Theorising liminality between art and life:
The liminal sources of cultural experience

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

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

Before I get too abstract, let me be begin with a concrete example of some of the phenomena I will be circling around. Recently, in a rare moment of communication as I was driving her to school, my 14 year old daughter told me of her enthusiasm for a book called 'this is not a book'. I had been encouraging her to talk about Macbeth since she is 'doing' this play at school, but she is expert at resisting my encouragements. I asked why she didn't seem to like books and my ears pricked up when she mentioned a book she thought she would like. The book, she murmured, is called 'this is not a book'. She heard about it after re-discovering a gift she had received some years back. This gift was a journal called 'Wreck this journal' which is designed to be ruined. For example, it contains suggestions encouraging its owner to rip the pages, smear it with food and generally mistreat the journal. Written by the same author in a similar spirit, 'this is not a book' (Keri Smith, 2009) suggests to the reader things like: try to create as many sounds with the book as you can, and hold the book above your head for as long as you can, and record your time on the page. It instructs the reader to trust their imagination because it is 'the source of all true journeys'. It seems clear what Anna was telling me: school spoils books for her, it takes them out of the zone in which they might be enjoyable, and lodges them firmly in another zone that kills joy, this killjoy zone being school work. The zone permitting enjoyment, by contrast, is a zone of play, albeit play with an ever-present hint of anxiety and perhaps even dread. She especially enjoyed the play involved in a title like 'this is not a book'.

All art forms or cultural products require someone to engage with them, of course, and none can dictate the exact experience that is to be had with them. Nevertheless, once produced, they are forms in their own right. In the case we are dealing with, this curious little cultural product announces itself in its very title as something which violates Aristotelian logic by appearing as two mutually exclusive things – both a book and not a book. It shares with other art works this feature of being, not just a world of its own and in its own right, but also a curiously doubled and ambiguous world that we might call a *world-within-a-world* (Stenner, 2017a: 152).[1] It is as if two

worlds that are usually kept separate as an 'either / or' are combined as 'both / and'. Or rather, they are combined as a *both* 'both/and' *and* 'neither nor':

This is a book   This is not a book
This book *is* not a book
This not a book *is* a book
This book *is not* a book
This not a book *is not* a not a book

This 'doubled' feature of what I am calling a 'world-within-a-world' is typical of any art, which to function as art, must somehow fold back on and re-enter itself, thereby creating a distinction between itself and something like reality (a distinction within which the artwork somehow exists in a zone where 'the accent of reality has been withdrawn' [Schütz, 1945: 554]). But this feature is not just typical of art in general, but also of play and games[2]. Even the play of a very small child must somehow imply a distinction between itself and something that might subsequently be called reality. The play must create and communicate that distinction as part of its process of unfolding in a zone for which the usual limits of reality are suspended. Here too we find a connection with religion, which often involves the creation of a particular zone in which we are licensed to seriously entertain things like angels and demons, titans and reincarnations, parting seas and previsions of the future. Each of these worlds-within-worlds (Schütz lists dream, play, theatre, painting, humour, religion and science) can be contrasted, albeit roughly, with pivotal or canonical *worlds of daily life*. Liminality theory encourages us to attend to the importance of these 'worlds within worlds', and indeed to recognise that human beings are what Proust (2000: 610) calls 'amphibious creatures' who are plunged simultaneously into both sides of the distinction.

To return to my anecdote, Anna's unexpected desire for 'this is not a book' has nothing to do with any acquaintance with Rene Magritte's famous painting, because I can assure you that she is nearly as disinterested in art galleries as she is in books. Rather, she enjoyed the paradoxical play involved in the title. But more than this, both of the conflicting propositions in the paradox of a book that is not a book are strictly necessary if we are to account for Anna's enjoyment. To put it crudely, she can enjoy that she is showing an interest in a book, as demanded by her school and by her parents ('this is a book'). And yet, this 'book' does not invite her to read it, but to mistreat it, destroy it, have fun with it ('this is not a book'). It is a book which holds the reality of its 'bookness' in suspense by removing the usual limits applicable to books. Furthermore, the book somehow recognises Anna, and communicates to her that it knows her predicament and that an enjoyable way out of that predicament can be found. 'This is not a book' seems to speak to her directly, and seems to offer a way of getting her out of a hotspot[3] in which she feels she must read but cannot read. As a world within a world, 'This is not a book' seems to invite an experience in which the book oscillates, as it were, between book as medium and book as form or message. One moment the book is a medium hosting the form of writing, and hence it IS a book, the next moment, the medium becomes the message, and the book appears as a brute object to be torn or used as a door stop, and hence it is NOT a book.

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

I am suggesting that 'this is not a book', as a curious 'world-within-a-world', is particularly suited to people who are themselves experiencing a phase of passage or transition 'between worlds'. When we are between worlds, then and there we find, or we run up against, the use and meaning of these curious things – like 'this is not a book' – that is a world within a world. The reason for this is that when we are in passage, they can help to get us through. Of course, you don't have to be going through a liminal experience to get something out of this kind of cultural object, but I will argue that the vital source of cultural experience is indeed to be found *then and there*, in a phase of liminal passage: in a becoming. But a liminal passage, if it is indeed a becoming (a transformation), is a delicate and ambivalent thing. What Anna enjoys then and there is also a certain freedom or license to destroy, deface, ruin, spoil and have done with this non-book. It is important that this destruction is both playful and yet also has a quite serious overtone of anxiety and dread to it. The book somehow allows what might otherwise easily be a scary and unpleasant experience to be tolerated within a positive frame, a little like a fairground ride can convert sheer terror into exhilaration. It helps to create a supportive framework within which delicate, ambivalent and ambiguous feelings can be entertained in a positive and encouraging manner. And with the book, somehow one is also not alone, but accompanied by the one giving you this licence, even if nobody is there. And in this positively licensed destruction there is, surely, above all, a sense of *life*. A vitality of desire. A sense of touching upon the essentials that make life worth living ('vital subjectivity' [Stenner, 2017b]). A liminal experience, in short, is an experience *of a world within a world* that happens *between worlds:* a world-within-and-between-worlds.

