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Affect: On the Turn

Paul Stenner

For some influential advocates of the "affective turn," the concept of affect stands for a spontaneous, collective, subjective and progressive becoming-other that promises "new possibilities" that are never quite articulated. This perspective has great potential, but risks lapsing into a naïve celebration of affect that is ill-equipped to grasp the negative aspects and uses of experiences of becoming (i.e., liminal experience). A liminal occasion is an occasion of passage between categories during which, for whatever reason, the forms of process associated with modes of being are subject to metamorphosis. A focus on liminality, it will be argued, has two chief advantages. First, it allows us to focus on the affectivity that comes into play when we, or our circumstances, are in

the process of transformation. This highlights the fact that many of the positive, exciting, desirable features attributed to "affect" are characteristics of liminal occasions, but also that these occasions can have a darker side. A second advantage is that it encourages us to recognize the long history through which different "technologies" have emerged to manage, generate and communicate the liminal affectivity typical of liminal occasions. The oldest of these "liminal affective technologies" is ritual, which dates back to prehistoric times. Without denying the distinctiveness of the present moment, in which affectivity is routinely summoned and manipulated by a host of new technological means, this argument opens up new ways of locating our present within a broader genealogy.

Introduction: Turn, Turn, Turn Again

In calling this contribution "affect on the turn" my intention is to harmonize with the title of the *Affective Transformations* conference held in Potsdam in November 2017, and also with one of its recurrent themes: that the affective turn may have turned a little sour. I originally come from Somerset in the south west of England, and there we describe foodstuffs as being "on the turn" when they are at the point of going rancid or rotten: milk, perhaps, or an apple. In this context, being "on the turn" is not necessarily a bad thing. Milk has to "turn" if it is to become a nice cheddar cheese, and apples must be on the turn if they are to become the good scrumpy cider that Somerset is also famed for.

So, in what sense might the "turn to affect" be "on the turn"? And might it turn into something rather nice? As many delegates discussed at the conference, too much literature within the affective turn takes an overly celebratory stance on affect (for critiques, see Hemmings 2005, Greco

and Stenner 2008, and Leys 2011). Affect has come to signify spontaneity, collectivity, *avante-gardism*, and progress. This stance can seem a little naïve when it misses some of the very problematic and even exploitative ways in which affectivity is technically summoned and manipulated in the infotainment circuits of our digitalized epoch of global capital (Angerer, Bösel, and Ott 2014; Angerer 2017). In response to this naivety, the first part of my paper will conduct a critique of the concept of affect upon which the affective turn appears to turn. I will then propose that some of these weaknesses can be clarified and addressed by crafting a concept of liminality that enables us to attend to the ways in which liminal experience is managed, summoned and navigated by means of *liminal affective technologies*. Put crudely, the notion of liminality, at least in the anthropological sense given to it by Arnold van Gennep (1909), concerns human beings when they are "on the turn" (i.e., when they are going through the passage of becoming-other), and liminal affective technologies are the cultural means of facilitating and overseeing such sensitive occasions of becoming. In fact, even cider may serve as a component in a liminal affective technology if it contributes to the stirring of emotions associated with some sort of becoming (a drunken rite of passage into what passes as adulthood in some quarters of Somerset, for instance).

Summary Critique of the Affective Turn

I will begin the critical part of my contribution with a quick account of my research interests and background. I completed a PhD in the field of social psychology at the University of Reading, UK, focusing on the social dimensions of experiences of jealousy (Stenner 1992). Through that work I became familiar with psychological literature on the emotions, but I was also influenced by contributions to the study of emotions from sociology, anthropology and history, post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Hélène Cixous and Michel Serres, and by the recent rise of interest in social constructionism across the social sciences. The theoretical questions raised by post-structuralism and social constructionism excited me enormously, and it was perhaps this excitement that transformed me into somebody who wanted to be an academic social scientist. This was about more than just me as an individual. I was fortunate enough to have Rex Stainton Rogers and Christie Davies as supervisors, along with a group of like-minded PhD students, and Rom Harré as an external examiner. Harré had edited an influential volume called *The Social Construction of Emotions* (1986). Theoretically, this was a challenge to the so-called essentialism and positivism associated with the psychological

and biological literature on emotion, which tended to reify emotions as naturalistic mechanisms to be approached solely by experiment. It seemed to me that the positivistic approach tended to ignore much of the complexity and cultural nuance at play in emotional experience, including the historical and geographical variety identified by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists. Methodologically, this interest meant a turn to text or discourse as the primary means through which the meaning of emotional experience gets constructed in real-time interactions and other forms of communication. In line with this "turn to text," I studied the various different accounts of jealousy that are constructed in everyday discourse, and in the more specialized discourses of writers, scientists, lawyers, health professionals, and others (see Stenner 1993; Curt 1994; Stenner and Stainton Rogers 1998).

