentation and individualist fissure occurring in the United States – the cultic emphasis on the extreme individual and the continual movement of immanence – may prevent a fascist state and render it impossible. This is an open question.

Bruce Kapferer is professor emeritus, social anthropology, University of Bergen; honorary professorial fellow anthropology, University College London; director, EU Advanced Project Egalitarianism; and professorial fellow, Cairns Institute. He has carried out fieldwork in Zambia, South Africa, India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, Australia and the United Kingdom, and has published widely on these areas. He is currently a roving ethnographer and anthropologist.

Roland Kapferer is a musician, documentary filmmaker, philosopher, lecturer in anthropology at Deakin and Melbourne universities, and now freelance. His current specialisms and publications concern new technologies, cinema, philosophy and critical ethnography.

NOTES

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1. The revelry in the Capitol might be conceived as a 'happening' in the sense of the art happening – a term initially coined by Allan Kaprow in the late 1950s in reference to the artist Jackson Pollock's 'action-painting', and becoming famous in the radical countercultural events of the 'swinging sixties'. Happenings were usually performance events with an a-logical diverse character that abandoned the structure of story and plot, and emphasized chance and incident. The idea was for artists to resist the structure and order of the art market, and many developed a resistance to the confinement of the system. Connected to Dada and other movements, this was an extremist art pushing against the limitations of gallerist order. The Burning Man festival, attended by many of the elite and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, is often given as a contemporary example of a happening. And, as Burning Man shows, a

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change can be traced from the early 1960s happenings into a corporatized and controlled activity. What we see in the Capitol riots is certainly a radical resistance to ordinary political process, but this time on the part of the right. Anti-systemic and revolutionary violence has been appropriated was originally published by extreme right groups and abandoned by a left that has lost its way – there is an interesting comparison to be made with the more left-wing oriented Occupy Now movement, which was in many respects much more pacified and contained and internal to the constraints of the system. The same might be said of the brand of left-wing criticism offered by Bernie Sanders and the facilitating, useful role he plays in the general orientation of the Democratic Party. Abstract Expressionism – the key invention of American artists – soon became a form of corporate art, being extremely expensive and hung in the lobbies of Wall Street head offices.

2. We refer here, of course, to the work of Karl Jaspers and his famous concept of the Axial Age. Jaspers claimed that a key moment in human existence or an 'axis of history' occurred around 500 BC, which is part of a spiritual process lasting between 800 and 200 BC. 'Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the Axial Period' (Jaspers 1953: 1). Jaspers proposes that in this period a striking parallel occurs across many regions of the world; new ways of thinking – a grand 'spiritualization' – emerge in China, India, Persia and the Greco-Roman world. For the first time human beings appear to themselves as 'specifically human', take cognizance of themselves in relation to a whole, and lift themselves up to Being as a whole (there are obvious connections here to the ontological thinking of Martin Heidegger). At this axial point in history, human beings break out of their self-imposed and self-contained closed limitations, and begin to 'modify' humanity – such 'modification' is now being pushed to extremes in the context of advanced biotechnological gene-editing projects such as CRISPR-Cas9. With advances in Artificial Intelligence drawing on massive data pools, human being becomes a resource and a source of power for a machinic order. Humans now become uncertain of their position, and open up to new possibilities and new potentials for themselves. This is the beginning of speculative thinking, which is also conceived by Jaspers as 'an age of simultaneous destruction and creation' (1953: 5). It is a violent period. This is a grand time that begins the questioning of human activity and the imposition of new meanings upon such activity. Specifically, for our purposes and in the context of this volume on extremism, Jaspers understood the Axial Period as the breakthrough of principles that up until that time had been operating only at the limit of humanity and in 'borderline situations'. We are suggesting that what crystallizes around Trump but also around many other events in the world occurring today is the beginning of a new axis in world history, and one that profoundly transmutes the key categories central to Jaspers' existentialist vision of humanity. Even the notion of 'world history' central to Jaspers' argument comes into question at this extreme moment.
3. The pioneering work of Victor Turner on the concept of the liminal in his *The Ritual Process* (1969) is essential. But, for our purposes and more specifically, it is perhaps better to use the concept of the liminoid, which Turner himself developed as a way to rethink the liminal in the context of post-industrial systems. (Turner 1974). Developing his idea of the liminal into the liminoid, he insists on the anti-structural elements and the independence of liminoidal moments that are spaces of radical creativity. According to Turner, the liminoid is a much more individual form – less about obligatory community practice, more about individual innovation and cre-

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ation. For Turner, the concept of the liminoid is his response to the condition of emerging large-scale post-industrial systems concomitant with an increase in wild subversive behaviour – what had previously been, in the small-scale situation, a 'subversive flicker' in 'the service of normativeness' now becomes quite something else, and ever-expanding. What he calls relatively late social processes – such as revolution or insurrection or new art movements with their emphasis on 'feeling' and originality – invert the original relation between the normative and the liminal in the small-scale society situation. In Western post-industrial societies, social criticism that had been pre-industrially liminal now becomes situationally central, and is no longer a matter of a brief interface between fixed structures. Turner suggests that this move to the liminoid may help us to think better about global systems and think about them in a holistic way. This, he says, is to move away from van Gennep's 'primary sense' of liminal phases and rethink the liminal in the context of a *totalizing* social historical shift. In a recent article, Genevieve Bell (2021) makes reference to Turner and van Gennep on liminality as a means of understanding the Covid-19 pandemic 'anthropologically'. She makes a facile use of the concept, simply using it to chat happily about passages through periods of state-imposed lockdowns. This is a kind of reactionary move that sucks all of the analytical force out of Turner's concept, and certainly misses its generative and creative sense. In another article for *MIT Technology Review*, 'We Need Mass Surveillance to Fight Covid-19 But it Doesn't Have to be Creepy', Bell admits the potentials for a Bentham-like digital panopticon developing as a result of the public health battle with the virus, but makes the case for a Singapore-inspired model of data collection that will allow a 'trade-off' between old models of privacy and a 'new social contract' negotiated in the digital age – a negotiation in which we will have to accept a 're-evaluation' of traditional notions of privacy. Such negotiation is a central platform of her 3A (Autonomy, Agency and Assurance) research institute based at the ANU in Canberra, Australia. Mass surveillance must be stripped of the notions of punishment and moralization previously associated with it, cleaned up and remade for successful public application. Far from anthropology as critique, Bell represents a corporate-anthropology totally complicit with the corporate-state transmutations we are discussing here. Her career trajectory, working between the corporate boardrooms of Intel and the Commonwealth Bank and university research institutes, captures the essence of the corporate-state direction. Her recent appointment as vice-chancellor at the Australian National University is the apotheosis of this movement – and hints at corporate interests, particularly in artificial intelligence and new digital technologies, moving into the heart of the university. This has some resonance with Martin Heidegger's sense that in the developing techno-capitalist order the key move is from scholarship to research.

4. In *Hatred of Democracy* (2014), Jacques Ranciere argues that democracy in essence acts as a supplement to the natural order of things and the titles people ordinarily possess. To the two great entitlements to govern – the right to govern by birth and the right to govern through power and wealth – Ranciere adds the supplementary title, or what he calls the anarchic title. This is, for him, the essence of democracy, 'this is what, of all things, democracy means' (ibid.: 46). The right to govern is based on a fundamental egalitarian equality, and the paradox of democracy is that no one has a legitimate right to govern – ultimately there is no real legitimate governor and all governments are in the end illegitimate. Those who govern must always be re-

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minded of their ultimate illegitimacy. Thus, the inegalitarian nature of a democracy is always grounded in the egalitarian. Following this line of thinking, it would be possible to say that the political leaders at the Capitol on 6 January were exposed to the violent and terrifying anarchy of the people that is at the base of their power.

5. Max Weber classically defines the state to be founded on the monopolization of violence. This is broadly the circumstance of the USA, except that the Founding Fathers were aware of what can be called Rousseau's paradox, the capacity of the state to contradict the democratic rights of citizens in society. Elaine Scarry, in *Thermonuclear Monarchy* (2014), argues that the 2nd Amendment of the US Constitution was introduced to enable the citizenry to ensure their democratic rights against the overpowering potential of the state. Scarry discusses the fact that the state now has overpowering potency with its independent control of nuclear armaments, giving a single nuclear submarine the ability to exact global destruction of a virtually unimaginable kind. In her argument, the 2nd Amendment is virtually pointless against the current devastating capacity of the state. The people have little ability to contend the power of the state democratically, which those invading the Capitol were in effect demonstrating.
6. In a fascinating video he released after the events at the Capitol, Schwarzenegger ironically reaffirms the figure of the macho white violent male he is attempting to denounce! This is a good example of the way in which extreme authoritarian elements of the emerging American corporate state combine with and supplement the liberal-democratic, 'intersectional' notions that are also a fundamental aspect of the corporate state.
7. Jacob Chansley, the QAnon Shaman, embodies the core notion of the plane of immanence – his body and costume is a postmodern hybrid of multiple directions, a constellation that articulates heterogeneous elements: he wore American-flag face paint, a fur hat made up of coyote skins and bison horns, and he displayed a bare torso covered in various Norse tattoos and runic letters – a large Mjolnir or Thor's Hammer and an image of the Norse tree Yggdrasil. Above these was a Valknot, a symbol possibly related to Odin and fallen warriors at the extreme point crossing into Valhalla, but now deterritorialized by white supremacists and referred to by the Anti-Defamation League as a 'hate symbol'. Chansley proudly offered his body up to the assembled media, screaming and bellowing his celebration of America: 'Land of the free, home of the brave!' This is a body as a dynamic system or, as Deleuze and Guattari might say, a body that goes to the limit, that is deterritorializing and reterritorializing, in flow, and whose component parts are not fixed but selected according to exterior relations. This is an extreme body – the new American individual multiplied and in extremis. In the aftermath of the Capitol events, Chansley increased his infamy when he refused to eat prison food because of his delicate physical constitution – he refused to eat for seven days until he was provided with proper organic food. This was the subject of many memes, and many commented on the irony of his claiming constitutional rights after attempting to impede the constitutional recognition of the president.
8. Trump made an official state visit to the United Kingdom on 13 July 2018. He was greeted in central London by tens of thousands of protestors and a now famous 6-metre-wide caricature blimp depicting Trump as a baby wearing a nappy. Along with the 'trump baby', protestors installed a 16-foot-high Trump robot sitting on a golden toilet sending tweets. Protestors wore hats and T-shirts emblazoned with

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Trump as humpty dumpty. The American actor John Lithgow released a poem entitled 'Trumpty Dumpty Wanted a Crown', which perfectly captured the liberal fear of what they felt would be Trump's post-constitutional and aristocratic power grab.

