

CHAPTER III
VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LIMINALITY

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Liminality is a concept, borrowed from the Belgian folklorist Arnold Van Gennep, which like a pebble, I tossed speculatively into the pool of my anthropological data about a dozen years ago, to try to make more sense than I had previously been able to do of ritual processes I had observed in Central Africa. Since then it has been spreading rings in my work and thought over wider ranges of data drawn not only from preindustrial societies, but also from complex, large-scale civilizations. My theoretical focus has correlatively shifted from societies in which rituals involve practically everyone, to societies in which, as Durkheim puts it, "the domain of religion", if not perhaps of ritual, has "contracted", become a matter of individual choice rather than universal corporate ascription, and where, with religious pluralism, there is sometimes a veritable supermarket of religious wares. In these societies, symbols once central to the mobilization of ritual action, have tended to migrate directly or in disguise, through the cultural division of labor, into other domains, esthetics, politics, law, popular culture, and the like.

We will briefly examine liminality, what Van Gennep meant by it, and how I have elaborated his formulation. Van Gennep examined rites of passage in many cultures, and found them to have basically a tripartite processual structure, even when they had many isolable episodes. He defined *rites de passage* as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age." I will use "state" as a metonym for the other terms; it refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized. These rites of transition, says Van Gennep, are marked by three phases: separation; margin (or *limen*); and re-aggregation. The first and last speak for themselves; they detach ritual subjects from their old places in society and return them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, to new places. A more interesting problem is provided by the middle, (marginal) or liminal phase. It is interesting in itself, but more so perhaps on account of its implications for a general theory of sociocultural processes. The term "marginal" has been preempted by various sociologists (for example, Stonequist, Thomas, Znaniecki, and Riesman) for their own purposes - so we are left with "liminal".

A *limen* is a threshold, but at least in the case of protracted initiation rites or major seasonal festivals, it is a very long threshold, a corridor almost, or a tunnel which may, indeed, become a pilgrim's road or passing from dynamics to statics, may cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life, a state, that of the anchorite, or monk. Let us refer to the state and process of mid-transition as "liminality" and consider a few of its very odd properties. Those undergoing it - call them "liminaries" - are betwixt-and-between established states of politico-jural structure. They evade ordinary cognitive classification, too, for they are neither-this-nor-that, here-nor-there, one-thing-not-the-other. Out of their mundane structural context, they are in a sense "dead" to the world, and liminality has many symbols of death - novices may be classed with spirits or ancestors or painted black; in Central Africa the place of circumcision in the boys' initiation rites is called "the place of dying." They are also "polluting", as Mary Douglas might say, because they transgress classificatory boundaries. Sometimes they are identified with feces; usually they are allowed to revert to nature by letting their hair and nails grow and their bodies get covered with dust. Their structural "invisibility" may be marked not only by their seclusion "from men's eyes" but also by the loss of their preliminal names, by the removal of clothes, insignia and other indicators of preliminal status; they may be required to speak in whispers, if at all. They may have to learn a special liminal vocabulary; normal word-order may be reversed or even randomly scrambled. As against these emblems of death or limbo, other symbols and symbolic actions portray gestation, parturition, lactation, weaning. The novices at times may be treated as embryos in a womb, as infants being born, as sucklings, and as weanlings. Usually, there are words and phrases which indicate that they are "being grown" into a new postliminal state of being. But the most characteristic midliminal symbolism is that of paradox, or being *both* this *and* that. Novices are portrayed and act as androgynous, or as both living *and* dead, at once ghosts and babes, both cultural and natural creatures, human *and* animal. They may be said to be in a process of being ground down into a sort of homogeneous social matter, in which possibilities of differentiation may be still glimpsed, then later positively refashioned into specific shapes compatible with their new postliminal duties and rights as incumbents of a new status and state. The grinding down process is accomplished by ordeals; circumcision, subincision, clitoridectomy, hazing, endurance of heat and cold, impossible physical tests in which failure is greeted by ridicule, unanswerable riddles which make even clever candidates look stupid, followed by physical punishment, and the like. But reducing down overlaps with reconstruction. The rebuilding process is by instruction, partly in practical skills, partly in