I mention this "turn to text" or "discursive turn" because the affective turn that is my subject today was very much a turn against the discursive turn. The first use that I have found of the phrase "affective turn" was at a feminist conference organized in 2001 by Anu Koivunun. Koivunun used it to refer to a growth of interest in affects, emotions and embodied experiences across the social sciences and humanities. This body of work makes no clear distinction between affect and emotion, and can actually be considered part of the discursive turn. For this reason I reserve the phrase "affective turn" for a more specific intellectual movement. The phrase made its first appearance in the title of a book with Patricia Clough and Jean Halley's edited volume *The Affective Turn*, published in 2007. Here, the concept of affect at play in the phrase "affective turn" is sharply distinguished from emotion. Clough and Halley contributed to an avant-garde movement that uses a concept of affect to turn against the discursive turn. Affect, in their sense, is strictly separated from discursive practices and is defined as being in principle inaccessible to discursive articulation. It is an autonomous and pre-personal force or capacity that exists outside of any consciousness. The starting point for this affective turn is the idea that the discursive turn was a kind of discursive imperialism that neglected a vast and vital territory of affective dynamics and forces. If for advocates of the discursive turn, discourse symbolizes a principle of progressive freedom from naturalistic essentialism, then for advocates of the affective turn it symbolizes a certain entrapment within a spider's web of official meaning. The aim is still liberation from the strictures of established structure, but now progressive freedom is sought through stopping our talking heads from making their discursive sense.

By 2007, the affective turn was already a torrent of scholarly activity, but this torrent was fed by tributaries that began flowing more than ten years before. During the 1990s I was teaching an undergraduate psychology course entitled *Affect and the Social*, first at the University of East London and then at University College London. This meant that I kept quite a close eye on developments in the literature. I noticed three separate developments that would soon flow together into the affective turn. I will simplify by noting three publications that appeared in 1995, each of which challenged the constructionist focus on discourse and proposed a concept of affect that promised the hope of change and progressive freedom (for a more detailed account, see Stenner 2017a). Each works with a different concept of affect, drawn from a re-engagement with classic psychology on the part of humanities scholars.

The first was Brian Massumi's article, *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995), which drew heavily upon Deleuze's readings of Bergson and Spinoza. Massumi announces the wish to part company with the linguistic model of theory, proposing an account of affect as an autonomous pure intensity. Since in this account affect is a virtual force that by definition escapes any signifying order, it is sharply distinguished from "emotion" (for a sustained appreciative critique of Massumi's use of social psychology to draw this distinction, see Stenner 2018). All of this is argued in the name of the freedoms of novelty. Hence, in Massumi's article we have the characteristic rhetorical features of a critique of the discursive turn, a positive presentation of affect as solution, and a statement that at stake in all this is something new and progressive.

The second publication from 1995 was an article called *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold*, written by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, prominent scholars in the field of queer theory. This article begins with a scathing attack on the limitations of critical discursive theory and proceeds to celebrate the biological theory of the affects proposed by the US psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Again, through embracing Tomkins as a psychologist who, to quote Sedgwick and Frank (1995, 23) "understands *us*," what is at stake is freedom from what they described as the "moralistic hygiene" of critical discursive theory.

Third was the awakening of interest in affect within psychoanalytical psychosocial studies. In 1995 Anthony Elliott and Stephen Frosh edited a book called *Psychoanalysis in Context*, which marked a notable resurgence of interest in applying psychoanalytic theory to sociological questions. There is obviously a long tradition of reflection on affect within psychoanalysis,

but at this point a psychodynamic account of affect was presented as a challenge to the perceived hegemony of social constructionist theory. Ian Craib (1997), for example, described social constructionism as a kind of mass manic psychosis, itself explainable by the unconscious affective dynamics at play.

Of course, there is a lot more to the affective turn than these three sources from 1995 (see Gregg and Seigworth 2010). But identifying them and specifying their common ground allows us to see how and why they might flow together to: a) challenge the linguistic imperialism associated with the turn to discourse; b) find resources within psychology for an ultimately unconscious, biological and autonomous concept of affect that comes to be clearly distinguished from emotion; and c) adopt a rather celebratory stance where affect comes to stand for all things spontaneous, *avant-garde*, and progressive (i.e., that promise to break free of discursive imperialism). For me, Patricia Clough (2010, 223) sums up these features of contemporary affect theory when she aims at "toppling… semiotic chains of signification and identity and linguistic-based structures of meaning making" from their "privileged position." Today, affect theory is more or less premised upon the firm distinction between affect and emotion that follows from this stance. In the introduction to their *Affect Theory Reader*, for example, Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 1) state that affect implies "vital forces beyond emotion."