9. Some recent work, 'The Technopolar Moment' (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2021) by Ian Bremmer, a political scientist and founder of the Eurasia Group, argues for an emerging 'technopolar' order in which technology companies are recognized in their sovereignty and are given a central role in nation-state government – increasingly this is the meaning of the word 'governance', as Alain Joxe once pointed out in his classic text *Empire of Disorder* (Joxe 2002). More recently, Bremmer has written with Mustafa Suleyman, an artificial intelligence entrepreneur and founder of DeepMind, an artificial intelligence company acquired by Google in 2014. Their article 'The A.I. Power Paradox' (*Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2023) further develops the idea that technological companies are sovereign powers that must be given a central role in state systems, and that the development of AI – a domain almost entirely under the control of private companies – makes this absolutely necessary.
10. *The Truman Show* (1998), a film directed by Peter Weir, tells the story of Truman Burbank, an ordinary man living in a small town who discovers he is actually participating in a giant Big Brother style reality TV show – The Truman Show – and is surrounded by a world of cameras and 24-hour surveillance. His life is a television image. Human life is fully mediated and controlled at even the most intimate level by a giant corporation who sit outside in the sky manipulating and tweaking every moment of Truman's existence. The film is prescient. In a sense, human beings living their social relationships via social media have all become Truman, regularly tweaked and nudged by anonymous powers combing them for information. In an increasingly claustrophobic digital network plugged into Google Home or guided by Amazon Echo, and surrounded by police cameras and facial recognition technologies, the coils of the digital snake of control squeeze ever tighter (Deleuze 1992). As many on Facebook or the other digital platforms are finding today, Truman recognizes his apparent freedom to be total 'unfreedom' – highly controlled. In his final desperate attempt to escape from his home, which he now realizes is his prison, he battles his corporate masters who create storms and hurl lightning bolts like Zeus. Ultimately, he triumphs and manages to leave through a stage exit door located on the horizon of his giant movie-set world. Perhaps today the ever-increasing power of digital networks and a rapidly developing 'Google Earth' makes such escape much less likely. Weber's iron cage becomes a virtual data glove or a silicon universe.
11. It is possible that there has been too much focus on the notion of 'spaces' and 'worlds' as metaphors for understanding what is happening in the current convergence of human and machine. When the internet was first developing, the dominant metaphors were spatial – web-*sites*, cyber-*space*, the information super-*highway*, internet-*rooms* or town-*halls*. This radically new situation could only be made sense of using previous experiences. This was how the internet was made 'user-friendly'. The same can be said about the idea of digital 'worlds'. But just as the cinema was first limited by the theatre as a means of understanding it – strange new things called movies were shown as if they were theatrical performances or movie-*theatres* – more recent developments in technology seem to be leaning on previous systems to help people make sense of them. Perhaps the internet is not a space at all, or at least may not be fully attended to if understood as a place or a space? Software developers

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and computer engineers who design platforms and apps are designing augmented sense organs, and perception is being augmented or transmuted by new technologies. And when perception is augmented and stimulated in these strange new ways, certain shifts in human relations must occur. The internet is merged and entangled with hyper-stimulated nervous systems and bloodshot retinas, and may well be restructuring basic human orientations.

12. John Lanchester (2019) writes of the 'overlapping warnings' in the dystopic visions of both Orwell and Huxley in relation to the Trump presidency. He concludes that we exist today in a strange mix of Huxley's soma-like anti-depressants and sexual promiscuity combined with Orwell's post-sexual celibacy, never-ending war and increasingly authoritarian political leaders. In a sense, the different presidencies push out to greater extremes. If the Obama legacy was Donald Trump's anti-presidency then Trump's legacy is the Biden–Harris 'Community. Identity. Stability', which appears to be a return to the normalcy that many crave but promises, more, a hyper-normalization (see Adam Curtis).
13. There were 65.6 million postal votes cast in the 2020 election, many more than ever before. Overall, 159.7 million people voted. So 94.1 million voted non-virtually, which is only 25.8 million more than voted by post. The overall number of people eligible to vote was 257.6 million. Of course, a substantial number of eligible voters did not vote at all – 94.1 million. Many states are starting to limit voting to only postal votes – Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington no longer have any other means of voting except by post. Clearly there will be a move over the next few years to entirely virtual systems. There is an effort to move states toward postal voting despite the fact that the National Vote at Home Institute recently found that 32 states are missing major policies, infrastructure and best practice that will ensure secure mail ballot. 15 states cannot even verify voter addresses before they are sent out. 17 states do not have a voter verification system. And 30 states do not have options to fix problems in voter signatures and often voters have no way to fix signature mismatch.
14. A pandemic of profit. In the 2021 financial reports on tech company profits, Apple went beyond all analysts' expectations, reporting a record revenue and a net profit of $28.8bn. Sales rose in all regions, most of all in China. Apple's quarterly sales exceeded $100bn for the first time. Microsoft reported record sales. Facebook also reported record quarterly revenues and Tesla recorded its first ever profit of $721m on news of Biden's election. Amazon of course still maintains the biggest annual revenues. See *The Economist*, 30 January 2021.

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PART IV

EXTENSIONS

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CHAPTER 17



FINDING LIKENESS

Neural Plasticity and Ritual Experience

Robert Turner

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement.
>
> —T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Introduction

Before elaborating my hypothesis regarding how our brains may be transformed in rites of passage, I should provide some historical and personal background for my interest in this topic. I am trained as a physicist and applied mathematician, and I pursued a career of research in solid and liquid state physics until 1975, culminating in postdoctoral research at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge. At that point, needing a broader perspective on academic enquiry in order to clarify my life goals, I made an abrupt switch, enrolling in a two-year postgraduate diploma course in social anthropology offered by the Anthropology Department at University College London, then chaired by Mary Douglas. By that time (as now) under my father Victor Turner's influence, I considered social anthropology to be the most empirical of the social sciences, begging the fewest questions regarding human capacities for describing each other's actions and understandings.

Having some success in this course of study, I decided to undertake ethnographic fieldwork, on the theme of the conflict between legitimations based on traditional worldviews with competing legitimations based on

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conceptions of science. This research question was underpinned by Habermas's sociology of knowledge. I chose to make this study in a small Scottish seaside town with a very long history of commercial share fishing and very high church attendance, which was then dealing with the consequences of the recent installation of a huge coal-fired power station nearby. My project was funded for two years by the Social Science Research Council. The work was absorbing and rewarding. However, I found that I was continually struggling with the first rule of ethnography, which is to take nothing for granted. Although the culture (and indeed language) of the fishing families that I came to know was strikingly different from that of my own upbringing and experience, it was still far more familiar than that of a Dani tribesman (for instance), which made ethnographic objectivity a significant challenge. This experience precipitated the further reflection that without a certain bedrock of assumptions regarding the goals, intentions and ethical values of the people one met, accurate ethnography in any (perhaps more exotic) culture might be impossible. But who would be brave enough to itemize these assumptions? And in what theoretical language should these assumptions be framed?

It was at this time that I first heard about the novel technique of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which was starting to provide completely non-invasive images of living human brains. I also encountered the pioneering work of Nils Lassen and David Ingvar, who used injected radioactive tracers and an array of particle detectors to crudely map localized changes in blood flow in the brains of human volunteers while they performed specific tasks. It occurred to me that if MRI (an essentially non-invasive technique) could be adapted likewise to detect cerebral blood flow changes, it might be possible to compare human brain responses across cultures, and by this means to effect a kind of translation of human action, matching the meaning of actions by matching their concomitant patterns of brain activity. From such observations, I felt, some progress might be made towards creating a more objective ontology of human motives and actions, which could constitute a robust framework for cross-cultural comparisons.

Soon after this insight, I met and became friends with the great developmental psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen, then a professor at the University of Edinburgh. Having previously worked for years with Sperry in the field of human neuroscience, Trevarthen was happy to encourage me to pursue these ideas. When I discovered in 1983 that a position was advertised in the Physics Department of the University of Nottingham, with the opportunity of developing MRI with Peter Mansfield (later to be awarded the Nobel Prize), I applied for and, to my delight, got the job.

Meanwhile, in Charlottesville, Virginia, the anthropologist Victor Witter Turner was developing his own perspective on the human brain as the organ

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of culture. In his late paper, 'Body, Brain and Culture', published in 1985 in his post-mortem collection 'On the Edge of the Bush', he took inspiration from Laughlin and D'Aquili (Laughlin and D'Aquili 1974) and other early writers attempting to connect brain science with anthropology. In his first paragraph he wrote:

> The present essay is for me one of the most difficult I have ever attempted. This is because I am having to submit to question some of the axioms [that] anthropologists of my generation – and several subsequent generations – were taught to hallow. These axioms express the belief that all human behaviour is the result of social conditioning. Clearly a very great deal of it is, but gradually it has been borne home to me that there are inherent resistances to conditioning.

The paper went on to consider the possible relationship between the hemispheric specializations of the human brain and types of thought and action, whether ritual or instrumental. He supported these ideas by extensive neuroanatomical details. It is clear that a convergence had come about between my own concerns regarding the translation of culture, and my father's desire to ground some aspects of culture in brain activity.

This convergence, which included a growing academic link between my parents and Colwyn Trevarthen, culminated in discussions I had with Vic the night before he died, in December 1983 in his home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Still recovering from a serious heart attack that he had suffered eight weeks previously, he described his fieldwork during that spring in Israel, where he had attended the Samaritan Passover ceremony on Mount Gerizim, and told me about his ideas regarding brain laterality and social action. I described my acceptance to a faculty position enabling me to carry out MRI research at the University of Nottingham, and my ambition to make thought visible in the form of functional imaging of the human brain. The following morning, he had his final heart attack (in circumstances that I had dreamt about in considerable detail a few weeks earlier) and died, despite the best efforts of my mother Edie and myself to resuscitate him.

Two weeks later I returned to Scotland, moved house, and started my job at Nottingham University, understandably highly motivated to develop MRI to the point that it could be useful in cross-cultural comparison studies. The first goal was to determine whether MRI could capture the traces of thought, as manifested in cerebral blood flow changes. By 1991 my research had formed a vital step towards the discovery that the MRI contrast provided by the presence of deoxygenated blood could be used to track changes in brain activity, with a spatial resolution of about a millimetre and a temporal resolution of a few seconds, limited only by the slow response of blood flow to changes in neural electrical activity. By that time, working as a visiting scientist at the USA's National Institutes of Health, I performed a series of experiments using

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cats which led directly to the first demonstration of functional MRI (fMRI) in humans, performed by Ken Kwong and a team of physicists and radiologists at Harvard Medical School, with whom I was collaborating.

The next important challenge was to define precisely where such activity was taking place in the brain, defined in relation to our shared neuroanatomy, so that localized changes in brain activity could be compared across individual people, perhaps with different cultural or ethnic origins. By 1993 I had become aware that MRI was capable of distinguishing different areas of cerebral cortex by their internal structure – an insight shared by very few radiologists using MRI at that time, who had mostly come to regard MRI purely as a diagnostic modality, with little interest in its potential as a unique tool for neurological discovery science. The source of the visible distinction between cortical areas was their differing distributions of myelin, the lipid membrane that wraps and insulates neural pathways (axons), about which we shall hear more later.

I was soon appointed to a personal chair at the Institute of Neurology, in London, as leader in the technical development of functional MRI for the radically new approach to brain function research known as 'imaging neuroscience'. Besides directing my team of physicists, who supported five other groups – neurologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, neurolinguists and computational neuroscientists – in our new laboratory, I proceeded to educate myself about myelin and its enormous importance in brain MRI contrast, and to seek research funding for comprehensive mapping using myelin contrast of the cortical territories of living brain.

It was immediately clear that to discriminate these areas using their differential patterns of myelin – their myeloarchitecture – would require excellent spatial resolution, because the human cortex is never more than about 4 millimetres thick. To obtain a resolution of the needed half a millimetre in an acceptable scanning time would need a more powerful scanner than those available at that time, so I focused my efforts on encouraging MRI manufacturers to be ambitious in developing scanners operating at much higher magnetic field strengths.