What have psychologists got to say about this kind of thing? On the surface of things, very little, it seems, but there are precious exceptions, usually beyond the 'mainstream'. Tania Zittoun, for example, is a rare psychologist who asks the question: 'How can we comprehend what young people *do* with books, movies and songs?' (Zittoun, 2006, p. 33). These cultural elements, she continues, 'enable humans to extend their intelligence and memory through time and space'. She writes of young people using songs, movies and so on as 'symbolic resources' which can help them, for example, to re-position, re-signify and re-imagine themselves,

particularly during what she calls life transitions. She follows Winnicott in calling the experiences that are mediated by these cultural forms 'cultural experiences'. I want to help further theorise this notion of *cultural experience* by bringing more clearly to light its distinctively liminal sources. In fact, we've done this together in a recent analysis of the movie *Inception*, but that's for another time. Tania's work is part of the recent development of cultural psychology, and so there are other contemporaries (see Valsiner, 2014 for an overview) but also other important precursors, not least Vygotsky and Spinoza. On the matter of precursors, from my perspective as a social psychologist, G.H. Mead is particularly worth noting as a thinker of the liminal, even if he never used the l-word. At the core of Mead's thought is the importance of ascribing real existence to experiences of transition during which one world or system passes over into another. His concept of emergence[5] concerns situations in which something new enters a world, the advent of which changes that world. Mead wants to ascribe reality both to the novelty of this event of emergence, and also to the process of adjustment whereby the changed system comes to terms with it. In fact, Mead's expresses this reality with his core definition of sociality:

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

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

Introduction

Over the years I have participated in developing a critical and transdisciplinary approach (Stenner, 2014; 2015) to social psychology that is 'psychosocial' and 'processual' (Brown and Stenner, 2009, Stenner, 2017a). I will briefly explain both terms. The term processual points to an ontology according to which ultimate reality is composed of events or occurrences[7] rather than irreducible substances: an entity's being is constituted by its relational becoming. The latter stance is principally inspired by Alfred North Whitehead's[8] philosophy whereby 'the actual world is a process' (Whitehead, 1929, p.22). Comparable process thinking can be found in the work of Bergson, Mead, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Langer, Turner, Deleuze, Serres, Luhmann, Stengers and many others. It has been slowly trickling into psychology for more than

a century, and has strong connections with systems theory[9]. As I tried to outline in my recent book *Liminality and Experience,* transition, becoming, passage and emergence acquire huge importance within process thought: liminality becomes what Jaan Valsiner calls a cultural universal[10], or primary concept (see also Stenner and Weber, 2018).

Process thinking aims for general applicability and applies to all aspects of nature. The term psychosocial points, not just to a specific focal research interest in social psychology, but also to a rejection of fundamental dualism and a concern with the mutual constitution of the socio-cultural and the psychological[11]. Although I cannot address it fully here (see Stenner, 2017a, pp 6-14), my own approach begins with an acknowledgement of the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the psychological and the social: the psychological both *must* and yet ultimately *cannot* be separated from, and indeed connected to, the social. On the one hand, the psychic and the social are inseparable since, as Mead proved, we can become self-conscious (and have 'selves') only by taking the perspective or attitude of another towards ourselves. On the other hand, the psychic and the social are destined to pass each other by because our minds presuppose the activities of our nervous systems, and, for all our empathy, the nervous systems of two individuals do not directly connect. Even though I might say I can feel your pain, the pain I feel is not in fact yours: your experience remains your own, lodged to your own unique standpoint within the world, and so something of it must remain enigmatic and inaccessible to me[12]. This paradox of the psychosocial means that sociality and selfhood must leap a chasm hand in hand, and must do so continually. Self emerges from the social process to the extent that the social process gets into the self, but *that is always a limited extent*, fragile and contingent on the acceptance of creative leaps of faith that are culturally mediated and supported (as we shall see, by liminal affective technologies of passage)[13]. The fact that 'self is social' thus does not prevent the psyches of individuals from falling out of joint with, and needing to coordinate with, the flows of culturally structured and conflict ridden social communication in which they have their being. Neither does it prevent people from seeking to change the – ultimately somewhat arbitrary - social processes of society. Indeed both this problem of coordination of individuals with society, and this ambivalence towards social order, are fundamental to the concept of liminality[14]. *Acceptance of the paradox* of the psychosocial is decisive to understanding this (see Motzkau, 2009), as I hope to show.

The current paper is not an explication of this approach but an application to a topic of some interest to the field of cultural psychology: the nature of 'cultural experience'[15]. I take the phrase 'cultural experience' or better 'cultural experiencing' from the psychoanalytical psychologist D.W Winnicott (another thinker of liminal experience who never used the 'l'-word). Winnicott puts the emphasis on the word experience and sensibly hesitates to define 'culture'[16]. He alludes only to a pool of inherited tradition that is the basis for a continual inventiveness that provides a continuity that transcends personal existence[17]. With origins in the myths and rituals of oral traditions, this cultural pool spans several thousands of years. But, as I will discuss, Winnicott is not, for the most part, interested in elite cultural products[18]. He finds, for example, a direct continuity between cultural experience and the play of very young children, and he is interested in 'creativity'[19] as a universal, and not just as an exceptional talent. For now, however, it is important just to note that Winnicott

does not ask *what* is cultural experience but instead poses the much better question: *where* is cultural experience?[20]

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

To make this argument I expand upon the concept of liminality developed in *Liminality and experience* (Stenner, 2017a, Greco and Stenner, 2017). This in turn builds upon three key steps in liminality scholarship which I cannot deal with here: first, the initial articulation of the concept of the liminal within the anthropology of Arnold van Gennep (1909); second, its re-discovery, celebration, popularization and expansion (e.g. into the concepts of liminality and the liminoid, as well as communitas[21] and anti-structure[22]) during the 1960s by Victor Turner (e.g. Turner, 1969, 1982); and third, the further extension of the concept within the social sciences, notably by Eisenstadt (1985), Szakolczai (2009, 2017), Thomassen (2016) and also, in a different manner, Alexander (2017). This concept of liminality will enable me to show how Winnicott's ideas can be integrated with anthropological work on rites of passage and brought into resonance with broader sociological work using liminality.

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

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

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

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

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There are two obvious objections to my provisional argument so far about cultural experience having a liminal source in circumstances of passage. I need to get these out of the way before proceeding further. First is the objection that all experience is cultural experience, and hence there is no outside to this category. In one sense this is certainly true. It is a premise of cultural psychology, discursive psychology, social constructionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and practically all traditions outside of mainstream positivism that *all* human existence is culturally mediated and semiotically modified. What Cassirer called 'symbolic forms' provide a third link or 'Zwischenreich' between human organism and environment that shape and add texture and new degrees of freedom to even the most mundane and routinised human activity, experience and encounter[23]. Accepting this important truth, however, does not require us to assume that our symbolic existence is static, uniform or finished. If we wish to know how cultural forms emerged in the first place, or why new cultural forms are continually arising in dialogue (and often in conflict) with existing tradition, then we need a more nuanced and specific account of cultural experiencing informed by the notion of liminal experience[24].