Although these developments have much to commend them, in my view this pristine concept of affect upon which the affective turn has come to turn is problematic and confused. Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 4) acknowledge this when they warn their readers that "first encounters with theories of affect might feel like a momentary (sometimes more permanent) methodological and conceptual free fall." In my view, this is because much of it simply *is* a conceptual free fall and free-for-all.

In *Liminality and Experience* (Stenner 2017a), I identify eight different concepts of affect that are mixed together in this literature, leading to all kinds of confusions. Without repeating these here, I will instead quickly examine one of the ways in which Brian Massumi distinguishes affect from emotion in his 1995 article. I focus on this way of drawing the distinction simply because it has been enormously influential. The distinction is pitched at a very abstract level and is presented with a bare minimum of empirical illustration (Massumi makes some quite idiosyncratic interpretations of a series of psychological experiments, which are discussed further in Stenner 2018). He states that his "clearest lesson… is that emotion and

affect… follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (Massumi 1995, 88). Affect apparently follows a logic of *intensity* that is autonomic in nature and to do with the effect rather than the content of events. Emotion, by contrast, follows a logic of *quality* that is semantically or semiotically ordered, and hence is fixed by the binary distinctions of a conventional system of signification. So, for Massumi, we must distinguish two parallel but completely different orders. One order is about content, quality and semantics, the other about effect, intensity, and autonomic processes. For Massumi, emotion belongs to the first order because an emotion, like shame or fear, is a subjective content, with distinctive qualities that have been semantically fixed by socio-linguistic conventions. Affect, however, he defines as intensity, and insists that it is "a non-conscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation… disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration…" In short, for Massumi emotion is *qualified intensity* or, to put it differently, affect that has been captured within meaningful and hence socially functional narratives and semiotic circuits. Affect, by contrast, is that which necessarily escapes this kind of capture, and so remains virtual, as a potentiality that can never be assimilated.

Now, to be clear, I am not denying the value of drawing some sort of a distinction between the actual and the virtual, or between discursive symbolism and more basic psychological processes. Such distinctions are in fact quite important to the theoretical approach to psychology that I adopt and help us to avoid a crude "mind/matter" bifurcation. But I am questioning a simple mapping of such distinctions onto the words "affect" and "emotion." Massumi (1995, 88) defends this move by invoking Spinoza, whom he describes as "a formidable philosophical precursor on many of these points: on the difference in nature between affect and emotion, on the irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect…" Of the two claims outlined in this proposition, I will start by quickly discarding the second. It seems to me that Spinoza nowhere argues for the "irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect," although I confess to being uncertain about what the phrase "irreducibly bodily" actually means. Spinoza (1677/1989) is most famous for his thought/extension parallelism, and this involves a resolute refusal to consider thought and extension as two separate substances, and hence to treat the universe either as "irreducibly" material/physical or, for that matter, "irreducibly" mental/subjective. As I have argued along with Steven Brown:

> The first step in analyzing encounters is to maintain the parallelism of body and mind. This involves, for Spinoza, a separate explication

> of how affects order relations between bodies and between ideas. Proximate causes are sought within each attribute. The body cannot act as the cause of changing order within ideas, nor do ideas directly bring about modifications in bodies. Since "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E. II. prop. 7), what is sought is the dual expression of the encounter as it presents under each attribute. (Brown and Stenner 2001, 90)

Turning now to the first claim, it seems to me that Spinoza did not draw any such distinction between affect and emotion, let alone argue for a difference in nature. Spinoza wrote in Latin and used the term "affectus" (as well as variants like "afficio" and "affectio"), and he never employed the word emotion, which was barely used anywhere until the early nineteenth century. The affections of a body are the modifications that occur in the course of an encounter with another body. Spinoza discusses the affects at great length in his most famous book, the *Ethics,* and when he deals with concrete examples of affects, far from marking a difference in nature from emotion, he discusses what we would now routinely call emotions. That is to say, he discusses experiences called things like anger, fear, joy, jealousy, envy, and so forth. The important thing is his *approach* to these emotions, which always emphasizes modifications wrought by encounters. Anger, for Spinoza, is thus a particular kind of modification that occurs in particular types of encounters (for more detail, see Brown and Stenner 2001).