In 2005, at a Society for Neuroscience meeting in Washington DC, I encountered by chance Douglas Fields, head of a myelin research laboratory at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. He told me that his lab was working on the hypothesis that the wrapping of axons by myelin is driven by experience, such that the passage of neural impulses down an unmyelinated axon would stimulate the relevant nearby cells to perform their wrapping task. It is now well recognized that this process is fundamental to the maturation of neurons, an important component of the hypothesis of this chapter.

Using a 4.7 tesla prototype scanner funded by the Wellcome Trust, I was able to make some progress in the visualization of cortical features, spe-

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cifically the identification of the human primary visual cortex at the back of the brain, but it was not until I was appointed in 2006 as director at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, in Leipzig, Germany, that I was able to bring this endeavour much further, having the immense benefit of the exclusive use of a well-engineered 7 tesla scanner, the major experimental resource of the my research department of about twenty-five staff.

I also set up a small histology laboratory there, under the care of an experienced neuroanatomist whom I had recruited, which enabled direct comparison between features of the MR image and the observable details of stained sections of cadaver brain. At 7 tesla we were quickly able to pick out striking details of myelin in the cerebral cortex of our volunteer subjects, as well as imaging their functional brain activity much more precisely. By 2011 we were able to publish a paper calling for more systematic myeloarchitectural studies of living human brain, a call soon echoed by David van Essen at Washington University in St. Louis, one of the world's leading neuroanatomists.

It was becoming increasingly apparent that human cognitive development occurs in parallel with the progressive myelination of crucially important neuronal circuits. Here was a mechanism that could account for the relative permanence of some acquired human skills and habits. But what remained lacking was an account of how transformations could take place in our behavioural repertoires, given the stability conferred by myelination. The work of my father, Vic, in appreciating the enormous power of ritual in effecting such gestalt changes in people during rites of passage, began to feel more and more relevant to this question.

Neuroanthropology

The relatively novel disciplines of cultural neuroscience and neuroanthropology (Domínguez Duque et al. 2009) have arisen from the recognition (from slightly differing perspectives) that a dialectical relationship exists between the brain of an individual human being and the cultural milieu within which that person lives. The regularities that define culture materially shape our brains, even from before birth, whilst our activities as human agents, directed by our brains, maintain the culture that provides definition to our social experiences (Turner R. 2002; Turner R. and Whitehead 2008).

Crucial to this theme is the well-demonstrated fact that our brains themselves are highly adaptable, or plastic, with neurobiological competences that capture and maintain the fruits of experience (Karni et al. 1995). As we develop and interact with each other, this shaping continues, both through

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unconscious probabilistic learning and by explicit instruction, tuning our brains adaptively to the kinds of social and physical events that we are most likely to encounter, under the constraints of our own physiological limitations and our technological artefacts. In a tight feedback relationship, our cultures are also produced by our brains, extending into the future from the social rules, languages, traditions, buildings and infrastructure that our ancestors constructed. Even if we are not conscious innovators, we maintain our cultures by our collective assent to their contents.

If this simple model told the entire story, our lives as social beings might play out in a static equilibrium. However, embedded within our cultures are institutions that can transform us as social beings by physically and rapidly transforming the organization of our brains. I will focus on this process of transformation, which can aptly be compared with the transition from caterpillar to butterfly. I will provide arguments that extend this conceptualization to include our mortality: the dynamic changes in our lives, and in our cultures. I will describe a hypothetical model for material changes in our brains that can occur during the liminal period of rites of passage, which could be tested using magnetic resonance imaging.

What Are Brains For?

To begin with, it is worth considering the special role that a brain plays in the organism in which it is located (Swanson 2011). The simplest animals, such as Hydra, possess only sensory and effector nerves. More evolved species add a layer of interneurons that mediate between these two classes, and at this point the structure that densely includes them can be called a brain. As brain research has progressed, it has become increasingly clear that the brain of even the simplest-brained animal fulfils the vital ethological needs for recording experiences, predicting future experiences on the basis of such recordings, and deciding on actions that help survival and reproduction. Neurons have the characteristic feature, conserved throughout evolution, that their structure and connections can be modified by experience, and can thereby record it. When we cooperate, we dramatically enhance our survival capabilities: we gain access to greatly improved methods for recording sharable experience, vastly more accurate capacities for predicting future events, and reliable guidelines for the formulation of productive decisions.

In the absence of external stimuli, neurons remain somewhat active, exchanging signals in the form of action potentials – and in so doing, predicting and preparing for what may probably occur next. Neurons, far more than any other type of cell, have immensely long processes, or neurites, extending

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many times the length of the central nuclear part (soma) of the cell, and making highly specific connections with other, more distant, neurons. Thus neurons have the capacity to pool data characterizing the present state of the organism and, collectively, to generate commands that control its actions, in relation to its sensations and desired future state.

With a simple animal it is easy to understand how its complement of neural types, its pattern of neural connections, and its ethological and environmental context, limit its action repertoire within a finite set of choices consistent with survival and reproductive success. A classic example is provided by Tinbergen (1951) in which he describes the behavioural repertoire of the stickleback fish, which has about ten million neurons. The pattern of connections, or connectome, of the brain of the larval zebrafish has recently been fully delineated (Hildebrand et al. 2017), which will enable plausible neural modelling of the action repertoires of simple fish. An intriguing reflection on the importance of such repertoires is that the animal's conspecifics need somehow to recognize its actions, in order to respond appropriately – for instance, the gravid female stickleback must know that it should follow the male into the nest tunnel, so that mating can take place. Thus evolutionary pressure can result in increasingly stereotypical repertoires.

Even though we humans have vastly larger brains than sticklebacks, the same evolutionary pressures apply. As social beings we require to be understood, in order to thrive, survive and multiply. Such tacit and explicit understandings are facilitated by the fact that almost all of our actions are governed by rules and regularities, of many of which we are happily unaware, but without which we should be unable to interpret and predict each other's actions. In general terms, this myriad of rules for action forms the basis of human knowledge. (Elements of such knowledge that are sharable by people can fairly be described as 'scientific knowledge'.)

In the research field of cognitive neuroscience, the brain activity that accompanies the formulation of the likelihood of future events is described as 'predictive coding' (Rao and Ballard 1999). In addition to receiving input from neural sensors and controlling motor outputs, any assemblage of neurons that is complex enough to be described as a brain must have the capability of predicting future events, and planning responses accordingly. For instance, identification of objects of sensory experience can be performed with high efficiency when a brain region can rapidly compare the afferent signals arriving from sensory organs (such as the eye) with a restricted set of possibilities stored in memory – Bayesian priors – and report accordingly to other brain areas, even when only a small number of discriminating signals have been received. This approach was first hinted at by Richard Gregory (1966) and has been embodied in neural network models, such as recurrent neural networks (Bitzer and Kiebel 2012; Bastos et al. 2012).

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In this context, the concept of prediction error, as a brain signal of survival importance, has been explored in some depth. Friston and Stephan (2007) have formulated a global model of the relationship of a brain to its environment which gives a central place to this concept, equivalent to surprise, using the statistical mechanical metaphor of 'free energy'. He argues that many measurable characteristics of brain function can be viewed as a process of minimization of this free energy. In his sense of the term, human cultures can be seen to operate as a collective means to minimize free energy for all participants.

What Is Culture?

The concept of 'culture' is notoriously contestable, and a wide range of definitions have been proposed and advocated across the social sciences and humanities. To be clear, I define culture as what people know, tacitly or explicitly, that enables them to pursue their lives in a way that is acceptable to those around them (Turner R. 2002). The culture of an interacting group of humans thus comprises their beliefs, rituals, myths, history, morals and language. It also includes their power relations, exchange relations and kinship system. Finally, it includes their skills, aesthetic principles and communicative genres, such as music, poetry, theatre, carnival, masque and dance. A culture is shared by a human group, and being non-instinctive and not genetically inherited, must be learned by every person in order for him or her to be accepted as a competent member. Thus, culturally informed action is inevitably a tiny proportion of all possible human action, and can be described as quite stereotyped.

As a means of classifying and identifying human experiences, culture greatly helps people to make decisions. Even our very large and complex human brains are probably incapable of the task of reinventing our lived-in worlds at every passing second. Instead of an infinite range of possibilities, possible options are narrowed down to discrete alternatives, each of which carries describable weights and consequences that can somehow be predicted. To the extent that people classify themselves and each other as occupying a particular social status, specific ranges of actions and interactions are mapped out for them. Seen as predictive coding, a brain's planning activity, forming expectations of future experience, has only to deal with a manageable number of feasible outcomes.

This much-needed simplification requires validation by some form of social consensus. By presenting a finite and therefore manageable system of meaningful options, cultures provide a framework within which cooperation is easy. This all-important cooperation entails trust, the ability to think

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alike, allowing the goals and methods of actions to remain largely tacit and thus avoiding repeated commands or explanations. But how do we come to think alike? I argue that we learn to usefully inhabit the same social, mental and physiological worlds when our feelings and thoughts become entrained with those of our companions. To be perceived as a viable option, a proposed action must make sense in the cultural context. One would be considered foolish to hope to be understood if speaking Swahili in a Kyoto hostess bar. Our shared background cultural knowledge protects us continually from performing such meaningless actions. The question then arises, how is such a consensus built?

Entrainment

On a summer's afternoon in Paradise, a nature reserve on the banks of the Cam, a passer-by may often enjoy the sight of a group of nine domestic white geese, now living ferally. Without any obvious external command, all nine geese can be seen to coordinate their activities, so that at any given time they are all doing the same thing – grazing on the meadow, preening themselves, having a nap with head under wing, honking with excitement or alarm, or extending their long and graceful necks down to the river for a drink. Their actions are not usually precisely synchronized, but they stay within eyesight of each other, residing year round within a 100-metre stretch of river bank.

Such behavioural synchrony can be observed in all social animals, including us. It must therefore be inferred that this predisposition to what may be called 'social entrainment' confers evolutionary fitness, and that it is firmly encoded in specific brain circuitry. Clearly this biological predilection underlies the existence of social facts, to use Durkheim's term.

Recent neuropsychological research on music and infancy sheds further light on this phenomenon. A study by Jessica Phillips-Silver and Peter Keller published in 2012 investigated musical chorusing and turn-taking: 'When individuals join together in almost any musical behaviour, ranging from a simple tune shared between a young child and caregiver, to a rhythmically complex performance of a Cuban jazz band, their joint action is characterized by entrainment'. The authors distinguish two kinds of entrainment, temporal and affective. We often experience temporal musical entrainment in the automatic, even unconscious nodding of the head, or tapping of the hand or foot, when we hear music. Even when such overt motion is repressed or absent, activity in motor areas of the brain recorded by electroencephalography or functional magnetic resonance imaging reveals this shared entrainment (Merchant et al. 2015).