The second objection is more critical. It begins with an apparently empirically grounded understanding of cultural experience as something that is the very opposite of transition or creative becoming. The best-known but by no means the only advocate of this view is the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His basic argument is that the actual, if usually hidden, function of works of art and other cultural forms is to define and reinforce class definitions and distinctions in order to fortify interclass boundaries and reproduce the existing status quo. Cultural experience from this perspective is all

about establishing and protecting structures, and that is why, for Bourdieu, each and every artistic offering is addressed to and accepted by one class alone. Cultural experience, in short, is about drawing distinctions and fixing them, and the primary function of Shakespeare, George Elliot and the Opera is for the cultivated elite to tell themselves apart from the plebs and chavs they see littering the pubs and football stadiums. And when it is not class that is being sacralised by art it is the nation state or city-state announcing its essential superiority and insisting on the status quo. What is Michelangelo's David but the Florentines telling the Sienese where to go? Does not every capital city brandish its art museums like a fleet of battleships? Like Jacques Lacan's phallus, cultural experience fixes identity into the firm shape of patriarchy and empire, the better to turn the screws on the poor and needy. Now, even if I have caricatured it a little, there can be no doubt that this perspective rings true much of the time and must not be ignored. But even so, must we call this 'cultural experience'? Does the fact that a given painting serves as a mere status symbol in a rich person's living room mean that it cannot also be part of a real cultural experience? A CD can be sharpened up and used to sever the head off a piglet, but that hardly proves that music serves for butchery[25].

This is not… what I was expecting: Spontaneous and devised liminal experience

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

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

We must recognise, of course, that this scene is part of Homer's great epic poem that would itself have been sung as a song, and that was composed sometime between 700 and 800 B.C. We must acknowledge, therefore, that we are dealing with a story told in the medium of epic poetry, and indeed that this particular scene takes the form of a song within a song. Everything here has the doubled quality of 'worlds within worlds'

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

I selected this example as a very special case because Demodocus' song is not any song, but a song that is about *Odysseus'* own adventures. This means that for Odysseus (the character in Homer's song) the connection that Demodocus' song makes with his life cannot be missed, since he is both audience and subject matter. But without this hyper-personalised ingredient of doubling, the same contrast between devised cultural experience and spontaneous actual life is used in Homer's song when Odysseus' weeping is compared with how 'a woman weeps who throws herself on her husband's dying body'. So, I have used this example to distinguish and contrast two intimately related kinds of liminal experience. On the one hand, the cultural experience had by Odysseus in Alcinous' palace can be described as a *devised* liminal experience because it involves a transition that is enacted virtually and mediated by the cultural form of song. On the other hand, his experience of battle in Troy, of victory followed by disaster, shipwreck and capture (to the extent that we take the liberty of considering these real-life experiences that actually happened to him), can be described as spontaneous liminal experiences involving world-rupture and subsequent transformation. Devised liminal experience is something that happens which we do to ourselves in an environment of rarefied space/time that is abstracted from daily practical reality. Spontaneous liminal experience, by contrast, is embedded in practical reality and follows from what happens to us despite our actions, in the irreversible time of 'outrageous fortune'. Both forms of liminality presuppose a contrast with forms of experience and activity which are sufficiently stable and predictable to be taken for granted as a shared canonical world of mundane practical reality[26].

This distinction between devised and spontaneous liminality is not intended as some sort of categorical absolute, but – on the contrary – I find it useful because of the contrasts and connections that are opened up by means of it. Indeed, it could be said that liminal affective technologies like song, theatre and ritual actually function at the *turning point* between the spontaneous and the devised (Stenner, *in press* 2019). Just as Odysseus was able finally to imaginatively connect – by means of the song - to experiences he had really lived through, so the devised liminal experiences we self-generate in a safe space can help us to navigate and manage our experiences of spontaneous liminality. These spontaneous experiences cry out, as it were, for imaginative symbolic expression, precisely because they challenge and transform the

taken-for-granted order of daily life. Demodocus' song supplied Odysseus with a new form of symbolism with which to drag, as it were, his liminal experience across a threshold of semantic availability. Homer has his own way of putting this when he sings that it is the work of the Gods to spin 'threads of death through the lives of mortal men' [spontaneous liminal experience], and 'all to make a song for those to come' [devised liminal experience'].

Liminal affective technologies as cultural and symbolic media for transition: the aesthetic, the sacred and the ludic as varieties of liminal experiencing

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

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

transition of 'hominization' [see Girard, 1987]). Ritual as a liminal affective technology of the sacred also, therefore, long predated other cultural technologies like the theatre[28], the novel, and the fine arts. Nevertheless, each of these later cultural technologies can be considered to be present within ritual in seed-like form, awaiting their moment of release and individuation, as it were[29]. In this sense, considered in relation to the historical sociogenesis of cultural experience, ritual can be considered the matrix of those technologies that are specialized in generating devised liminal experience. Although I will not deal with it here, a third type of liminal experience is the *ludic* variety which is produced through play, games and sports when they function as liminal affective technologies. These too were (and often still are) a core part of the ritualistic repertoire and, like the arts, are often tightly enmeshed within the sensibility of the sacred, which clings to them even today (see Stenner, 2017b).[30]

Ritual shares with art and with play the curious quality of being a 'world within a world' with a 'reflexive' form (of re-entry) that has doubled back on itself[31]. Like a song, or a novel or a game, a ritual is a self-created cultural form which we use on ourselves in order to produce distinct emotional experiences through the evocation of a double which is nevertheless simultaneously bracketed out or truncated or abbreviated[32]. In fact, as I just noted, rituals often deploy elements of song, dance, painting, sculpture, mask wearing and so on in order to artfully summon and orchestrate unusual and intense experiences. In Ancient Greek, the word for ritual was *dromenon* meaning a 'thing done', but the 'thing done' in ritual is curiously disconnected from what might normally be considered as ordinary practical (canonical/pivotal) activity. Unlike the building of a house or the tilling of a field or the making of a pair of boots, these rites lack direct relevance to the preservation of the physical organism of those acting, and sometimes may even put it at risk. In the famous *Gol* ritual practiced on Pentacost Island, young initiates dive headfirst from a specially constructed tall tower in a flight that would kill them but for vines tied to their ankles. Young men from the Satere-Mawe people of Amazonian Brazil, to give another example, participate in an initiation ritual that involves dancing whilst wearing a pair of carefully constructed gloves infested with bullet ants. It is clear that these self-generated 'devised' experiences are precisely haunted by their evocation of a spontaneous or 'raw' experience that would be considerably more dangerous were it not canalized into the relative safety of a contained and regularly repeated devised experience of ritual (and thus distinguished as liminal from canonical experience). These rituals generate intense and emotionally heightened experiences which are 'at the limit', as it were, of our ordinary work-a-day experience. But intense and dangerous though they are, these experiences nevertheless unfold in a curious *world within a world* that is cut loose and held in suspense from ordinary spatio-temporal reality, much like the play of a child, or that other type of play that is performed in a theatre (see Turner, 1982). As we shall see in the next section, with rites of passage, the link between these 'worlds within worlds' and the status of being between worlds (i.e. their status in creating a *world within and between worlds*) was made patent by the father of the liminal: Arnold Van Gennep.