It is however important to grasp that Spinoza does not limit his understanding of affects to human emotions. On the contrary, as a philosopher Spinoza was looking for much broader generality. For Spinoza, *all* entities—whether animal, vegetable, or mineral—are to be understood in relation to the affects they are capable of in their encounters with other entities. His philosophy is thoroughly relational, contending that anything that exists does so as a function of its relations, and hence of the affects it is capable of going through. In this sense he proposes what Leo (2016) aptly calls an "affective physics." When it comes to human beings, those affects typically take the form we know of as emotions. Hence although Spinoza does not assert this, there is a plausible basis for a distinction in which affect would be an ontological or metaphysical concept applicable to all entities, whilst emotion would refer to affects in so far as they express themselves at a specifically anthropological level. An ontological concept of "affectus" would thus apply equally to slugs and to people, but without implying that the affects of slugs and people are the same. A slug is not capable of being affected and of affecting others in the manner that we call "jealousy," for

example. And this is not to deny that there may be slug affects that in some respects exceed the capacities of human beings.

Things are no less disappointing if we try to extract a fundamental difference between affect and emotion from Tomkins's work or from psychoanalysis. Like Spinoza, when Tomkins (e.g., 1963) discusses the affects that make up the affect system, he refers to what ordinary people would call emotions: the experiences we call anger, fear, shame, disgust, joy, and so forth. In his published work, Tomkins uses the word "emotion" very rarely, and the reason that he prefers the word "affect" is that he wanted a more scientific term that would allow him and his readers to step back from routine and common-sense assumptions about emotions. In short, what ordinary so-called "lay folk" call their "emotions," the scientist—with the benefit of their objective research—recognizes as proper to an innate system of affects.

André Green (1999), who is probably the main psychoanalytic authority on affect, points out all kinds of nuances between the words used for emotion, feeling, affect, sentiment, passion and so on in French, German, and English. His ultimate position is that within psychoanalytical discourse, affect should be a metapsychological term and not a descriptive term with a specific referent. The word "affect," in other words, should be reserved for use as a categorical term which groups together "all the nuances that German (Empfindung, Gefühl) or French (émotion, sentiment, passion, etc.) bring to this category" (Green 1999, 8).

The Affective Turn as a Deeper Return of Process Thought

On the basis of these kinds of arguments, I submit that the concept of affect I have critically outlined is not capable of sustaining an entire turn or a new field of "affect studies." But this does not mean that this literature is so far on the turn that it should turn us off. On the contrary, to my mind the "affective turn" is actually part of an emerging intellectual agenda whose stakes are much bigger than is conventionally thought. To return to the metaphor I used in the introduction, I propose that we have not let the apples turn far enough to get the cider we desire. But to understand why this is the case we need to re-orient ourselves. In my view, the turn to affect is not a rejection of the discursive turn but a deepening of it. The discursive turn—in its more sophisticated forms at least—was never in fact about linguistic imperialism, but was a protest against the overly static mode

of thought that had previously dominated: it was a protest on behalf of thinking in terms of processes (or, for short, *process thought*). The affective turn is, to my mind, best understood as a deepening of process thought. This deepening extends process thought in a transdisciplinary direction, applicable as much to the natural sciences as to the social and cultural disciplines (the discursive turn, by comparison, was primarily about defending the humanities and social sciences from the incursions of a positivistic strain of natural science).

Understood in this way, the distinction between affect and emotion is not our main concern. There is a more important distinction at play within it, and that is the distinction between event and structure. For example, when Massumi (1995, 87) argues that approaches are "incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level," he states that what they "lose, precisely, is the expression event—in favour of structure." Structure, for Massumi, "is the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self-consistent set of invariant generative rules." Event, by contrast "is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox." The real issue in Massumi's work, it seems to me, is the identification of affect or intensity with event and emotion with structure. It is this concern with events that is the source of his preoccupation with the emergence of novelty. It is this emphasis on what Massumi calls the "virtual as cresting in a liminal realm of emergence" (Massumi, 1995, 92) that needs to be rescued from the confusion that is caused by a premature distinction between affect and emotion.

To perform this rescue, we need to think processually. We need to recognize that a structure is not in fact something static but is an organized and indeed self-organizing pattern of processes. A structure, in short, is a form of process that is ultimately composed of events. An event is an occurrence (or sequence of occurrences) that either perpetuates or transforms structures or forms of process (see Sewell 1992; Greco and Stenner 2017).