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Affective entrainment, on the other hand, involves the formation of interpersonal bonds, and can emerge from many shared activities, including vicarious sharing (Konvalinka et al. 2011). Most immediately, it arises from the pleasure in moving the body to music and being in time with others. How much the precision of synchrony affects the intensity of such entrainment remains to be discovered. It is clear that early musical interactions between infants and their caregivers can provide the first experiences of affective and temporal entrainment (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009), often supported by their coordinated body motion (Phillips-Silver and Trainor 2005). Entrainment of this kind must be intrinsically rewarding. Indeed, it has been shown that the 'reward' neurotransmitter dopamine drives entrainment to the circadian cycle (Baba, DeBruyne and Tosini 2017).

Similar brain processes are likely to be involved in many human activities, ranging from dancing, choral singing, saying prayers together, marching, and forming the audience at concerts and parades. What these situations have in common is their unambiguous framing, providing a context in which identical performance becomes unproblematic, indeed desirable. Entrainment with one's fellow participants is insidiously invited, as well as superveningly compelled. A sense of affective membership with other participants, knowing that they are thinking and acting the same as oneself, is very likely to begin and grow.

Brain Plasticity

Mammalian brains comprise grey matter, which contains the cell bodies of neurons and almost all of their points of connection, and white matter, formed by the long output fibres that join neurons. It is beyond question that repetition of neural activity results in the strengthening of neural circuits, as described by Hebb (1949), a result which is variously denoted as learning, memory, adaptation or neural plasticity. This can involve three distinct processes. The first two such processes take place where separate neurons meet, and occur within the grey matter. The output fibres of a given neuron, generally small in number, are called axons, and its profuse input fibres are called dendrites. Axons connect with dendrites at synapses, where their electrical neural signals (action potentials) are transmitted from axon to dendrite by the release of specific chemicals such as glutamate or dopamine. In the first instance, repeated synaptic activity alters the biochemistry of the synapse and results in altered synaptic performance, known as long-term potentiation or depression, which can be maintained over timescales from minutes to hours. Over a similar timescale, additional synapses may be created by the

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growth and extension of dendrites, and terminal branches of axons, to form new contacts with available axons.

Strikingly, these processes whereby neurons adapt their connectivity via experience are largely reversible. If potentiated synapses do not find further use, their potentiation is lost. Newly sprouted arborizations of dendrites can simply be reabsorbed, together with their new synapses (e.g. Lai, Adler and Gan 2018).

The third process that changes brain connectivity is the transformation of axons through their wrapping by myelin, a membrane structure with a highly specific composition that consists mainly of a blend of lipid molecules, importantly including cholesterol. Myelination greatly improves the efficiency of an axon, increasing by up to thirtyfold the speed with which an action potential travels, and reducing the axon's energy requirements. For a given axonal fibre bundle, myelination can take a few days to complete and is generally irreversible. The traffic of neuronal signals between different brain regions is critically determined by the myelination of their connecting axons (Chorghay et al. 2018).

The major neural pathways throughout our brains thus develop in a bootstrapping fashion, building sequentially on what has already been established (Guillery 2005). Even in our late teens, the process is not yet complete in the white matter of the frontal lobes, and increases in myelination have been observed in adult brain. Combining faster transmission with a shorter recovery time gives a three-thousand-fold increase between infancy and adulthood in the brain's computational bandwidth, thereby enabling extensive and elaborate networking among brain regions. Crucially, myelination inhibits local dendritic and axonal arborization, and prevents formation of further synapses along the length of the axon (Chiquet 1989). Thus it casts in stone the connections supplied by that axon.

The fundamental point here is that myelination is largely driven by experience (Fields 2015). It regularly proceeds when the cells responsible for myelin formation, oligodendrocytes, receive chemical signals that action potentials are passing along nearby axons. The oligodendrocyte gets busy, wrapping a sheet of myelin in several precise layers around the axon, over a period of a few hours. The resulting increase of action potential traffic encourages myelination of more axons, which in turn improves the coupling of the brain areas that the pathway connects, and thereby enables more action potentials to be transmitted. Repetition of experiences or actions further durably consolidates and structures such pathways. Myelin protects these vital circuits. Its random and encroaching loss in multiple sclerosis, devoured by the white cells that are supposed to protect us, bitterly strips a person of one faculty after another until death supervenes. During this agonizing process,

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oligodendrocyte precursors repeatedly but vainly attempt to remyelinate the bare axons.

In human brains, the process of systematic myelination is quite slow. At birth, only a few axons are yet myelinated, mainly in the primary visual and motor pathways (Flechsig 1920). Much of the white matter is at least partly myelinated by age four, but the white matter in the prefrontal lobes continues to increase its myelination until one's early twenties (Giedd 2015). Even in fully adult brains, it has been estimated that a reserve of perhaps 30 per cent of white matter axons remain unmyelinated. Giedd cogently argues that this particularly human characteristic – no other primates take so long for their brains to mature – gives us an evolutionary advantage in that our brains remain relatively plastic and adaptable at an age when we are able to participate in a wide range of experiences, and to form our own plans and agendas in relation to them.

However, it must be noted that in regard to social stability and trust, permanence in networks relating to social interactions is highly desirable (Olsson et al. 2018). The durability provided by myelination is a critical feature of the laboriously configured neural circuits that embody our expectations, and enable predictions and planning.

But we age. Our lives have chapters, acts in our own plays (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II). We move from role to role, and our movement is marked, in every human culture. Somehow cognitive and emotional switching must be achievable, in the whole person, or social expectations will be disappointed and we will not thrive. How can myelin-protected neural circuits be rearranged? Do our human brains have the resources to undergo the systematic and collective transformations that may result from entrainment? How do we deal with a situation that is not part of our previous personal experience?

Ritual, Entrainment and Liminal Status

The most frequently discussed human situations in which participants find themselves in a liminal condition occur in the course of rituals, which I define as prescribed sequences or processes of collective human action, the features of which generally change only slowly over time. Not all rituals are markers of transitions of social status, though many may reinforce the sense of inclusion in a community or category initially brought about by a rite of passage. To avoid complication, I will refrain from discussing closely associated human experiences, for instance the liminoid status described by Victor Turner (1974), and focus on how the liminal period is established as a social context within ritual, which I consider to be particularly significant for driv-

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ing important changes in the brain organization of the participants (Turner R. 2015).

The frame of ritual provides an additional, or indeed alternative, set of norms for actions, including relaxation of normal restrictions, and presumes equality for those undergoing the rite of passage. The rite generally encompasses powerful symbolic acts, rhythmic sounds and music, specific aromas, and coordinated movements of a dance-like nature. Special foods may also feature as part of the intense transformational experience. The combination of sensory input is novel and engrossing. Often the participants are expected to discipline themselves, as physical stamina may be required to carry out the performance of the ritual. When a group of people are collectively subjected to such rituals, not only will they experience liminal status, but in their betwixt-and-between state they may well enjoy communitas (Turner E. 2012: 176–96).

It is plausible to suggest that the liminal periods experienced by protagonists in most rites of passage have particular importance in enabling a permanent consolidation of neural pathways. 'For individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness' (Turner V. 1967). During the liminal state, patterns of brain connectivity may be regarded as undergoing a gestalt switch, in which the components remain much the same, but the internal logic of cognitive inference is transformed, as previously unmyelinated axonal pathways are massively brought into play.

The collective experience of entrainment (Trost, Labbé and Grandjean 2017) may be fundamental to the entry into the liminal state. The convergence of normative and orectic aspects of the dramatic scenarios of ritual provides a compelling and convincing invitation to think with and to feel with the other participants. The powerful salience of such experiences makes them unforgettable, and our brains become engraved with a new, shared, culturally distinctive design.

The important point is that these are circumstances in which one can reasonably expect major reconfiguration of neural circuits in the brain, a reorganization that must be durable to have any value for survival. This occurs most particularly in social contexts of liminality, when custom and habit become at best irrelevant, when the masks of social competence are dropped, when the present becomes far more important than the past or future. In these circumstances, our neural circuits scramble to reconfigure themselves, to adapt to the novel reality – but into patterns that are common across the participants, who share intense and compelling experiences.

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Experimental Validation

Curiously enough, a MedLine search for 'ritual and myelin' gives no hits whatsoever. But to perform an experiment that could empirically demonstrate changes in myelin directly related to the experience of a rite of passage is by no means impossible. The most important source of contrast in magnetic resonance images of the brain happens to be myelin. One of the most fundamental of nuclear magnetic resonance parameters, the longitudinal relaxation time T1 provides a quantitative index of the degree of myelination (Stüber et al. 2014). Development of infant brains can be monitored by sequential mapping of this parameter (Lebenberg et al. 2019), and changes in T1 due to training specific to known white matter pathways has been measured in adult brains (Caeyenberghs et al. 2016).

As social organization and social stability vitally depend on the effectiveness of rites of passage, which are far too easily taken for granted, it is surprising that there has been no experimental exploration of this universal human institution.

Conclusions

Decision making for action requires discrete options. For actions to make beneficial sense to social animals, such as humans, their objectives need to be identifiable and recognizable. Collectively we build cultures, comprising shared and assimilated knowledge that provides such definable options. Operationally, such knowledge is embedded in patterns of connections in our central nervous systems, which are rendered durable by the selective myelination of the most vital pathways. Retrieval of knowledge, as a performance, comes about when neural activity that helped to consolidate these pathways is replayed, either by environmental triggers, or by personal recall, voluntary or involuntary. Our human lives progress through discrete stages, such that the stage that we have reached defines the set of choices and options that we can expect.

As we move into a different stage, our beings must be transformed to make use of these choices. The neural rewiring that this entails is complex and difficult. Ritual provides a context for transformation, by processes of entrainment brought about by intense multisensory experiences, collectively organized for those undergoing social transformation by others who have already gained social maturity. To bring about effective transformation, entrainment must take place in liminal contexts, which open up the possibility of change and also powerfully remind the protagonists of their fundamental likeness as human beings. Such transformations are able to engender the rewiring of brain

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connections, forming fresh shared social gestalts, by means of the extensive reserves of brain plasticity embodied in our not-yet-myelinated axons.

Experimental validation of the hypothesis I have described has not yet been explored, although the techniques required are already widely available.

Robert Turner played a key role in the invention of actively shielded gradient coils used widely in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), in the development of diffusion-weighted imaging of human brain, and in the discovery of functional MRI by measurement of the effects of blood oxygenation changes. He studied maths and physics at Cornell University and completed his doctorate in physics at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Following three years postdoctoral physics research at the Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, he attended University College London, where he obtained a postgraduate diploma in social anthropology. After ethnographic fieldwork in a Scottish fishing village, funded by the Social Science Research Council, he returned to physics, which he taught for four years at Napier College, Edinburgh. Appointed as a lecturer at Nottingham University from 1984 until 1988, he built his own MRI scanner, designed and built gradient coils for MRI, and assisted Sir Peter Mansfield in the development of snapshot echo-planar MRI. Between 1988 and 1994, he was a visiting scientist at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He then became a Wellcome Principal Research Fellow and professor at the Functional Imaging Laboratory of the Institute of Neurology. He was director, from 2006 until 2014, of the Department of Neurophysics at the Max-Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Germany. Now living in Cambridge, England, he is emeritus director at the Max-Planck-Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, and honorary professor in the Physics Department, University of Nottingham, and in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. In 2020 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine.