This is not… a space: a *wavering* between worlds experienced as the liminal sacred

Liminality is much discussed these days, but nearly always it is assumed to be a spatial phenomenon[33]. The phrase 'liminal space' is very commonly used, as if

liminality were reducible to the space of a border, or a membrane, or a door, or a cross-roads, or a meeting point, or an airport, or a beach, or some other place or structure at the edge or 'in between' structures. The assumption is that this space is somehow itself 'liminal'. This is all very well, and – when skillfully handled, there can be much value in the concept of liminal space (certainly the word derives from the Ancient Roman *limes* which were fortifications marking the outer limits of the empire) - but it remains a fortunate simplification. When liminality is grasped as liminal space it has already been contained, ordered, tamed and simplified, and attention is directed away from other liminal phenomena (not just 'temporal' *process* but also liminal personae, liminal (quasi)objects, liminal sociality or 'communitas', liminal affectivity, liminal technologies, etc).

There is nothing inherently liminal about thresholds, borders, frontiers, margins and so forth. What may or may not be described as liminal must include the experience of passage or movement across such a threshold, and its management. Van Gennep, who coined the term 'liminal', makes this clear himself when he points out (he was writing in 1909, see p.15) that except 'in the few countries where a passport is still in use, a person in these days may pass freely from one civilized region to another'. In the UK today we can even wander in and out of Churches and graveyards chatting and taking photos without raising an eyebrow or skipping a heart-beat. But for most of human history, such crossings were accompanied by various formalities, including magico-religious rites, and indeed no activity could be completely free of the sacred. In his chapter entitled 'the territorial passage' Van Gennep cites Trumbull's account of General Grant's visit to Egypt during the late 1870s. Upon entering Asyut territory General Grant was obliged to step over a flow of blood between the severed head of bull that had just been sacrificed and the rest of its still quivering body. One can imagine General Grant wavering for a moment before stepping across the flow of this bloody Rubicon. As Van Gennep (1909, p. 15) states:

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

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

is, as it were, a relatively contingent, formless, subjunctive experience of *potentiality*. As Van Gennep puts it, a person may find themselves:

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

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

Rites of separation might typically include an act of cutting or of veiling. The cutting of a widow's hair or a circumcision as part of an initiation rite, for example, symbolize a separation from married status in the first case, or from the state of childhood in the second. The story of General Grant provides another example in which leaving a territory is marked by the symbolic separation of a bull's head from its body. Rites of incorporation, by contrast, might include an act of binding, as when a married couple literally 'tie the knot' by binding their wrists together, or when a funeral ends with a shared feast. The liminal or transition rites sit between preliminal separation from the old and postliminal incorporation into the new. They often symbolize movement as when a married couple are carried across a threshold, or the body of the deceased is borne aloft by pole bearers or a new leader is raised upon a throne or an initiate is required to go through a physical challenge. In so doing, liminal rites also typically isolate and maintain the passengers (those passing) in an ambiguous, ambivalent and paradoxical 'intermediate position', held, as it were, some where 'between heaven and earth' or 'suspended between life and true death' or belonging neither 'to the sacred or the profane world; or, if he does belong to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other' (Van Gennep, 1909, p.186).

We have noted that the rituals of the rites of passage ceremonialize and symbolize an experience of 'going through' whereby people leave one world behind as they enter a new one. But why should such passages necessitate all this ceremonial fuss? Why is passage so important? What is at stake in this mysterious 'becoming'? I have stressed that Van Gennep's proximal use of the word liminal is to refer to a type of ritual (the

middle phase of a rite of passage). In introducing his book, for instance, he writes that 'I have tried to assemble here all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another.' (p.10)[37]. Note here, however, that Van Gennep implies the idea of a passage or a transition as something more than a rite, indeed as something that the rite 'accompanies'. Indeed, if a ritual is a devised thing, a cultural thing done, a *dromenon*, then, as I have stressed, it is a thing enacted just at those turning points, thresholds, transitions and ruptures in the physico-bio-psycho-social fabric where actual transformations are happening. They are enacted just there where babies are born, where people die, where puberty ensues, where women fall pregnant, where people are appointed to new roles, where celestial movements produce the natural movements of the seasons, months and days, etc. According to Van Gennep (1909, p.13), the 'function' of rites of passage is to 'reduce the harmful effects' of disturbances to the life of society caused by actual changes of condition amongst its members'.

Approaching this issue as a social psychologist informed by Mead, Cassirer, Schütz, Langer, Vygotsky and other thinkers of symbolically mediated process, it should be clear that the 'disturbances' implied by van Gennep are related to the fact that the various canonical or pivotal worlds of daily life that have been collectively constructed by human beings are just that: enormously complex ongoingly co-enacted symbolically mediated conflict ridden historically contingent material-semiotic physico-bio-psycho-socio-cultural *constructions* (that must be recurrently re-constructed). That we may take the 'natural attitude' towards these social systems does not mean that their reality is in fact simple and 'out-there', or that we can easily create them, change them, and move between them smoothly at will. Furthermore, to be part of (participant within) a human world of ordinary daily life, or indeed of any sphere of more-or-less coordinated human social activity is to already be what Mead calls a 'self'. The self is not a given but a complex emergent involving a highly sophisticated matrix of mutual recognition. If to be a self is to 'call the recognition of others and the recognition of ourselves in the others' then we cannot 'realize ourselves except in so far as we can recognize the other in his relationship to us' (194). Without going into the basics of Mead's theory, this matrix of mutual recognition is the basis for how human beings can coordinate in order to participate in the shared social acts that make up the ongoing practical reality of any social order (of any field, sphere, circle, world or universe, of any network, system, or nexus).