tribal esoterica, and proceeds both by verbal and nonverbal symbolic means. Sacred objects may be shown, myths recited in conjunction with them, answers may be given to riddles earlier left unexplained. Very often, masked figures invade the liminal scene – usually framed in a sacred enclosure, cave, *temenos*, or other sequestered site – these masked figures being themselves liminal in their bizarre combinations of human, animal, vegetable and mineral characteristics. Such maskers and monsters are often composites of factors drawn from the culture of mundane, quotidian experience, but split off from their normal, expectable contexts and recombined in grotesque, weird, even anatomically impossible configurations, which have as at least one of their functions, that of provoking the novices or initiands, the “liminaries”, into thinking hard about the elements and basic building blocks of symbolic complexes they had hitherto taken for granted as “natural” units. Actuality, in the liminal state, gives way to possibility, and aberrant possibilities reveal once more to liminaries the value of what has hitherto been regarded as the somewhat tedious daily round. A manheaded lion, leaping in firelight from the bush, may make one think about the abstract nature both of human heads and of feral bodies, or of the relationship between culture which can *manufacture* monsters, and nature which generates lions, or of the symbolism of social control – a chief has lion-like powers; each culture will stress its own salient dichotomies and draw its own lessons. And this is one of the simpler monsters; the Chinese dragon, a complex monster indeed, has been claimed by Elliot Smith to be a cultural construct in its entirety; every part of its body has cosmological significance; the colors and shapes of its eyes, limbs, wings, tail, its scales, its claws, its postures – all derive from the principles and symbolic lexicon of a cosmological system. Thus masks and monsters may be as much pedagogical devices as instruments of coercion through terror and awe; like other liminal things they are probably both.

This is, of course, a synoptic account. Not all preindustrial societies have protracted *rites de passage*; some stress particular themes and symbolic processes, and play down others. Here I wish to show that where transition in space-time is ritualized, *how* it is ritualized, the nature and properties of the ritual symbols and of their interrelations, give us clues not only to the cherished values of the society that performs the rituals, but also to the nature of human sociality itself transcending particular cultural forms.

This is not the place to discuss in any detail the distinction between sequestered and public liminality – which roughly corresponds to the difference between initiation rites and major seasonal feasts. In the former, the liminaries are humbled and levelled to make them fit for a higher status

or state; in the latter, the liminaries are everybody in the community, and no one is elevated in status at the end of the rites. But by way of compensation such major rites as sowing and harvest festivals, first-fruits festivals, change of season rites or rites celebrating important points on the sun's ecliptic from northern to southern solstice very frequently involve symbolic status-reversal or the creation of mock-hierarchies for the mundanely poor and humble.

Humbling and submission to ordeal, whether inflicted by self or others, goes with preparation for elitehood – whether in this world or the next; while having an extremely good time, and play-acting at having superior status, goes with a basic persisting secular egalitarianism among those who become liminaries for the occasion.¹

Here, another question must be raised: whatever happened to liminality in *posttribal* societies? The answer will involve me in a brief discussion of a set of concepts which may help towards an explanation. These are: work, leisure, play, flow, and *communitas*. I am not, in this essay, going to use liminality in a metaphorical sense. I am going to look at cultural phenomena, which may either be shown to have descended from earlier forms of ritual liminality, or are, in some sense, their functional equivalents.

Work

In tribal and archaic societies what people do in ritual is often described by terms which we might translate as “work”. Raymond Firth speaks of the “work” of the Gods in Tikopia as a native description of the annual ritual cycle of these Polynesians. Bantu-speaking peoples in Africa use the same term for a ritual specialist's activity as for what a hunter, a cultivator, a headman, or today a manual laborer does. Our own term “liturgy” is from the Greek *leos* or *laos*, “the people” and *ergon* “work” (cognate as our linguists here well know with Old English *weorc*, and German *werk*, and ultimately derived from the Indo-European base *werg-o* “to do, act”). I could cite many other examples, but the point I wish to make is that the ritual round in tribal societies is embedded in the total round of activities, and is part of the work of the people which is *also* the work of the gods. We are dealing with a universe of work, in which the whole community participates, as of obligation not optation. Furthermore, though there are special rites for special categories of persons, and for particular points in the culturally defined life-cycle of each person, sooner or later no one is exempt from ritual duty, just as no one is exempt from economic, legal or political obligations. Communal participation, obligation, the passage of the whole society through crises, communal or

individual, directly or by proxy, these are the hallmarks of the "work of the gods" and sacred human work. Without sacred work profane human work would be, for the community, impossible to conceive.