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AFTERWORD



LIMINALITY

Contemplating the Hypothetically Potent Conjunction of the Social and the Physical

Don Handelman

> [We are] stuck at the threshold of one of the most stubborn of all dualisms – the animate/inanimate dualism.
>
> —Karen Barad, *Intra-active Entanglements*

In a late, brief essay, Roy Wagner (2018: 85) refers to liminality as perhaps the most significant of Victor Turner's discoveries. Wagner compares liminality to energy, stating that, 'liminality and energy share the same description and can be used interchangeably for that reason. Both are invisible to the unpracticed eye and must be inferred from their effect on other things, like quantum singularities [are]'. Calling liminality a discovery is especially provocative, because in anthropology we usually reserve discovery for ethnographic facts that we uncover through the grounds of living of actual peoples. We discover the factual that we can substantiate, at least partially, through ethnography. We are rarely said to discover a concept or a theory, as these are most often given the status of meta-propositions and/or epistemologies emerging from research results that are highly conditional on a host of changing factors. By referring to liminality as a discovery, Wagner gives to liminality a factual status, even if, as he maintains, this can only be identified after it is gone (like a spark of energy or a bolt of lightning).

Nonetheless, by implying factuality to liminality, the inference is that liminality exists. Put more directly, liminality is a phenomenon without phenomenality, paradoxical through and through, existing through traces, like the shadows it casts or the light it projects. Yet if liminality may exist

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then we are enjoined to ask just what this may be. I am not concerned here with a definition of liminality, as definitions exist to obviate themselves (and so are often called 'working definitions', as if this excuses their vulnerability). Nor do the descriptive particulars of what human beings do with and through liminality occupy me here, this has been discussed endlessly ever since Turner (1967) published his seminal article, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage', half a century ago.

Through liminality human beings meet qualities or forces that deny the stability of worlds being made and shaped as human. More than this, these forces or qualities destroy the regularizing, stabilizing qualities of the human. Perhaps we can say that liminality is substantial in what it does to the substantiality of the phenomenal. I previously argued that the medium of liminality is densely fluid, a corrosive solvent that is inherently non-stable, or, as stability is irrelevant to liminality, a-stable (Handelman 1985: 353).[1] At that time, I thought that the force of liminality dissolves the phenomenal. Considered this way, liminality is less anti-phenomenal than it is a-phenomenal. That is, liminality seems to exist apart from the phenomenal (aside from those moments during which it penetrates and concentrates within the phenomenal). I no longer fully accept this formulation, for the liminal may be present continuously within the phenomenal, but less intensely and densely. Nonetheless the qualities or forces of liminality are – yet are not quite – a human formation in any total and direct sense, even though the occasioning of liminality is likely to be just this.

One way of thinking about qualities of liminality is through the biosocial and human capacities to activate energies of the somatic mind-body (and body-mind), sometimes in particular settings and contexts, and sometimes not. Anthropologists have documented and analysed a multitude of sociocultural phenomena that intimate or hint at the generation and transmission of energetic qualities that, in somatic concert, aid in or enable the accomplishment of unusual activities (see, for example, Katz 1982; Handelman 1984; Greenfield 2005; Bar-on Cohen 2009).[2] So, too, theorists have argued for relationships between the somatic body and the life-giving energetic qualities of the biosphere (cf. Sato 2012, on photosynthetic processes). Less considered are the possible connections between energy in a more cosmic sense and liminality, and, thus, the hypothetical conjunction of somatic and cosmic energies within liminality.

Liminality: In the Weak Sense, In the Strong Sense

In describing liminality as a human yet not quite human formation, I am referring only to one sort of the liminal. Since Turner published his ideas on

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the liminal, two elementary senses of liminality have emerged: let me call them the weak sense and the strong sense. The weak sense is entirely social in its grounding and composition. The weak sense derives from Turner's positing of the liminal as the duration betwixt and between one social condition of being and the becoming of another. This is the period during which the social being of a person is taken apart and swept away, and that person is initiated to take on and to enter into a new condition of being. Turner used this formulation to discuss the changes in personhood (and/or identity) undergone during *rites de passage*, on the premise that in so many of these rituals the liminal phase is one of high uncertainty, when the person is neither one kind of being nor another; or is perhaps even a being without social grounding, though not without an existential one. In saying that this is a time of uncertainty, I emphasize that for the individuals undergoing change the directional option is often known – but not the way or ways of getting there. The choice of the direction of personhood's movement is known to the candidates, yet not what will occur along the way that may well transform them into another kind (generally speaking) of being.

Yet liminality as a duration that is fraught with uncertainty, because it is betwixt one kind of organization of human beings and another, is also so easy to apply to a multitude of personal crises, social situations and historical conditions, from the micro- to the macro-social, or indeed to any social formations that seem to be going through changes in which the outcomes are unclear, even though these outcomes – as possibilities of the situation – can be more or less spelled out, and guessed at to some extent. As one example, the anthropologist Susan Sered describes the Jewish 'community' in Palestine during the 1940s as being in a condition of 'cultural upheaval', which she refers to as one of 'societal liminality' (Sered 1989: 27). During this period, Sered argues, when old symbols fell into desuetude and new ones had yet to crystallize, there was an increase in pilgrimage visits to shrines of the saints. In this way pilgrims tried to make sense of their current realities by linking these to sacred foundations. Sered states further: 'It seems to me that the notion of liminality can also apply to a society – to people who, for political or other reasons, are in between two states or statuses' (ibid.: 39).

By calling this liminality's weak sense I am not saying that this application is irrelevant; not at all. I am arguing, however, that this usage tends strongly to the *passive*, of liminality treated analytically as an indefinite context within which a variety of social forces are freed in some sense from institutional constraints, and so are enabled to struggle for primacy in the forming of what may be different, even very different, social orderings. In referring to an 'indefinite context', I mean one that is more oceanic in its possibility, or, in Turner's terms, that is subjunctive in tense (and in tenseness). Here liminality makes possible, or perhaps attracts, a multiplicity of relatively un-

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constrained social forces. As an indefinite context, liminality may entertain unusual confluences of and conflicts among social forces, yet it does not contribute actively to their interplays. In its weak sense, liminality is more of the possible and less of the potential, and it is hardly potent.

By contrast, Wagner compares liminality to energy, saying that they are both described as invisible, and so can only be known by their effects. The two can therefore be used interchangeably. Wagner indeed intimates that liminality *is* energy. And energy, I would think, is *active*, not passive. Energy is energetic. Following this line of flight, one may well ask what this energy might be and from whence it might come or derive. One could well ask, yet without expecting any clear-cut answer, as the trajectory of the question likely skirts the interface of the human and the a-human, and the resonances amongst these. This positioning is not so far from that of Turner: 'In Turner's conceptualization, the liminal is a chaotic vortex of counteracting forces, a singularity, perhaps outside space and time, a re-originating point, a wellspring of potential that moreover is not necessarily committed in any particular direction . . . that is, until it is realized into existence' (Kapferer 2019: 2).

Personally, I think the issue is worth entering into, and in the sections that follow I will suggest one way of thinking about this problematic, while acknowledging there are many others. The connections I will suggest are indeed speculative, even wildly so. Here I can only offer an outline, and my discussion closes without any climactic formulation. Nevertheless, addressing the issue may point in directions that should likely be thought on, even if their purview is outside the usual perspectives of sociocultural anthropology – and, too, the abductive imagination might even come to the fore.

I have previously intimated that liminality cannot be comprehended through the social *qua* social alone (Handelman 1985).[3] The potency of liminality in its strong sense is not mystical, at least not in the sense of being anti-rational or un-rational, though it may be a-rational, thereby denying the dualism of rationality and its converse. Yet neither is this potency material. Here I am addressing a position that has been a linchpin of modern sociocultural anthropology, to wit that cultural phenomena in all their complexities are always formed and shaped by human beings through their own practices and through their own making of worlds of existence: that the human is responsible for the human and that this is the domain of study of the anthropologist; and that we study the human forming of social ordering (a phrasing demanding that the social always be understood in the active tense). I will not depart from this, yet neither will I accept it fully, as I think that liminality in its strong sense points to other kinds of confluence of the social and the supra-social (and of the infra-human).

Existing as we do during our recognition of the Anthropocene, scholars of social orderings are comprehending more acutely that the social is not sim-

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ply the linear outcome of and product of the actions of human beings; and, moreover, that the sociocultural does not only depend for its survival on the sociocultural itself. We are coming to comprehend (or at least to intuit) the complex interdependencies of the social, the biological (the somatic and the infra-human), and the physical (supra-social) worlds of our existence.[4] This likely indicates that the physical world (indeed, forces and dynamics at play in the universe) and the biological body (at the molecular level) are relevant to how the social can and cannot organize and comport itself, as it were; and, in turn, that we, as agents who are shaped and produced by the social, ignore these factors at our own risk. The sociocultural does not exist straightforwardly through its own exceptionalism. Thus, in my understanding, liminality in its strong sense may need to be addressed in and through various conjunctures of the physical, the social and the biological, though as stated I do not address the latter here. I emphasize that in the sections that follow I am not concerned with the (multiple) sciences and their validities as such, but rather with the ways in which the ideas involved may give us an inkling into relationships between the physical cosmos and organic life, including the human.

The rest of this chapter will be divided into five sections. The first will bring in Ilya Prigogine's theorizing that the increasing entropic complexity of the universe created emergent conditions of far-from-equilibrium, and that these indeterminate conditions enabled fluctuations and variations in the continuing emergence of the cosmos. For Prigogine, increasing entropy is associated with the development of increasing cosmic complexity rather than with the heat death of the universe. Prigogine argues further that organic life could only come into existence through conditions that are far-from-equilibrium. Prigogine's theorizing aligns the evolution of the universe with that of organic life, with entropy as, if not renewable, then in a way returnable.

The second section will suggest that the occupancy of certain sociocultural niches in traditional social orders are limited temporally, and that through time the occupants of these niches undergo a kind of dissipation in their occupancy that, if not checked, will produce increasing fluctuations in the ordering of the social that will disrupt its stability. Rites of passage solve this dilemma by transforming the occupants of such a niche and thereby moving these transformed beings into another. So, too, sociocultural orderings, when thought to reach such increasing dissipative fluctuations in their ordering that they threaten their capacity to sustain themselves, are then made to undergo rituals that transform them anew. These rituals are infused with the strong sense of liminality, and in the main their transformations are accomplished through the liminal.

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The third section will argue that indeterminacy (including non-equilibrium) underlies all sociocultural ordering. Human beings must work constantly to prevent themselves and others from tumbling, as it were, into indeterminate conditions that threaten understandings and social relations. I suggest that indeterminacy is equivalent to liminality in its strong sense, and that the two can be used interchangeably. As indeterminacy, liminality thus becomes a profoundly widespread a-phenomenon in ongoing, human sociocultural ordering, yet one that can also be concentrated and focused in certain zones of transformation, like the liminal phase in ritual.

Prigogine's theory of far-from-equilibrium conditions and the creation of organic life is often identified with chaos theory (Hayles 1990: 91–114). It thus differs from quantum physics, yet also overlaps with this in its emphasis on the potentiality of the increasing complexity of the evolving cosmos.

In the fourth section I will bring in Karen Barad's interpretation of quantum physicist Niels Bohr's indeterminacy ontology, which argues that quantum indeterminacy is profoundly energetic, precedes determinacy, and constitutes a radical opening to the potentiality that is critical to the forming of all form. This helps to distinguish, relatively speaking, indeterminacy from uncertainty, though understanding that they flow into one another. Indeterminacy is given powerful positioning in the forming of human social ordering and its struggles to order entropic fluctuations. Given that I identify indeterminacy with the strong sense of liminality, this also gives a foundational (and paradoxical) status to liminality in human social ordering.