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

recognized by others. The liminal media of transition facilitate this process.

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

This is not… me: Winnicott and the initial emergence of a world and a self

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

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

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

self' (or sometimes an *objective subject*) which can be its own inner world is simultaneously the creation of the object or objectivity in the sense of finding externality itself[41]. But this affirmation of the construction of externality is far from being an idealistic denial of objective existence: it is a matter of the acceptance of the independent existence of the object, that is to say, 'its property of having been there all the time' (2005: 119).

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

Having identified the 'inner' and 'outer' perspectives as achievements, Winnicott emphasises the need to expand our usual statement of human nature (which he perceives to be restricted to an ontology that posits only the existence of an inner world and an outer world) and to insist upon the reality of a crucial 'third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore' (Winnicott, 2005: 3). As he puts it, 'For a long time my mind remained in a state of not-knowing, this state crystallizing into my formulation of the transitional phenomena' (2005:129). Much like Mead who, as we saw, insisted upon the reality of the 'betwixt and between' (of emergent sociality), Winnicott posits and affirms the reality of 'third area' which is 'an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott, 2005, p.3). This fits neatly the paradoxical formula by which something is liminal if it is *both* both/and *and* neither/nor (Kofoed and Stenner, 2017). Winnicott's intermediate area of experiencing is both internal and external, since it contains the potential for both (Winnicott [2005: 72] also calls this area a 'potential space'), whilst at the same time it is neither internal nor external, since it pertains to a phase before this distinction has arisen in experience[42].

Winnicott is examining a quite specific situation in which a qualitative and irreversible *change* in experiencing is occurring, a change that leads to an increased

complexity of experiencing, a complexity that gives rise in experience to an inner as distinct from an outer and to a me as distinct from a you. He is talking about the infant's *first* use of a symbol, their *first* experience of an object, their *first* experience of play, and each of these related firsts (necessarily temporal) participate in *expanding the world* of the infant beyond its prior limits. More concretely, he is interested in a phase in the life of an infant (usually between 4 and 12 months old) during which some entity – the corner of a blanket, a bundle of wool, or even a mannerism – acquires vital importance such that they become anxious, or distressed, or cannot sleep without this 'transitional object'. If the transitional object is the infant's first possession then this is because this first possession is *both* a material object – a bit of cloth perhaps – *and* a symbol. If it becomes a symbol, this is because it is a 'subjective object' and hence it is *both* a part of the infant *and* an external object (it can oscillate between the two), or rather it is *neither* a part of the infant *nor* the kind of fully external object experience-able by a pre-formed objective subject[43]. It would therefore be wrong to assert that it symbolizes, say, the infant's own thumb or the mother's breast. Equally important to its symbolism (for the infant) is that *it is not* the thumb or the breast. It is *indeterminate* in the sense that its distinctive character is its 'formlessness' (47). It is by reason of this formlessness that the transitional object can serve as a 'symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother)' (130)[44]. Only something (relatively) formless can become a medium which 'takes on' form[45]. As with any symbol, but perhaps more than most, the transitional object marks *importance*. But the importance it marks and captures for the infant is that of this *transition* through which distance, time and otherness are for the first time encountered and, as it were, managed[46]. Winnicott (5) writes, with winning simplicity, that it 'goes on being important'. It is the first possession, born necessarily of loss.

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

World of   World of baby
Baby / caregiver   →   in which objects,
merged unity   including the caregiver
                                                 exist as separate realities

         Phase of transition

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

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

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

difference; of being something that *can be* present and then gone and then return; and of something that can be here and then there and then here again.

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

Second, we have in embryonic form the 'doubled' character of a world within a world. Winnicott is at pains to emphasise that the passage can be blocked or troubled if the caregiver does not take a quite particular attitude towards the whole paradoxical business of this indeterminate transitional phenomenon. This attitude on the part of the caregiver – which is a constitutive part of the process of passage – is, for Winnicott, one of play and tolerance. The caregiver *plays along* with it in the sense that 'it is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (2005: 3). Of this passage 'we agree never to make the challenge to the baby: did you create this object, or did you find it conveniently lying around?' (2005: 130). There is, between mother and infant, *play* with the sense of whether the object is something inner or outer, mine or yours, here or gone, *devised* or *spontaneous,* and this play licenses a certain tolerance of its indeterminate, unsettled nature.

It is not just that the baby is *held.* Winnicott, for example, describes how a mother initially creates for their infant the *illusion* that her breast or bottle is part of the baby. She places the breast there and then just as it is desired, giving the baby the illusion of having magically created it and providing an experience of desire magically satisfied, as it were (a devised liminal experience). Once she has given sufficient opportunity for illusion, the task during weaning becomes one of gradual disillusionment, but during the transition the ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox at play in the situation are tolerated and even enjoyed. As with a mistress of ceremonies conducting an initiation ceremony, the care-giver balances two things. On the one hand, she helps to create a fluid and playful zone that is exempt from the reality principle that is operative beyond this zone (a zone in which any canonical reality is held in suspense), and to guide what happens within this unusual place beyond place and time beyond time. On the other hand, this magical world of illusion must not be so perfect and

complete that it is impossible for any 'reality' to get through, as it were. If the growing child is to experience spontaneous liminality beyond the devised, and to integrate and synthesise the two into a viable self, the orchestration and staging of the process must, as it were, contain cracks. To be 'good enough', we might say, is precisely *not to be too good*. In short, the infant must be allowed the illusion that she creates what exists - that reality is her fabulation and her fabulation is reality. But also the *acceptance of the paradox* - that is proper to the occasioning of the liminal phase - must be gradually withdrawn if a unit self (with its objects and others) is to crystallize out on the 'other side' of the passage. The same paradox under different circumstances might be sheer madness.

As we noted with 'this is not a book', behind or within this play, of course, is something deadly serious, since we are dealing after all with a baby coming to tolerate increasing distance from a care-giver who constitutes the vital core of their world, and on whom they fundamentally depend. We can well imagine that threats to the continuity of the nascent 'ego-structure' (the inner reality that affords an outer reality and an attribution of personhood) in process of formation might be experienced, under certain circumstances, as what Winnicott calls 'unthinkable anxiety' (2005: 131). The play that Winnicott describes is for this reason both affectively charged and thoroughly ambivalent in an affective sense, being capable of volatile fluctuations from the heights of pure joy to the depths of sheer terror (see Stenner and Moreno, 2013 and Greco and Stenner, 2017 on the ambivalence of 'liminal affectivity'). The object/symbol that is the transitional object can be considered in this light, not just as a key tool, device or prop in the shared management of this volatile, paradoxical and ambivalent liminal passage of psychosocial birth , but as an *Ur* cultural product sharing a direct genealogical link through teddy bears and footballs to art works via the sacred objects of religious ritual. These too are quasi-objects (Serres, 1982) which, when appropriately handled, serve to facilitate or occasion liminal experiences of passage. The transition object is a liminal entity. It is the first *world within a world* and, as such, it functions in the first (ontogenetically speaking) of the *between worlds* transitions. It is, in short, a world within and between worlds.