Affect as Experience on the Turn: Liminality

Having completed the critical part of the paper, I will now offer a positive proposition—or at least sketch (for a more sustained presentation of the argument see Stenner 2017a)—an alternative theoretical framing for some of these issues. I propose that the preoccupation amongst affect theorists with what might be called "intensive events of becoming" can be usefully

re-framed with a suitably crafted concept of liminality and liminal experience. Crafting this concept of liminality means moving well beyond its origins in the field of anthropology, where it refers to the middle phase in a rite of passage (Van Gennep 1909; Turner 1969). In my own work, I have extended the notion of a liminal occasion to include any occasion of passage during which some form of *becoming* takes place. I have called this *ontological liminality*, and from this perspective *anthropological liminality* is a specific or limited case (Stenner and Moreno 2013).

Let me link this with my theme of being "on the turn." At a specifically anthropological scale and focus, liminal occasions are significant *turning points* in the lives of individuals and collectives. Van Gennep called these turning points *transitions* or *passages*. A rite of passage is a ceremonial pattern of rites that accompanies "a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (van Gennep 1909, 10). These turning points or transitions are occasions when what I call "psychosocial forms of process" are suspended or interrupted, or collapse, or go through some sort of transformation or metamorphosis. I use the unfamiliar phrase "psychosocial forms of process" because human social and personal existence is a complex and tightly patterned unity of subjective experiences and objective expressions, bound up in flows of coordinated action mediated by discursive communication and situated within broader dynamics of power. The phrase "psychosocial form of process" is therefore designed to indicate that the routine practices of ordinary "everyday life" always presuppose a complex and fragile composition of forces that are ultimately processual in nature and composed of flows of events. For this reason, occasions during which those forms of process are interrupted, or suspended or transformed, tend to be very emotionally intense for those involved, and they tend to generate a particular quality of affect that I call *liminal affectivity*.

Philosophically speaking, I locate the approach I adopt within a tradition of process thinking that is inspired by the British philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead. The following quotation is from his last book, called *Modes of Thought*, from 1938:

> Nothing is more interesting to watch than the emotional disturbance produced by any unusual disturbance of the forms of process. The slow drift is accepted. But when for human experience quick changes arrive, human nature passes into hysteria. For example, gales, thunderstorms, earthquakes, revolutions in social habits, violent illnesses, destructive fires, battles, are all occasions of special excitement.

> There are perfectly good reasons for this energetic reaction to quick change. My point is the exhibition of our emotional reactions to the dominance of lawful order, and to the breakdown of such order. When fundamental change arrives, sometimes heaven dawns, sometimes hell yawns open. (Whitehead [1938] 1968, 95)

This tradition of thought has much deeper roots than Whitehead's philosophy. Back in the seventeenth century, Spinoza made a similar point in the preface to his *Theologico-Political Treatise* ([1670] 1951, 3). He draws a contrast between well-structured and rule-bound situations, and situations of doubt in which people are "driven into straights where rules are useless." It is probable that he had in mind the situations of war and religiously inspired conflict that were endemic before and during his lifetime and that affected him personally. In well-structured circumstances, he suggests, the human mind tends to be "boastful, overconfident and vain." Most people, "when in prosperity, are so over-brimming with wisdom (however inexperienced they may be), that they take every offer of advice as a personal insult". Put these same people in the straights of more chaotic circumstances, however, and Spinoza finds that they "know not where to turn, but beg and prey for counsel from every passer-by." They fluctuate "pitiably between hope and fear" and become superstitious and generally "very prone to credulity." Here Spinoza suggests that the same people can show very different characteristics—have very different opinions, values and feelings, for instance—as they cross the line between these two types of situation.

What I call the *liminal affectivity* that Spinoza here invokes arises from the fact that forms of process that were taken for granted have been perturbed or disrupted. Since human subjectivity is intricately woven into the forms of shared meaning that make up our various social practices, any significant disruption to a social form of process will shock and uproot the psychic constitution of those who participate, and disrupt the capacity for standard forms of coordinated communication. To return to my theme of turning, in these situations it usually feels, at least at first, as if our lives have taken a sharp turn for the worse. This turn or swerve can of course be conceived as a *passage,* and we should recall that for Spinoza affects are nothing but the experience of passage or transition. Suffering and distress, to quote from Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677, 138), are "passive states of transition… wherein the mind passes to a lesser perfection," whilst joy and merriment are also passive transitions, but transitions in which the passage is "to a greater perfection." We must not forget, then, that for Spinoza, affects *are* experiences on the turn, or experiences of the turn.