The final section will find a philosophical continuation of quantum field theory through Deleuze and Guattari's theorizing of the relationship between a virtual cosmos, the plane of immanence and, I add, the forming of the social. Deleuze appears to have been powerfully influenced in his thinking on the virtual by quantum physics. In his conception the virtual is chaotic and energetic, and is sheer potentiality – in other words, it is indeterminate. In relation to the human, the plane of immanence continues the virtual, but is less chaotic and more consistent, and serves to enable human beings to turn potentiality into social relatedness. Thus liminality in its strong sense – identified with indeterminacy and with the potent power to dissolve phenomenal reality – is given a kind of entrée into the social through the virtual and its planes of immanence.

Cosmic Conditions of Far-From-Equilibrium and Organic Life

Ilya Prigogine – a Nobel laureate for his research on non-equilibrium thermodynamics and conditions far-from-equilibrium – links the evolution of

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the physical universe to the emergence of organic life.[5] In Prigogine's theory there was no singularity like the Big Bang that created the universe. Instead, there was an empty (quantum), unstable universe that perhaps was pure potentiality, the potential existence of matter, yet without matter. This unstable void broke down, and substance, matter, came into existence; and with matter, so too entropy. Matter moved within itself and within the universe as the bearer of entropy (Magnani 2016: 250). Time actualized with the entropic movement of matter, and time moved like an arrow, linearly and irreversibly (Prigogine and Stengers 1984). As Magnani comments: 'The meaning of irreversibility [in physics] undergoes a radical change since irreversibility should no longer be linked to an evolution that leads inexorably toward an inert state of the universe (thermic death), but to its birth, or perhaps to an eternal succession of universes that are born everywhere and that head toward the infinite' (Magnani 2016: 250). In other words, the universe moves towards increasing complexity and its concomitant issues of organization.

It is precisely the irreversibility of the arrow of time that makes futurity open-ended and unknown. Irreversible time gives the universe a changing, historical existence. As the sociologist Barbara Adam (1998: 214) states succinctly, Prigogine established this temporal movement of the universe 'as a law of nature; and with it he changed the very meaning of the nature of a scientific law . . . laws themselves come to be understood as developing; and reversibility, far from being the most fundamental aspect of nature, comes to be recognized as a product of the consciousness of the human observer'.[6]

The evolving complexity of the universe through lengthy durations of increasing entropy produces what Prigogine terms 'conditions-far-from-equilibrium', through which increasingly entropic fluctuations or dissipations come into existence. Through these conditions the universe is in continuous emergence, the dynamics of which amplify these fluctuations while ordering their disorder, but at higher levels of organization (Mosko 2005: 33). The irreversible, directional movement of the entropic universe produces higher levels of organization through the elaboration of its fluctuations. It is important to emphasize that with Prigogine's arrow of time the multiplicities that emerge from the indeterminacy of conditions-far-from-equilibrium are not undone. Prigogine states this as follows: 'Irreversible processes [associated with the arrow of time] are as real as reversible processes described by the fundamental laws of physics; they do not correspond to approximations added to the basic laws. Irreversible processes play a fundamental constructive role in nature' (Prigogine 1997: 27).

Organic life emerged in conditions-far-from-equilibrium. As Prigogine puts this: 'Life is possible only in a non-equilibrium universe' (ibid.: 26–27). Prigogine's theorizing aligns the time of the evolving universe with the time

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through which the organic evolves. Perhaps we can say that all forms in the universe are time-full, yet are indeterministic. Nonetheless there remains the profound problematic 'of the emergence of biotic organization from inorganic sources' (Wicken 1981: 132).

Liminality and Entropy

Organic life, emerging through conditions far-from-equilibrium, is permeated by entropic fluctuation. Yet these inevitable movements of instability are countered through the thrust of life – of existence of every kind – towards regeneration. Edmund Leach (1962) excoriated James Frazer for dabbling in 'butterfly collecting' in his classic, *The Golden Bough*. For Frazer – indeed a compiler of secondary and literary anecdotal descriptions rather than an analytical ethnographer thinking through self-collected and often self-experienced ethnographic details – death and rebirth together constitute the elementary rhythm of life, human and natural, and, no less, their interconnectedness. Yet Frazer reminds us over and again of the significance of the human dynamics of entropy.

The second law of thermodynamics in classical physics demands that physical systems of the universe expend energy and degrade complexity until a state of inert equilibrium is reached, at which point the universe enters either 'heat death' or 'heat sleep'.[7] Even if, heretically, one questions the second law (as did Prigogine), yet accepts it, there then are caveats. One of these is that of negative entropy or negentropy. This refers to the tendency of certain forms of organization, including those of life forms, to form plateaus of increasing order and complexity 'in apparent contradiction to the mandate of entropy . . . [nonetheless] the concept of negative entropy does not violate the second law of thermodynamics; the gain in organization for isolated "islands" [of organic life forms] is balanced by a corresponding loss in the environment of the [open] system' (Ross 2019: 25).[8]

Wicken gives a different conceptual twist to the second law, which, he argues,

> is a principle of *potency by which the possible is made actual*. Indeed, in its statistical formulation the second law is not really a law of nature at all, but one of mathematical necessity to which nature, to the extent that its processes are governed by corpuscular events lacking in material orientation, must be bound . . . The reason that irreversible processes exist in nature is in a very general sense for the end [that is, the 'goal'] of entropy production, for increasing the spread-outness [in Prigogine's sense of dissipation and fluctuation] of the universe's matter-energy among available quantum states. (Wicken 1981: 133–34, my emphasis)

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As Majumdar and Josephson (2020) put this, 'In general, dissipation of energy is seen to be the basis of pattern formation in nature. Energy gradients are what makes things happen' (on energy gradients and organic life, see ibid., Note 18). This entropic spread-outness of fluctuation and accompanying potency may also be relevant to the human world and to rites of passage and transformation.

The idea of potency – of the potency of potentiality, raised by Wicken – is critical to comprehending liminality in its strong sense. As we well know, Arnold van Gennep, in *Les Rites de Passage*, pinpointed a prime location of liminality in human worlds. Van Gennep discerned three phases in the organization of rituals of passage, mainly in tribal social orderings. The middle phase, *la periode de marge*, is constituted so as to accomplish the passage, that is, the transition, from one sort of social ordering to another. The middle phase is the *limen*, the threshold that must be crossed in the process of transition from one condition of existence or being into another. During this middle period of *marge* the usual norms of the sociocultural are suspended, are held in abeyance, in order that the changes necessary for passage (which often contravene the usual norms) be introduced. Yet van Gennep went beyond the social in comprehending rites of passage. As Rothem and Fischer (2018: 257) comment, 'Van Gennep concludes his book by indicating a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe . . . His book thus relates the organic, the social, and the cosmic'. Van Gennep appears to intimate that during the period of marge the cosmic and the social somehow resonate and are joined.

Nicole Hochner emphasizes that for van Gennep the period of *marge* is one of *pivotement*, a period of movement, yet one that changes direction through a point of inertia, the *point mort* or dead point (Hochner 2018: 305–7). Van Gennep understood this movement as one that reverses itself, and that this recursiveness constitutes the rhythm whereby the movement of the social towards increasing 'entropic' potency (in my terms) is turned into fruitful reordering. Seen in this way, the movement from, say, one cultural status to another through a rite of passage may not be quite the linear progression through the liminal phase of radical change, as Turner portrays this (cf. Handelman 1998: 31–38).

Movement within the liminal phase is into a condition that accentuates and increases variability and fluctuation, one that dissolves phenomenal reality into the profound potency of potentiality, including of course the potentiality for radical change. This released potency, which one can call energy, is used to shape and to give direction to the forming of person and social reordering. The pivoting through the dead point is critical, as this gives the right direction to the energizing of the potency of the liminal through

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the inchoate dissolution of the social person and/or social ordering. The inchoate and perhaps chaotic undoing of the social is concentrated and focused through the pivoting choice of the direction of radical change and its forming.

From this perspective, for example, turning an immature girl into a mature young woman suggests that her occupancy of the cultural status of immature girl is becoming increasingly fluctuating, opening towards over-variation in its practice in the everyday world. Given this, she should vacate this status before it destroys her capacity to exist as a full member of the social ordering, with all of the consequences of this for the social. In social terms, the increase in fluctuating practice is dangerous, when what is wanted is social reproduction that is within normative bounds.[9]

The liminal phase plunges the immature girl into increasing and accelerating fluctuation until the condition of being that the candidate is leaving is dissolved, and she opens to the potentiality of the new condition of being that she will become. There are also ethnographic instances in which the movement towards the dead point is deliberately quickened, increasing the intensity of fluctuating being that is turning into potentiality (see, for example, Hori 1962 and Blacker 1975 on self-mummification and transformation into Buddha-hood in Japan). Viewed from the perspective of a (strange) dynamic, one that pivots the potency of potentiality into transformation, movement through rites of passage (and through other rituals of transformation) may be more recursive than linear.[10]

As depicted here, rites of transformation involve pivoting through the liminal potentiation of 'entropic' fluctuation (a kind of animate energizing) that activates human being(s) into a new, powerful condition of becoming. In social terms, the 'entropic' is anti-phenomenal and anti-existential, given that it dissolves existence into fluctuating, unknown potentiality. Thus liminality in its strong sense roils dynamically as this sense of potent potentiality approaches the indeterminate (I will return to indeterminacy in a moment). This sense of liminality is especially important, because rituals of transformation do through their own workings that which Deleuze called 'difference-in-itself' (Clisby 2017: 241). These rituals make difference happen within and through their own organization (see Handelman and Lindquist 2005 on ritual in its own right). In Gregory Bateson's terms, this is difference that makes a difference – in other words, real difference. And all of this is made to emerge and to become articulated through liminality.

Without introducing a conception of 'energy', however simplistic and rudimentary, this pivoting of transformation through the liminal remains mysterious (though 'energy' as such may also be understood as an overdetermined generality that serves as a cover for much more complex dynamics that include some sense of the energetic). Such transformation is not

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simply a matter of redefinition and resocialization, both social and cultural – of shifting a person, a group, a social ordering, from one category into another. Neither is it wholly a matter of symbolic manipulation, as symbol is necessarily representation and thus is at a remove from somatic being and becoming. Nor is it a natural kind of *physis* in the rhythms of living systems, biological and social (Hochner 2018: 306), though it may be related to what Henri Bergson in his *Creative Evolution* called *elan vital*.[11]

Turner himself veered towards transformation through liminality in ways that skirt the human and the supra-human, as Kapferer (2019: 2) has recently recounted: 'In Turner's conceptualization, the liminal is a chaotic vortex of counteracting forces, a singularity perhaps, outside space and time, a re-originating point, a wellspring of potential that moreover is not necessarily committed in any particular direction . . . that is, until it is realized into existence'. Writing of traditional cultural orderings, Turner (1992: 153) refers to liminality as 'pure potency' infused with the subjunctive mood of 'as if'. The subjunctive immediately opens the way into potentiality. I think that Turner recognized the very potency of potentiality.[12] Certainly for him, transformation was neither an automatic nor a mechanical action. It always is a dynamic one. Thus this movement into transformation itself hints at some conception of the energetic (as Wagner implies) that roils through the strong sense of the liminal, or that is introduced into this milieu as sociocultural ordering becomes strange to itself.