The liminal sources of cultural experience

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

It seems that there are two distinguishable liminal sources of cultural experience. The first concerns the ontogenetic development that each individual human being must go through if they are to become adults. I have stressed that this is never entirely an individual phenomena, but intimately shared within family circles. This primordial

ontogenetic sociality is traceable to the well known phylogenetic fact of the maximally vulnerable nature of the 'unfinished' human infant. From this ontogenetic perspective the river of cultural experience is fed from the liminal source of the transitional phenomena described by Winnicott, including the forms of play that flow from it and around it. In this ontogenetic sense, experiences mediated by cultural forms such as ritual, theatre, music, painting, games and so on can be said to have an experiential source in play (which is a more universal medium, despite itself taking manifold culturally specific forms). To quote Winnicott (2005: 17), the transitional phenomena 'start each human being off with what will always be important to them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged'. I am stressing that this 'area of experience' is liminal and that it is common to what is (can be) created in play, in ritual and in art[50]. Certainly Winnicott makes several hints to the effect that playing leads on to cultural experience, serving as its 'foundation' (2005:143). For example, this 'area' constitutes the greater part of infant experience and 'throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living' (Winnicott, 2005: 19). An infant's transitional object will be gradually 'decathected' as 'cultural interests develop', and hence – although it 'goes on being important' - we should expect an individual, throughout their biography, to engage with increasingly more complicated transition objects as they develop (movies, novels, spiritual practices, philosophies). Furthermore, just as a child's play rapidly becomes a thoroughly collective matter, so our preferred liminal entities become the (often unconscious) basis for our social bonding. What, after all, is the body of work of Vygotsky if not a quasi-object –comparable in this respect to the Buddha and Liverpool FC - holding together the field of cultural psychology as a shared 'common experience'?)[51].

The second source concerns sociogenesis and the fact that any psychogenetic transformations associated with ontogeny are also embedded and unfold within the forms provided by the longue durée passage of human socio-cultural 'evolution'. From this perspective we must recognize, for example, that what we call 'theatre' is a specific cultural form that emerged in a specific place (Athens) at a specific time (6th Century BC), and that, as noted, it was connected to other societal novelties including the political form of Athenian democracy and epistemic form of Greek philosophy. The ontogenesis of any individual during this epoch (which did not last very long and indeed theatre was only properly resuscitated in Europe with the end of so-called 'medieval' times) unfolds in a context for which the world of theatre is already a reality. But equally, the ontogenesis of any individual before this date, or from another part of the world, unfolds in a context un-touched, as it were, by theatricalized reality (Szakolczai, 2013). From this sociogenetic perspective (or rather *perspectives* since the world is quite vast and multiple), we can nevertheless observe that the cultural form of ritual pre-dates theatre and, indeed, can be considered one of its significant sources. I have also speculated that ritual (being common to many animals) may have been a factor in the evolutionary transition the output of which was humanity. Either way, any answer to the question of the sources of cultural experience must clearly take both ontogenetic and sociogenetic perspectives into consideration, and cannot ignore phylogenesis. Ritual – on a sociogenetic plane – is no less a *source* of cultural experience than play is, on an ontogenetic plane. Naturally, phylo-, socio- and onto-genetic facts exist simultaneously in the now of each and every microgenetic actual occasion.

Postscript: This is not… Judy Garland

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

Since Susie Boyt is a direct descendent of Sigmund Freud, we can surely risk taking her book as a wonderfully well-observed auto-ethnography rich with data. We should therefore take note when she states that when 'Judy performs, every moment in life becomes a rite of passage' (Boyt, 2009: 7). We find a vivid description of devised liminal experience when she writes: 'Garland's performances leave us in a state of crisis, but it's a good crisis, like falling in love or having your stitches removed' (9). She describes the effect of listening to Garland sing as 'a familiar unravelling' (11): her 'voice undoes people' (9) and everything 'stands on its head'[53], everything 'is celebration or mourning' (7). On the other hand, we see that the power of this experience comes from its evoking and mixing with spontaneous liminal experiences from Boyt's own life: 'When I begin to listen to Judy Garland there is no joy or wound from the story of my life that isn't with me. Great flashes of past experience dazzle and dismay, the good and the bad at the same time, in great layers. It is an unstable moment, one that cannot be too often indulged' (11). In this way, there is a kind of meeting of two worlds, whereby the world of the young Susie Boyt is somehow enriched and illuminated through intimate juxtaposition with a world at the centre of which is Judy Garland. Garland, as it were, introduces Boyt to new experiences, new possibilities, new details, new feelings, in short, a whole new glamorous and tragic world of ambivalence that is not her own, and yet it also fundamentally *is* her own world, because 'something at the heart of Judy Garland connects directly to something at the heart of me' (2).

Now, since Boyt never met the real Judy Garland, it would be tempting to call this whole relationship, this whole so-called 'world of Judy Garland', an imaginary world, or a 'fantasy' of intimacy (1). If by this we mean that the juxtaposition of these worlds stimulated Boyt's imagination, including her imaginings about Judy Garland as a real person, then this is certainly accurate. But we must be careful to recognise that Judy Garland's films and records are in fact real, and that Judy Garland really made them and, as it were, *put herself into them*[54]. They are real cultural products that Boyt really listened to and watched. She did not somehow imagine Garland singing: she listened to the recording, and she became enraptured by following the rise and the fall of Garland's voice and hearing the lyrics and the music. Boyt might have imagined what

Judy Garland was like as a person, but didn't just imagine her music, she followed its unfolding duration and she locked her own temporality or duration into its real unfolding. She didn't imagine the film: she followed it closely and let it capture her being through her eyes and her ears. So there is not here a real world and a world that is purely imagined. There really are two worlds that come together in a mutual enrichment, via the mediation of the canalized cultural products, the films and the music, for instance.