But these situations of doubt and crisis described by Spinoza and Whitehead are just one kind of liminal occasion. I call them *spontaneous liminal occasions* to the extent that they concern things that passively happen to us rather than things we actively and self-consciously enact by and for ourselves. Although the distinction is analytic and never actually encountered in pure form, spontaneous liminal occasions can be usefully contrasted with what I call *devised* or self-generated liminal occasions. These are liminal experiences that we *do to ourselves and to each other*. Those who know the liminality literature will be aware here that I am influenced by Victor Turner, who wrote of unstaged and staged liminal situations, and also by Árpad Szakolczai (2000; 2009; 2016), who contrasts "real life" liminal situations with those that are "staged" (see also Thomassen 2014). I depart from Turner, however, in that the metaphor of "staging," although very vivid and useful, is overly limited to the model of the theater. The same is true of all so-called dramaturgical theoretical vocabulary within the social sciences, and of most theory whose keyword is performance or performativity. Let me explain why.

When Ritual Turns into Theater

The theater, as we know, is a relatively recent cultural form (it came into existence in the late sixth century BC in Athens). It is just one means amongst others for creating devised liminal experiences, and obviously in the case of theater it makes sense to call these experiences staged liminal experiences (Szakolczai 2013). It makes sense because the theater has a clear and architecturally instantiated division between an audience that observes from the auditorium or *theatron*, and players who act on the stage. But, arguably, it was precisely this division between *theatron* and stage that constituted what was novel about the emergence or invention of theater.

Cambridge Ritualist Jane Harrison did the decisive historical work on this topic, building on some of Nietzsche's ideas about the birth of tragedy. In a book on Ancient Greek religion published in 1903, Harrison shows how both the *theatron* and the stage emerged from a third and more mysterious space designated for the Chorus (see Harrison 1913). In ancient theater, the Chorus may originally have been composed of singers of the *Dithyramb*—a ritual song sung in honor of the god Dionysus. In the original Dionysian rituals, it is likely that everybody would participate, and so a fixed distinction between actor and observer would be problematic. But Harrison reasons that through time some members of the Chorus would split off and

offer real-time interpretations, commentaries or embellishments of the Dithyramb sung by the Chorus. These new activities of the actors would be observed by a new category of spectators who were not obliged to participate. The spectators could simply enjoy the interpretations, commentaries and embellishments that would soon supplant the Chorus and become the main action of tragedy and comedy in the new medium of the theater. The psychosocial importance of the emergence of theater can hardly be overstated (but for a critique of the Cambridge Ritualist thesis see Rozik 2002). When theater emerged, it became, along with philosophy and democracy, one of the three fundamental novelties that define the classical period (roughly 500–336 BC).

I have discussed the emergence of Greek theater to explain why I consider the expression *"staged" liminal experience* to be too limited, and prefer instead the word "devised" or "self-generated." Harrison's work shows the dependence of theater upon a much older means for self-generating liminal experience, namely ritual. In fact, we might say that Harrison is fascinated with ritual at the historical moment that it is *on the turn*. In other words, she focuses precisely on the historical point at which ritual begins to mutate into theater or become theater. Ritual, as I have emphasized, is *not* divided into a group of actors who perform for a group of spectators. To call those who participated in the ancient rites of Dionysus "actors" who "perform" is to seriously misunderstand the *sacred* nature of their activity. Unless the ritual has degenerated into mere formal ceremony, it is not a matter of playing a part, but of *becoming other* through ritualistic means, and thereby encountering forces that are taken very seriously indeed. Likewise, the others present are not detached spectators enjoying the spectacle from the critical distance of their designated location, but more or less active participants who both witness and contribute to the process of becoming. As Kurakin (2018, note 14)—inspired by Durkheim—puts it, there is no arbitrary observer in ritual: "every particular participant of the ritual… is doomed to perceive the object or event, collectively turned to the sacred, as sacred." If ritual is a device for self-generating liminal experience of a predominantly *sacred* kind, then theater is a device for self-generating liminal experience of a predominantly *aesthetic* kind, exploiting the critical distance afforded by the *theatron*.

Liminal Affective Technologies

Ritual and theater are therefore quite different and not to be confused, and yet they share a fundamental similarity such that we might well say,

following Harrison, that at a certain point ritual *turned into* theater. Since ritual existed long before 500 BC it can be considered the older of the two forms, and yet the two can coexist; theater might also turn into ritual, and there might also be a zone of indiscernability between them (Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* could be considered an effort to reconnect theater with ritual, for example, and certainly religious rites can easily turn theatrical, often to the anger of purists). In my recent work, I specify the fundamental similarity between ritual and theater as "devices" for self-generating liminal experience by calling them *liminal affective technologies.* They are, in other words, means or *media* through which we can self-generate liminal experiences of becoming, and manage, navigate and enjoy the liminal affectivity that is brought into play. In using the word "technology" I am extending the ordinary use of this word, much as Michel Foucault (2000) did when he wrote of "technologies of the self" (perhaps inspired by Marcel Mauss's [1935/2006] essay on "techniques of the body"). Any technology, as Niklas Luhmann (1990) points out, operates with a difference between the reduced complexity of repeatable cause–effect relationships, and "uncapped" causal relationships that have not yet been determined (see Andersen and Stenner 2020). Considered in this way, a technology is a "dodge to live" achieved by bringing uncapped cause–effect relationships into a form that produces reliably repeatable effects. But usually we think of technology as a means for producing reliably repeatable effects with respect to material forms in the so-called external world. A lever, for instance, is a technology for shifting weighty substances, and a sail a technology for harnessing the power of the wind.