Indeterminacy and the In/stability of the Everyday

The anthropologist Sally Falk Moore once suggested that 'the underlying quality of social life should be considered to be one of theoretically absolute indeterminacy ... which is only partially done away with by culture and organized social life, the patterned aspects of which are temporary, incomplete, and contain elements of inconsistency, ambiguity, discontinuity . . . [thus] even within the social and cultural order there is a pervasive quality of partial indeterminacy' (Moore 1975: 232). This introduction of indeterminacy into anthropology is important, though it strikes me as overly neat. To modify Moore's formulation, I add that indeterminacy in sociocultural ordering is never done away with, remaining a potentiality that underlies all such ordering. Indeterminacy opens within the in-betweenness, as it were, of all human attempts to do ordering. The indeterminate is ever present in the cracks and crevices of social ordering that may open suddenly (or slowly). Moreover, indeterminacy invites 'entropic', energetic fluctuation whenever and wherever the indeterminate appears, potentially deepening and speeding the disintegrating of social ordering.

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In this regard, the original ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel continues to be illuminating.[13] In thinking about how social life holds together, Garfinkel found its lineaments by asking his students to upset the commonplace patterns of their daily interactions, whether with family, friends, salespersons or bus drivers, and afterwards to record what ensued. As he wrote, 'Procedurally it is my preference to start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble … to produce disorganized interaction … through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected' (Garfinkel 1967: 37–38). This proved remarkably easy to accomplish. Consider one of the simple exercises done in the spirit of Garfinkel in order to expose that which underlies the apparent coherence of social ordering. A meets B on a street corner; they are deciding where to go for dinner. A asks B what he means by 'dinner'. When B responds with something of an explanation, A chooses another term in B's exposition to ask what B means by this, and, so on, ad infinitum, into a descending spiral towards the indeterminate.[14] These people neither talk past nor misunderstand one another. Beneath the surface stability of common-sense understandings that enable the ongoing practices of quotidian social ordering – like the practice of the 'et cetera' clause (Garfinkel 1967: 74) among other devices – there is inchoateness, the crevices of instability beginning to deepen towards the abyss.

Tumbling into indeterminacy invites the fluctuating, unstable potentiality of unknown or relatively unknown outcome. Indeterminacy is chaotic, and, in a more cosmic sense, is energetic as it brims with the potency of potentiality. However, even as indeterminacy wells within every possible crevice of social ordering, we bridge and ignore this through the epistemology of common-sense understandings. Thus, social ordering continually yaws roughly and unevenly between tumblings into entropic indeterminacy and resurgences of renewed re-orderings. In these precarities there are no rhythms or cadences, but only contingencies. The rhythms are found in the conservation and use of indeterminacy in transformative ritual and the like. There, I think, indeterminacy is the liminal in its strong sense of potent potentiality.

Indeterminacy and Uncertainty

So far I have used indeterminacy without distinguishing it from uncertainty. However, I was intrigued by Karen Barad's interpretation of Niels Bohr's indeterminacy ontology in quantum physics (Barad 2007). I borrow loosely from Barad as a key to understanding liminality as acquiring shifting qualities of indeterminacy and uncertainty. One outcome of Bohr's quantum field theory is that indeterminacy precedes determinacy.[15] Indeterminacy is 'an unending dynamism' (Barad 2012a: 8) that 'is responsible not only for the

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[quantum] void not being nothing (while not being something), but it may in fact be the source of all that is, a womb that births existence' (ibid.: 8–9).[16] Thus the quantum vacuum, the void, in its 'energetic' dynamism (that itself is the void) is neither present nor absent, neither empty nor full. The indeterminacy of the void 'is key not only to the existence of matter, but also to its non-existence, or rather it is the key to the play of non/existence' (ibid.: 13). In Barad's terms the quantum void through its dynamic non/existence is virtual, 'the indeterminacy of being/nonbeing, a ghostly non/existence . . . virtual particles do not exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely thin blade between being and nonbeing. They speak of indeterminacy' (ibid.: 12).[17]

Barad emphasizes that '[o]ntological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering', of the dynamism of matter. She continues: 'How strange that indeterminacy, in its infinite openness, is the condition for the possibility of all structures in their dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities' (Barad 2012a: 16). Ontological indeterminacy is indeed one way, perhaps foundational, of alluding to the indeterminacy that I think opens and moves through the betweenness of cracks and crevices in all social organizing and social ordering; and that emerges as the dissipating, dissolving fluidity of liminality in its strong sense in transformative ritual. In other words, indeterminacy is every-when and every-where, even as it is conserved (as I think it is) and somehow concentrated as liminality in its strong sense under special conditions. Despite the enormous logical gaps and incommensurateness between a quantum physics of the universe and the doings of social existence, I think nonetheless that there are resonances. Animate bodies and their somatic energies are not divorced from the physical makings and dynamics of their environments, in all directions, scales and intensities, one may say.[18] Hence, too, the relevance of epigenetics (Jablonka, Lamb, and Zeligowski 2014: 314–46; Lock 2015).

Yet what of uncertainty? Through the dynamics of indeterminacy there is perhaps only undecidability. However, uncertainty exists when is-ness, thingness, social ordering, exist and offer options of choice, though those options and their consequences are shifting, unclear, and at least partially unknown. Uncertainty exists when there is decidability, though this is conditional on changing and unknown circumstances. These are the conditions that, for example, characterize the 'risk society' in the social science literature. Yet indeterminacy and uncertainty are not a dualism. Neither is their relatedness that of a continuum of potential ordering and its variations. In human worlds, given our capacities for adaptability and (at least the desire for) relative control, one would be hard put to think of conditions of absolute or total indeterminacy – of the utter abyss – that last for more than relatively brief durations (say, in the immediacy of a natural disaster or a catastrophic

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singularity). Nor is it easy to think of any social situations in which there is the complete absence of uncertainty, given social ordering's ongoing emergence through which every repetition creates potential differences (Deleuze 1994; Handelman 2021).

Social ordering may be thought of as a field that is constituted through time through locations of greater and lesser intensities and densities of indeterminacy and uncertainty, and in which the 'boundaries' of the field either are, or may become, unknowns. Movement within this field depends on increases and decreases of fluctuation. Increases in fluctuation shift movement towards greater indeterminacy. With decreases, movement shifts towards greater uncertainty. In liminal phases of rituals of transformation, pivoting through the point mort shifts increasing indeterminacy and variable potentiality into a trajectory of increasing uncertainty and more consistent possibility, culminating with the thrust towards the greater certainty of outcome.

Human beings are entangled with both indeterminacy and uncertainty.[19] Thus indeterminacy, as it is given here, should not be thought of as out there, way out there in an abstract cosmic scheme. Rather it is right here, right now, no less than is uncertainty, on the tips of our noses and in the next crevice that opens within our phenomenal cosmoses, as everything human and all the rest only exist through such an ontology or ontologies. Now, indeed, if every-when and every-where exist on the edge of precarious indeterminacy then they exist also on the edge of whatever moves with and through indeterminacy. This perspective is given resonance through Deleuzian virtuality.

Deleuzian Virtuality

Deleuze's thinking offers an opening between quantum cosmology and the social. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) continue to develop Deleuze's idea of the virtual, now influenced by quantum field theory.[20] In quantum field theory (as Barad noted) the idea of the virtual 'relates to the so-called virtual birth and disappearance, or creation and annihilation, of particles from the so-called false vacuum, a kind of sea of energy, thus suggesting the image of chaos invoked by Deleuze and Guattari' (Plotnitsky 2006: 41). In quantum field theory '[i]t is as if, instead of an identifiable moving object of the type studied in classical physics, we encounter a continuous emergence and disappearance, creation and annihilation, of particles from point to point, the so-called *virtual* particle formation' (ibid.: 48).

By introducing ideas of quantum theorizing, however loosely, into the humanities, Deleuze has enabled scholars in other disciplines, including anthropology, to recognize the value of this kind of thinking for their own conceptual problematics (cf. Kapferer 1997; Handelman 2013). Deleuzian

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thinking on virtuality is especially relevant for the problematic of liminality understood as indeterminacy, and, so, indeterminate liminality understood as energetic. Deleuze and Guattari relate virtuality to chaos. Perhaps their clearest (at least a most quoted) statement on chaos is the following:

> Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape within it vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence. Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 118, emphasis in original)

And, this within what might be called 'a kind of sea of energy'.[21] The implication is that in this perspective the virtual is energetic (Villani 2007: 50), hence the movement of infinite speed through which particles appear and disappear.[22]

Deleuzian virtuality is cosmic in its formulation.[23] Moreover, this conception has a strong drive towards cosmogenesis, towards the potential emergence of form. A proposal of sheer cosmic potentiality, the non-existence of everything, the potential existence of anything. In my terms, the virtual's potential exists within the cosmic conditions of far-from-equilibrium proposed by Prigogine, as discussed earlier. The cosmic in the Deleuze and Guattari conception of virtuality moves in close proximity to conditions of everyday existence (which they call a 'state of affairs'). For that matter, the infinite movement of the 'particles' that potentially could form the everyday are infinitely close to this – indeed one can say that these 'particles' are within the everyday, though, as in quantum field theory, they neither exist nor do not exist, for their speed is infinite.

Conditions of everyday existence relate to the chaotic virtual by taking from it potential elements (or 'particles') that they actualize. With actualization, this virtual potential is no longer chaotic, but exists through relatedness and consistency – perhaps entanglement, one may say – through the constituting everyday. The speed of the virtual potential is no longer infinite; speed slows in keeping with the relative consistency of actuality. Yet this virtual potential *qua* potential nonetheless always exceeds that which is actualized and emerges as form in the everyday. Thus the excessive potentialities of the virtual are themselves what Deleuze calls a plane of immanence, or, a plane of consistency – one that is fully real in its closeness to the actual yet that is not actual. The plane of immanence is of course immanent and so is connected to the actual, which continues to draw from this potential in its ongoing actualization that constitutes phenomenal existence (Colebrook 2005: 10).

One may argue that the plane of immanence is the potentiality of chaos, of indeterminacy and its potency, slowing and becoming finite (i.e. 'real')

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without being actualized, yet also not losing fully the fluid, potent energetics of indeterminacy. Planes of immanence are 'cultural sieves' that cut through the infinite speed of birth and disappearance of the virtual to turn the potentialities of the virtual into the consistencies of the more selective and limited possible (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 118). Limited, in that possibility might become actualized in reality. Planes of immanence are how human cognition and agency meet the potentialities of the virtual, yet now conditioned selectively by the horizons of the possible. From planes of immanence the actual continuously takes that which is formable and, so, that may become actual. Writing on the virtual, the plane of immanence, and the actual, Deleuze (2005: 31) once put it this way: 'What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane [of immanence, of consistency] that gives it its particular reality . . . the plane of immanence is itself virtual'.