But, on the other hand, the ritual "work" to which I am referring is not quite what we, from our stance on the hither side of the Industrial Revolution and perhaps the Protestant Ethic, might regard as "work". For it includes what we might think of as "play", or, more solemnly put since Huizinga, the "ludic". In many tribal rites, there is built into the liturgical structure, a good deal of what we and they would think of as amusement, recreation, fun, and joking; furthermore, there is often the actual "playing" of games, ceremonial lacrosse among North American Indians, for example, the exhausting combined race and ball-game of the Tarahumara of Mexico, or the "push-of-war" contests found among the West-Central Bantu of Africa. Among the maskers are *clowns*; among the myths, *Trickster* stories. Liminality is particularly conducive to play. Play is not to be restricted to games and jokes; it extends to the introduction of new forms of symbolic action, such as word-games or masks. In short, parts of liminality may be given over to experimental behavior. I mean here by "experiment", any action or process undertaken to discover something not yet known, *not* scientific experimentation nor what is based on experience rather than theory or authority. In liminality, new ways of acting, new combinations of symbols, are tried out, to be discarded or accepted. Ritual, and particularly liminality, should not be regarded as monolithic. A tribal ritual of any length and complexity is in fact an orchestration of many genres, styles, moods, atmospheres, tempi, and so on, ranging from prescribed formal, stereotyped action to a free "play" of inventiveness, and including symbols in all the sensory codes mentioned by Lévi-Strauss – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, kinesthetic, and so on. It has free and formulaic verbal behavior – bodily acts of many kinds. The essence of ritual is its multidimensionality, of its symbols their multivocality. Merely to equate such ritual with the obsessional "rituals" of Western neurotics, as Freud did, is to rob it of its creative potentials, and of its nuanced interplay of thought and mood. Ritual's multiplicity of elements allows for great flexibility and gives it an immense capacity to portray, interpret, and master radical novelty. This same complex flexibility makes it adaptable to change. I am here referring to tribal ritual, where ritual is the nerve-center of cultural sensitivity.

But whatever happened to liminality, and to the richness, flexibility, and symbolic wealth of tribal ritual? As an adherent to one of the religions of the Book, I regret the deliminalization of Christian liturgy – except on rare occasions such as Christmas or Easter, where some liminal sonorities of song and language are allowed to linger. With the delimina-

lization seems to have gone the powerful play component. Other religions of the Book, too, have regularly stressed the solemn at the expense of the festive. Fairs, fiestas, carnivals exist, of course, but not liturgically. Other major historical religions have fared less badly. Thus, in Vedic India, according to Alain Danielou, the "gods" (the *sura* and *deva*, who are the objects of serious sacrificial ritual, which is the "work" of the householder *ashram* – *grihasta* – stage of life), the gods *play*. The rise, duration, and destruction of the world is their *game*. Creation is not only the "work of the gods", but also the "play of the gods". And human ritual is both earnest and playful. Modern *Bhakti* movements still have this spontaneous, "performative," ludic quality – where Eros sports with Thanatos, and not as a grisly Danse Macabre, but to symbolize a complete human reality.

Leisure

We have spoken of "work" and "play," now let us consider "work" and "leisure." Of recent years much has been written of this pair of concepts. Joffre Dumazedier has recently argued strongly for the view that true leisure only exists when it complements or rewards work. Thus he refused to classify the idle state of Greek philosophers and sixteenth century gentry as "leisure," since this cannot be defined *in relation to* work, but rather *replaces work altogether*, work being done by slaves, peasants, or servants. For Dumazedier, then, "leisure" presupposes "work." It is a non-work, even an anti-work phase in the life of a person who also works. Leisure, he holds, arises under two conditions: (1) the first is that society ceases to govern its activities by means of common ritual obligations; some activities, including those of work and leisure, become, at least in theory, *subject to individual choice*. (2) Secondly, the work by which a person earns his or her living is "set apart from his other activities; its limits are no longer natural but arbitrary" – indeed, it is organized in so definite a fashion that it can easily be separated, both in theory and practice, from his free time. Now it is in industrial and industrializing societies that we mostly find these conditions. Here work is organized by industry, by clocking in and out, by office hours, and so on, so as to be separated from "free time," which includes, of course, in addition to leisure, attendance to such personal needs as eating, sleeping, and caring for one's health and appearance, as well as familial, social, civic, political, and religious obligations. In tribal society all these would have been parts of the work-play sacred-profane continuum and would have been done with substantially the same group of people, not as in industrialized society with different bunches for each segmental activity spun off

→ Leisure, again, tends to be mainly an urban phenomenon – we see by the division of labor.