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

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Notes

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

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

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

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

[5] Although emergence has a contemporary resonance, it was much discussed in the early part of the 20th Century and was core to the 'emergence' of process thought. A key point of reference for the theory of emergence was George Henry Lewes, the lover of George Eliot, who was the first to use the term in his 1875 book 'Problems of life and mind'. Spinoza – the great philosopher of immanence – is a key factor here, since Lewes wrote enthusiastically about Spinoza whilst George Eliot translated Spinoza's ethics. If mind does not come from on-high as a transcendent, it must be explained as an emergent from within nature, and hence part of nature. Henri Bergson's 'creative evolution' from 1907 was another important landmark, no less Spinozist. Samuel Alexander's Gifford lectures (published in 1920) presented space and time as an environment out of which *emerged* matter, life, mind. These ideas were synthesised in C. Lloyd Morgan's 1927 book 'Emergent evolution'. In the roaring20s, then emergence was all the rage amongst academics, and Mead (1932/1980, p.23) was well versed in all of this (especially the work of Bergson and Whitehead) when he defined emergence as 'the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed'. Emergence, for Mead, is thus more than a vague 'wholism' which asserts that new properties come into being as a function of interacting 'levels' (see note 6 on Whitehead's the atomistic alternative to wholism). It is a concept primarily designed to grasp how *novelty* enters into the real processes that constitute the world we are part of.

[6] For empirical applications of Mead's thought to liminal occasions see Stenner, O'Dell and Davis (2019), where we apply it to the notion of 'ADHD identities' and see Andreouli, Kaposi and Stenner (2019), where it is applied to the phenomenon of Brexit.

[7] Whitehead (1929) calls these ultimate realities 'actual occasions' (sometimes 'actual entities'). From this perspective, James' famous stream of consciousness is in fact punctuated in so far as it is composed of an unfolding series of actual occasions of experience, each deriving from its predecessor and giving rise to the next as it perishes (see Stenner, 2011). James himself acknowledges this with his notion of *pulses* of experience which together give rise to the impression of flowing continuity. At a level of operation parasitical upon the conscious stream, and lending them its shape, are the actual occasions of communication which, when suitably connected and concatenated, form the ongoing streams of communication that make complex human social life possible. These communicative events presuppose symbolic mediation, and each event or actual occasion is a synthetic unity of message, information and understanding (Brown and Stenner, 2009, Chapter 4). The point is that it is these events or occasions that are the fundamental realities of and for the system. These events are the microgenetic (see Brown, 2012 for this account of microgenesis) atoms of the universe out of which wholes are formed, and since they are pulses of transmission or transition, we are dealing with something more like a 'holism' (a continuity full of voids, gaps, leaps, transitions) than a 'wholism'. In the account which I have sketched, communicative and conscious events are thoroughly coupled to the extent that symbolic meaning is crucial to both, but both also presuppose the vital events proper to organic systems and the energetic events proper to physical systems (Stenner, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2017).

[8] Over the last decade or so I have made efforts to apply Whiteheadian ideas within empirical social psychology, including applications to methodology (Stenner, 2009; 2012), theory (Stenner, 2007; 2008; 2001a&b, 2017; Brown and Stenner, 2009) and substantive topics like human rights (Stenner, 2013), standards and values (Stenner, 2016), experiences of gardens (Stenner, Church and Bhatti), and issues within the health system (Stenner and Moreno, 2013, Greco and Stenner, 2017).

[9] Process ontology is closely associated not merely with philosophy, but with metaphysics, particularly that of Bergson and Whitehead. By the mid twentieth century, metaphysics had become deeply unfashionable and virtually everybody agreed that it had died. Actually, the generalist baton of metaphysics, that had been knocked out of the hands of philosophers, was taken up by scientists in the

form of general structuralism and systems theory. Philosophically minded systems theorists often acknowledge Whitehead as a direct and fundamental influence (see Luhmann, 1985, for example).

[10] Something is universal if it belongs to the experience of all of us (Mead, 2015: 185) and if it never fails of exemplification (Whitehead, 1929: 4). I must confess to feeling very happy when Jaan Valsiner (2018) cited my own work as part of his articulation of liminality as one of three 'universal principles of the human psyche'. But my feelings were mixed with a disturbing sense of vertigo that is well captured by some words uttered by Stephen Dedalus towards the beginning of Joyce's *Ulysses* (p.37): 'I fear those big words, Stephen said, which make us so unhappy'. The current paper is an effort to harmonise those mixed feelings by presenting my 'take' on liminality as a transdisciplinary concept which may well have something like ontological reach (see Stenner, 2017). Whether this concept of liminality can indeed function as a leading concept / general assumption / utmost abstraction / universal is for others to decide. Here I want to note that Whitehead instructively reverses the misunderstanding that universals should explain concrete things and insists instead that the real job is 'to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things' (20). He asserts that 'it is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, 'In no way.' Again, the constructive question is: 'How can concrete fact exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature'. My concern is not to wield universals like an abstract General ordering his concrete empirical foot-soldiers, but to explore the necessarily imaginative and creative process of moving beyond a given concrete experience of fact in order to extract a pattern that gains us a more synoptic vision of things, and perhaps better purchase on them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[18] Winnicott (1958: 142) was more interested in what people *do* with cultural products: 'What, for instance, are we doing when we are listening to a Beethoven symphony or making a pilgrimage to a picture gallery or reading *Troilus and Cressida* in be, or playing tennis? What is a child doing when sitting on the floor playing with toys… What is a group of teenagers doing participating in a pop session?'

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

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

[21] For Victor Turner (1962) liminal situations create the conditions for an experiential confrontation with what it means to be a human being outside of and beyond a structurally given social position or state. Such moments or episodes tend to be highly affectively charged, and for Turner, they are enormously valuable formative experiences. Liminal experiences can give rise, for example, to a 'sentiment of humankindness'. They can help to generate a sense of equality and of the common purpose of the society taken as a whole (see Stenner and Moreno, 2013). Turner gives the name *communitas* to this rare experience of generic human bonds. As with so many things, this insight was preempted in a remarkable way by G.H. Mead. Mead (2015: 218-219) discusses the 'enlarged experience' made possible by the 'actual degradation of the social structure itself' that gives rise to an experience of 'universal community' and arouses a 'flood of emotions' associated with the 'sense of identification of one's self with everyone else in the community'. Mead considers this a classical 'religious technique' and is typical of 'the sort of experience which the neophyte has in conversion'. Everything is here but the 'c' word…

[22] Victor Turner (1962,1977, 1982) developed an extended concept of liminality. He recognised that liminal phases involve the temporary and ritual suspension of social structure and observed that most social scientists pay almost exclusive attention to social structure. For Turner, however, this focus ignores the vitally important contribution made to wider society by the formative experiences that occur during these liminal, transitional moments in which social structure is suspended. To mark the

importance of liminality he used the phrase anti-structure. Differences of status, of gender, of family rank and so forth are, for a short but intense time, dedifferentiated into a relatively unstructured limbo (see Stenner and Moreno, 2013).