Liminal affective technologies, by contrast, are about summoning and working with subjective, affective experience in order to occasion transformations. This is less a matter of reliably triggering and directing uniform causal process than of *undoing* the structural limits that usually produce conformal effects. To use a lovely turn of phrase from Norbert Elias, they involve "the controlled decontrolling of emotional controls" (cited in Wouters 2007, 232). Liminal affective technologies can in this sense be traced to, and build upon, more spontaneous liminal experiences and activities like play and daydreaming, both of which presume a certain "release" from the more structured routines of daily life. Both ritual and theater have obvious links to children's (and perhaps even animal) play. Ritual, for example, has a certain "excessive" and "repetitive" quality irreducible to mere survival or utilitarian functionality, and evocative instead of superfluous energy, enjoyed for its own sake. As with play fighting, we enjoy ritualistic acts irrespective of their "external" use-value. Ritual, in

this sense, is at root a means for exciting affectivity, and it can diverge into the serious emotions of the religious sacred, or into playful fun, or any mixtures thereof. The concept of liminal affective technologies thus also allows me to express the difference between ritual and theater, since they are *different* liminal affective technologies. Continuing my theme of the turn, we might say that religious ritual is a technology for turning affectivity into sacred experience, whilst theater is a technology for turning affectivity into aesthetic experience.

Ritual and theater are, of course, not the only liminal affective technologies. Sports and games, viewed from this perspective, can be thought of as technologies for turning affectivity into *ludic* experience. Nor is theater the only aesthetic technology, since we must include each of the other arts: music, painting, dance, and so on. So, I have identified three broad types of liminal affective technology, corresponding to the *sacred*, the *aesthetic*, and the *ludic* (see Stenner 2017b). It is interesting to observe the extent to which the *aesthetic* and the *ludic* types both have a close relationship to ritual. Ritual can be considered the matrix of the arts and sport to the extent that it contains and nourishes them in embryonic form. The masks of theater were born out of ritual, but ritual also encompasses elements of dance, music and story-telling as well as sport-like tests of skill and endurance. Just like ancient theater, the old Olympic Games were originally a thoroughly sacred affair. In sum, we might say that, historically speaking, sacred ritual takes a turn towards the ludic and the aesthetic forms, which spring from it like seeds from a pod. But, even when independent, the arts and sport never quite lose the tinge of religious significance. It is not accidental, taking literature as an example, that Thomas Mann directly identified his novel *The Magic Mountain* with a rite of passage, describing it as "a novel of *initiation*": "In a word, the magic mountain is a variant on the shrine of the initiatory rites, a place of adventurous investigation into the mystery of life" (Mann 1953, 728). To the extent that a novel implicates its readers (and writers) in an experience that is transformative and not just "entertaining," that work of art can be said to function as a liminal affective technology (Szakolczai 2016; Stenner and Greco 2018). Through an analysis of Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, Stenner and Zittoun (2020) make a similar case for film.

In construing these different kinds of media as liminal affective technologies, I am drawing attention to the ways in which they work to self-generate emotional experience and deploy that experience within a project of transformation. When we listen to a piece of music we really like, for example, or when we play an instrument ourselves, we produce

emotional effects, both for ourselves and potentially for others. If we are unmoved by a theater performance, or a movie, we are left disappointed. These activities share with ritual the common aim of producing *moving* experiences that are somewhat out of the ordinary and that are conducive of psychosocial transformation. Most scientific psychology of affect misses the entirety of these self-generated or devised affective experiences. It concentrates instead on a somewhat atavistic view of affects as raw survival mechanisms, wired into our brains through evolution to equip us for survival: fear for flight, anger for a fight and love for some other f word. In drawing attention to devised liminal affectivity and the technologies through which it is summoned, however, my intention is not to deny the brutal realities that may have been faced by our cave-dwelling ancestors, for whom, we are told, nature appeared in the raw with tooth and claw. In fact, the true value of the distinction between spontaneous and devised liminal occasions is the productivity of the *contrast* it permits. There is no pure spontaneous and pure devised experience—rather, everything falls somewhere in between. Indeed, it could even be said that liminal affective technologies function precisely at the *turning point* between the two. On the one hand, the liminal experience self-generated through liminal affective technologies helps us to navigate and manage the spontaneous liminality that might fall upon us. On the other hand, the spontaneous liminal experiences cry out, as it were, for symbolic expression, precisely because they challenge and transform the taken-for-granted order of daily life. New symbolism must be invented where old symbolism fails, and it is my thesis that the liminal affective technologies help us to create that symbolism and to drag it into emergence from the edge of semantic availability. To evoke my theme of the turn once again, we might say that liminal affective technologies serve to turn a crisis into a drama, disabling toxic distress into thought-provoking tragedy.