One may say that the plane of immanence is the immanent virtual. Thus potentiality is a never-ending dynamic opening of the immanent virtual that is becoming continuously consistent as possibility, and that might become actualized as phenomenal existence. The ongoing actualizing of the everyday is surrounded by virtual planes of immanence and by virtual chaos in all directions and dimensions. Actualizing our living practices, our cosmos and its multiplicities, we exist in varying degrees in the midst of the virtual, amongst the more indeterminate and potential, and the more uncertain and possible. Virtual indeterminacy is both supra-animate and animate, and so is not tailored particularly to the social. Nevertheless, through planes of immanence the virtual continuously supplies, as it were, the creating of the social. Nonetheless, in its strong sense the liminal in ritual is not the reality of the everyday with its safeguards of common-sense understandings. Within liminal ritual the guards and siphons of planes of immanence are weakened and lessened as the liminal opens further to virtual, energetic indeterminacy. The possible (always limited by the impossible) turns more into the potential and its potency.

In/Conclusion

Writing intently on liminality as indeterminacy, and of indeterminacy as chaotic virtual energy, catches me by surprise. Surely I have drifted tangentially and unaware into science fiction? The late Roy Wagner often taught courses on play and on science fiction. I studied play intensively and I have read science fiction now for some seventy years. So, have I spun here a fantasy of some kind of energetic substrate and supra-strate that enables certain vital transformations to be accomplished through liminal phases of ritual?

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And, extrapolating this in a heavily materialistic sociocultural anthropology that nonetheless must imagine and infer invisible entanglements that people are silent about or that they *say* are real – social relationships, friendship, love, trust, and so on – and in relation to which we have developed sophisticated (and common-sensical) ways of maintaining that these are real in their consequences?

Or, should we take an energetics of liminality more seriously?[24] I am not alone in skirting the edges of what seems invisible and implausible to us. Victor Turner did so long ago, and in his full-bodied, exegetical way he both brought this dilemma forward and disguised it (as Edie Turner understood so well). I do not have my dear friend Vic's way with words, so I leave the dilemma stranded on an exposed un-energetic promontory. Nonetheless, one thing is clear: should any of us try to take liminality-as-indeterminacy-as-energy seriously, then we must recognize how crude and simple this formulation is, and just how much contemplative and imaginative rethinking is needed. This will likely include the energetics of the biosphere(s) and of different forms of the animate, perhaps relating to an approach something like Hayles's (2017) distinction between non-cognizers and cognizers, yet ultimately facing (and questioning?) the distinction between the inanimate and the animate (see, for example, Pross 2003). Perhaps someone may even discover one day that traditional peoples who made extensive use of liminality in ritual cultivated, concentrated and focused something that could be called a principle for the conservation of liminality.

Don Handelman is Shaine Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Sociology at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Among his books are *Moebius Anthropology: Essays on the Forming of Form*; *One God, Two Goddesses, Three Studies of South Indian Cosmology*; (co-authored with David Shulman) *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self Knowledge*; (co-edited with Terry Evens and Christopher Roberts) *Reflecting on Reflexivity: The Human Condition as an Ontological Surprise*; and *Religion, Politics, and Globalization: Anthropological Approaches* (co-edited with Galina Lindquist).

NOTES

1. My use of 'a-stable' is intended to indicate that stability itself is irrelevant to liminality in itself.
2. State apparatuses also evince interest in ESP (extrasensory perception) phenomena and their possible applications, especially for intelligence and military matters. Thus Russian scientists and the military have long been interested in so-called

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parapsychological phenomena and, given this, so, too, have the CIA and the American military (i.e. CIA 2011; Stargate Project ([Wikipedia]); Weinberger 2007). For an overview of studies of ESP see Roll and Williams (2010).

Brian Josephson, a Nobel laureate in physics who later became something of an outlier in his discipline, recognizes the possibility, perhaps the likelihood of ESP. Nonetheless he argues that explanation is more likely to come from biosystems research than it is from the nonlocality, the 'spooky action at a distance', of quantum mechanics. Though 'direct action at a distance' may well exist, 'quantum calculations lead to the result that any such effects will disappear under statistical averaging' (Josephson and Pallikari-Viras 1991: 197). Quantum physics deals with quantifiability and thus 'neglects' particular cases, treating 'all cases of a class as if they were the same'. Biology, however, deals with processes and, so, attends to such cases, which may include those of ESP (Josephson 2002: 44).

3. That is, liminality in its strong sense, as I am using this here.
4. See, for example, Satsuka's (2018) fascinating discussion of 'multispecies entanglements'.
5. This section is taken largely from Handelman 2021: 309–11. For a strong yet balanced critique of Prigogine's theorizing, one that comes from the humanities, see Hayles 1990: 91–114.
6. In a somewhat apposite vein, the biologists, Brooks and Wiley (1988: 356) contend that, 'The second law is thus more than the natural law of energy flows; it is the natural law of history.'
7. For example, Corning and Kline (1998: 276) state that entropy neither has thingness nor is it a force. 'It is a property of matter with the peculiar attribute that it is designed to measure the relative absence of something, namely energetic order.'
8. Sato (2012: 234) raises the interesting question of whether entropy has a critical role in photosynthesis: 'The entropy problem in photosynthesis [which appears to release free energy] is important because photosynthesis is the starting point of energy conservation in the whole biosphere . . . If entropy is related to photosynthesis, what is the relationship of such entropy of photosynthesis with the entropy associated with various activities of life, such as DNA, cellular organization . . . ?'
9. Here pivoting may be moebius-like (Handelman 2021), since with near simultaneity the immature girl is outside of herself (being shorn of identity) and inside herself (becoming transformed).
10. Nonetheless, rites of passage are linear in their irreversibility. Passage from one condition of being into another apparently is not reversible. However, I note also that the recursive is critical to the existence of reflexivity, and that without reflexivity there likely is no rite of passage (for that matter there would be no human being who could partake of a rite of passage) (Evens, Handelman and Roberts 2016).
11. James DiFrisco argues persuasively and to the point that Bergson's use of *elan vital* was not a turn to a spiritualistic 'vital force', as this is commonly understood. DiFrisco (2015: 63) suggests that Bergson's perspective is that of 'an encompassing energeticist or thermodynamic view of nature, in which processes or fluxes have a more fundamental status than substances or things'. The elan vital (or *elan de la vie*, as Bergson preferred at times [DiFrisco, ibid.: 66]) is a forceful tendency, perhaps propensity, toward far-from-equilibrium. 'The degradation of energy imposed by the second law of thermodynamics' moves conditions toward equilibrium, yet this is countered by 'the raising of potential energy and distancing from equilibrium, and

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hence . . . by the production of organization' (ibid.: 64). This ascending movement of energy, as Bergson called it, toward organization and greater complexity (and, so, no less toward lengthier duration) is the *elan vital*. Moreover, for Bergson the living world's 'future pathways of its release of energy cannot be predetermined, [so that] finally it is a site of "indetermination" and even of creative activity', (ibid.: 66), a position not far from the one that Turner later espoused.

12. Without sidling into his conception of liminoid phenomena that, according to Thomassen (2012: 28), are responsible for the over-application of the liminal to numerous situations having nothing to do with transition and transformation.
13. The late Garfinkel seems to have shifted his earlier ethnomethodology towards the anthropological approach of Ethnoscience of the 1960s and 1970s (see Pollner 2012).
14. This example is used in Handelman 2007.
15. Barad (2012a: 6) writes that: '. . . the play of indeterminacies is ontologically prior to notions of . . . space and time'.
16. Barad continues here, 'Birth and death are not the sole prerogative of the animate world. 'Inanimate' beings also have finite lives.' Elsewhere (Barad 2012b: 21) she comments that, 'The inanimate is always being shoved to the side, as if it is too far removed from the human to matter, but that which we call inanimate is still very much bodily and lively . . . [we are] stuck at the threshold of one of the most stubborn of all dualisms – the animate/inanimate dualism . . .' And, so, and not as an aside, note the dead/living contrariness of viruses, as we live with the new coronavirus during 2020 and on.
17. So quantum particles do not quite exist until a connection, a relationship, emerges into existence; and then there is a relating that simultaneously cuts the particles apart into distinctiveness.
18. Consider the research of Michael Levin and colleagues on the bioelectricity of endogenous electrical fields (Tseng and Levin 2013). They found that during embryonic growth, bioelectric cues provide information on the identities and bodily positionings of organs to be actualized through growth. So, 'Voltage gradients regulate cell behaviors and the assembly of complex large-scale structures . . . artificially setting other somatic cells to the [for example] eye-specific voltage range [in frog embryos] resulted in formation of eyes in aberrant locations . . . eyes could be formed in the gut, on the tail, or in the lateral plate mesoderm' (ibid.: 1). Thus there may be voltage ranges for different organs (and perhaps too at the level of the whole organism). Moreover, Tseng and Levin (ibid.: 7) argue that, 'It is . . . very likely that computational tissues could be made from non-excitable [i.e. non-neuronic] cells.' Thus Levin states elsewhere that, 'There are very few fundamental differences between neural networks and other tissues of bioelectrically communicating cells. If you think that consciousness in the brain is somehow a consequence of the brain's electrical activity, then there's no principled reason to assume that non-neural electrical networks won't underlie some primitive, basal [ancient] form of nonverbal consciousness.' Tam Hunt, 'The Link Between Biolelectricity and Consciousness.' *Nautilus*, 10 March, 2021. Retrieved 10 March 2021 from https://nautil.us/blog/the-link-between-biolelectricity-and-consciousness?mc_cid.
19. On quantum entanglement see Barad 2010.
20. The influence of a variety of approaches in quantum physics on Deleuze's earlier thinking on the virtual is argued for by Plotnitsky (2006).

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21. The quantum physicist, David Bohm, proposed the distinction between the implicate order and the explicate order. Without entering into the complexities of Bohm's holistic thinking, the implicate order constitutes an enfolding (hence, implicate) 'immense background of energy, and that matter as we know it is a small, "quantized" wavelike excitation [the explicate order] on top of this background, rather like a tiny ripple on a vast sea . . . space, which has so much energy, is full rather than empty . . . It is being suggested here, then, that what we perceive through the senses as empty space is actually the plenum, which is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves' (Bohm 1981: 191–92).
22. This conception of virtuality as ever replenished since it does not exist yet does is the basis for Deleuze's rejection of the second law with regard to the virtual. Ross (2019: 27) summarizes this as follows: 'Deleuze's claim [is] that entropy takes effect in explicated, actualised phenomena, but [does] not apply to the intensive, energetically incommensurable phenomena of the virtual domain.' This echoes Prigogine's theory of the evolution of the universe.
23. The Deleuze and Guattari (1994) problematic is that of how concepts in philosophy are shaped into existence. Their initial focus is on the infinite speed of processes of thought. Can one presume that virtual thought is energetic? And if thought processes are energetic then so, too, are brain processes, and the converse? (As Russian ethnologists have thought for a long time, measuring the brain activity of shamans at work.) And, if brain processes are energetic then so, too, are other bodily processes? And, are these energies held in and totally constrained by the body? This seems unlikely, given what is known of the cultivation of potential somatic energies like *chi* (ki) and so many others (cf. Yuasa 1993).
24. The sociologist of science and technology, Steve Fuller (2018: 182), in discussing Alexander Wendt's *Quantum Mind and Social Science*, comments that, '. . . if we think of ourselves as proverbial blind men trying to grasp the elephant of reality, then there is a serious problem if natural and human science accounts of the fundamental nature of things diverge so radically that each can ignore if not outright dismiss the other.'

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