[23] Cassirer built upon von Uexkull's notion of the *Umwelt* according to which each living organism constructs, as it were, its own world. But the conspicuous emergence of high-level symbolism as a constitutive part of human evolution marks a radical step in complexifying and multiplying these worlds because of the degree of *semiotic freedom* (relative autonomy from organic determination) afforded by the symbolic domain (Hoffmeyer, 2010, von Bertalanffy, 1968). This has long been recognized by critical psychologists (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers, 1995), and was a core aspect of Mead's theory, presumably unknown by Cassirer, despite the shared concern with symbolism: 'The organism, then, is in a sense responsible for its environment… the social environment is endowed with meanings in terms of the process of social activity' (Mead, 2015: 130).

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

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

[26] Crudely, canonical or pivotal experience forms a process that is more or less regular and predictable. It is not stationary, but it is stable because – from experience to experience, event to event, communication to communication - it circles in a centripetal way around clear and familiar forms, positions, and activities. It endures because it recurs. If pivotal experience implies a centripetal dynamic which creates the sense of a centred subjective world, then liminal experience pushes centrifugally towards the edge of that world, opening to an unknown space beyond its limit. If pivotal experience constitutes the recognisable 'stations' or 'positions' in society, then liminal experience concerns those relations that escape (and perhaps transform) the stations, and it concerns the transitions between positions (see Stenner, 2015). Since every *station* available for occupation within a society (complete with social identities stabilized with relevant status, rights and duties) presupposes a complex social *relation* (soaked in power), so for every normative *position* there is a liminal *transition*.

33

Liminal occasions, in short, are significant *turning points* in the lives of individuals and collectives (Stenner, 2019). These turning points or transitions are occasions during which psychosocial forms-of-process are suspended or interrupted, or collapse, or go through some sort of transformation or metamorphosis (i.e. allowing some form of *becoming* to take place).

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

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

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

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

[31] The notion of re-entry was formalized in Spencer-Brown's *Law of form* (1969) and is drawn upon heavily by Luhmann (e.g. 1985). It appears with a particular application in Mead in the guise of 'reflexiveness' or 'the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself' and is used to explain how mind arises in the social process 'only when that process as a whole enters into… the experience of any one of the given individuals involved in that process' (Mead, 2015: 134). Via 'mind', in other words, society re-enters itself. In Whitehead (1929) it is built into his theory of feelings whereby feeling feels feeling only to be felt in turn by another feeling in a ladder of increasing complexity of 'actual occasion'. Variants can be found in many other thinkers, notably including Bartlett's (1932) notion of 'turning around upon an experience' (see Brown and Reavey, 2015).

[32] Ritual, like play, operates with actions which are 'abbreviated' or 'truncated' in the sense that, compared to what is called 'reality', they are not followed through to their full completion. But they acquire a new completion within the abbreviated space of ritual or play. This allows for their 'canalisation' as it were, into 'gestures' which can become 'signs' which – if you'll excuse the leap - can ultimate form the medium for thinking (see Mead [2015] on the genesis of the significant symbol

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

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

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

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

[36] This becoming may be reversible or irreversible.

[37] Unfortunately Van Gennep never elaborates theoretically on what he means by 'world'. As just seen, he sometimes uses more specific words like 'situation' or 'social world', and sometimes more general terms like 'cosmic world' or 'universe'. Nevertheless his notion of 'world' implies a coherent unity that is distinct from another world with coherent unity. One age group such as a group of children may have a coherent unity that is different from an age group of young adults, for example. An event of transition from the world of children to the world of adults would be accompanied by rites of

passage. Or the world of the married may have a coherent unity that is different from that of the unmarried, and passage between them will again be ritualized: 'For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined'. (Van Gennep, 1909: 3).

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

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

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

[41] To continue our 'world' theme, we could adapt Heidegger and express this achieved unity with the phrase Being-in-a-world. I modify Heidegger's Being-in-*the*-world precisely to emphasise the contingency that emerges when it is affirmed that what we call the environment is always the creation of a system that has come into being by having differentiated itself from it's surroundings.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

50 Victor Turner (1982) drew attention to just this continuity when he described the arts as *liminoid*. In the case of theatre, this continuity of ritual and art is directly traceable in a historical sense since there is strong evidence that Ancient Greek theatre emerged through a modification of Dionysian rites by way of the Dithyramb (Harrison, 1913). This is not to deny the differences between ritual and art, which are themselves interesting. For example, I suggest that the point of emergence of theatre from ritual be understood as the emergence - as if from a matrix of ritual - of a strictly aesthetic form of cultural experience from the form of the sacred (Stenner, 2017). But without losing sight of this distinction, the continuity proper to both aesthetic and sacred cultural experience continues with other art forms, to which, for all their autonomy, a feel of the sacred continues to cling. With respect to the novel, for example, I suggest we should take it very seriously when a novelist like Thomas Mann (1999, p. 728) argues that his book *The Magic Mountain* is 'a variant on the shrine of the initiatory rites'. As I discuss at length in a paper with Monica Greco (Stenner and Greco, 2018), lest this be misunderstood Mann does not mean that his novel is *about* initiatory rites but that it *is* a variant on initiatory rites.

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

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

[53] It is impossible to complete a paper on cultural experience and liminality without mentioning Bakhtin's (1964/1985) great masterwork *Rabelais and his world*. Bakhtin is another great thinker of liminality who never uses the 'l' word. Bakhtin shows how the birth of the French novel in the hands of Rabelais was a desacralizing reaction (on behalf of folk culture of the marketplace) against the ossification of liminal experience in the form of the medieval church and its authorities (73). Bakhtin shows how Rabelais aimed to destroy the official picture of events in an explosion of renaissance laughter. Here too writing was key to the societal transformation at stake (the rise of the use of written French and a rebellion against stiff church Latin [457]). Bakhtin's canivalesque is nothing if not the

liminal drama of the 'simultaneous death of the old world and the birth of the new' (463). His descriptions of the festive liberation of laughter and the body is classically liminal, including note of the 'temporary suspension of the entire official system' such that for 'a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom' (89).

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

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