Inconclusion: Some Contemporary Forms of Liminal Affective Technology

With the big theoretical picture behind us, I wish to bring the argument to a close by outlining some of the contemporary forms that liminal affective technologies are taking. It seems to me that the basic forms of ritual, art and games of various kinds are increasingly being instrumentalized to play a functional role in managing transitions within organizations of various kinds from schools to corporations (Zittoun 2007; Fuchs et al. 2014; Andersen and Pors 2016; Slater and Coyle 2017; Nissen and Solgaard

Sørensen 2017; Berg and Staunaes 2018; Zittoun and Rosenstein 2018). I would suggest that many of the institutional efforts to induce "change" in people and practices today can be usefully understood as liminal affective technologies (or what Berg and Staunaes 2018, modifying my terminology a little, call "liminal motivational technologies").

A key element of liminal affective technologies is their capacity to *potentialize* the emergence of unanticipated novelty, and in this respect, there is a close relationship between them and what Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, Justine Pors, Hanne Knudsen and others working within the sphere of public management have called "potentialization technologies" (Andersen and Knudsen 2015; Andersen and Pors 2016). Examples would include things like managerial performance arts, 360 degree interviewing, sand-pits, future games, artistic interventions in therapeutic settings, Psychological Informed Planned Environments, and even cross-professional speed-dating. Potentialization technologies are used when there is a perception that some type of change is needed in an organization, and yet the nature of that change is not yet clearly specified. Methods are therefore needed to help people to "think outside the box" and to "expect the unexpected." The preferred methods tend to take the form of role-play games, pedagogical activies, and artistic (especially theatrical) interventions (Stenner and Andersen 2020). These serve to suspend the usual patterns of activity, and to generate unusual situations with distinct affective resonances. Drawing upon Luhmann's sociological theory, Andersen and myself reflect upon potentialization technologies as a species of liminal affective technology (Andersen and Stenner 2020). For example, in Denmark an organization called *Sisters Academy* use a technique that they specifically link to liminality theory, as well as to performance art and activism. One of their projects from 2013 was called "School in a Sensual Society." *Sisters Academy* would enter a school during the holiday period and transform its environment using techniques of light, sound, and set design. When the teachers and pupils returned it felt like a different place, and the teachers were then encouraged to experiment with their teaching based on the principle that aesthetics are of pivotal value. The ambition is to effect—or at least to suggest—an institutional transformation through the deliberate staging of a liminal occasion. This would be an example of "potentializing" by means of a liminal affective technology.

But liminal affective technologies are not limited to the occasioning of "fun" or "creative" situations in which some type of change has to be induced in participants who may well be reluctant. They can also be about managing and shaping the spontaneous affectivity generated by "real-life"

liminal experiences. Eduardo Moreno, for example, studied the affective dimensions of deceased organ donation practices in Catalonia (Stenner and Moreno 2013). The entire deceased organ donation system in Spain is a complex *dispositif*, but we were particularly interested in the workings of small groups called *transplant coordination teams.* In the Spanish health-care system, these are composed of teams of physicians and other medical professionals whose role is to bring together all of the components—from the technical to the emotional—necessary for organ transplantation. A key role is to interview the closest available relative of the deceased in order to secure consent for harvesting the organs of their recently deceased loved one. The team members are trained to carefully manage the affectivity unleashed by these circumstances, and to use the resulting emotions to steer the relative towards a decision concerning consent, in full knowledge of the highly sensitive and transformative nature of the event being, as it were, "stage-managed."

The advantage of considering interventions, methods and techniques like these as liminal affective technologies is not just that it draws our attention to their relationship with rituals and their ludic and aesthetic off-spring, hence situating them within a broader genealogy. It also draws our attention to what we are trying to become when we use these technologies, and to our responsibility in actually enabling those becomings. This issue is increasingly important within our contemporary geopolitics, where global flows of capital threaten to impose a permanent situation of change upon practically all forms of human existence (Szakolczai 2016).

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