early forms of it perhaps in the fourteenth century Italian city state. When the concept of leisure begins to penetrate rural societies, this is because agricultural work is tending towards an industrial, "rationalized" mode of organization, and because rural life is being penetrated by urban, industrial values. Dumazedier follows Isaiah Berlin in arguing that leisure has aspects both of "freedom from" and "freedom to." Leisure is *freedom from* a whole array of institutional obligations prescribed by the basic forms of technological and bureaucratic organization in the work domain. It is also *freedom from* the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office, and a chance to recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythms again, on the beaches and mountains, and in the parks and game reserves provided as liminoid retreats. More positively, it is *freedom to* enter, even for some to help generate, the symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games, diversions of all kinds. It is *freedom to* transcend social structural normative limitations, freedom, indeed, to *play* – with ideas, with fantasies, with words (in literature, some of the "players" have been Rabelais, Joyce, and Samuel Beckett), with paint (think of the Pointillistes, Surrealists, Action Painters, and so forth), and with social relationships (new forms of community, mating, sensitivity training, and so on). And now we are getting closer to our lost liminality, for in this modern "leisure," far more even than in tribal and agrarian rituals, the experimental and the ludic are stressed. There are many more options in complex, industrial societies: games of skill, strength, and chance may serve (to use Clifford Geertz's terms) both as models of past work experience and models for future work behavior. Football, chess, and mountaineering are undoubtedly exacting and governed by rules and routines at least as stringent as those of the work situation, but, being optional, they remain part of the individual's freedom of his growing self-mastery, even self-transcendence, as we shall see when I discuss the notion of "flow." They are imbued more thoroughly with pleasure than are those many types of industrial work in which men are alienated from the fruits and results of their labor. Leisure is thus potentially capable of releasing creative powers, individual and communal, either to criticize or prop up dominant social structural values.

This is not the place to discuss the effects of the Protestant Ethic and bureaucratization on even the entertainment genres of industrial leisure, making for professionalization of the arts and sports, and giving rise to the notion that art itself is a quasi-religious vocation, with its own asceticism and total dedication – exemplified by Blake, Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, Proust, Rilke, Cezanne, Gauguin, Mahler, Sibelius, and so on. Here I wish to draw attention to some similarities between the *leisure* genres of art and entertainment in complex industrial societies and the *rituals and*

myths of archaic, tribal, and early agrarian cultures. It is, I suppose, possible to conceive of leisure as a betwixt-and-between, neither-this-nor-that domain between two lodgements in the work domain, or between, on the one hand, occupational, and, on the other, familial and civic activities. Leisure is derived from the old French *leisir*, itself derived from Latin *licere*, "to be permitted." Interestingly enough, the Latin comes ultimately, according to Skeat, from the Indo-European base *leik*, "to offer for sale bargain," referring to the "liminal" sphere of the market, with its implications of choice, variation, contract – a sphere that has connections, in archaic and tribal religions with such Trickster deities as the Yoruba and Fon Elegba and Eshu, and the Greek Hermes. Exchange and marketing are more "liminal" than production – as the focused fantasies of modern commercial advertising still attest.

We have now seen how tribesmen *play* with the factors of liminality, with masks and monsters, symbolic inversions, parodies of profane reality, and so forth. So also do the genres of industrial leisure: theater, ballet, film, the novel, poetry, classical music, rock music, art, pop art, and so on, pulling the elements of culture apart, putting them together again if often random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, sometimes deliberately experimental combinations. But there are certain important differences between the tribal genres, relatively few in number, of liminality, and the prolixity of genres found in modern industrial leisure. I have called the latter "liminoid" by analogy with *ovoid*, "egg-like" and *asteroid*, "star-like." I wish to convey by it something that is akin to the ritually liminal, or like it, but not identical with it. The "liminoid" represents, in a sense, the dismembering, the *sparagmos* of the liminal; for various things that "hang together" in liminal situations split off to pursue separate destinies as specialized arts and sports and so on, as liminoid genres.

Furthermore, the liminoid is very often secularized. Many of the symbolic and ludic capacities of tribal religion have, with the advancing division of labor, with massive increase in the scale and complexity of political and economic units, migrated into nonreligious genres. Sometimes they have taken their sacred tone with them, and one speaks of "high priests" and "priestesses" of this or that art form or of criticism. Certainly, symbol and ritual have gotten into drama and poetry, while on the one hand, literary critics speak of the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman*, the story of "our hero's" progress from poverty to glory, innocence to experience, as a "*rite de passage*" or „an initiation," with a linear irreversible monological diachronic progression; while Julia Kristeva on the other hand, writes of the "carnivalization" of the novel – the kind of synchronic, dialogic, nonlinear, re-

versible, multigenred work such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Lawrence, Sterne, Joyce, Virginia Woolf and others have produced – which may have its ultimate roots in seasonal rituals of reversal and celebration of fructifying chaos, rather than rituals of status elevation. One striking piece of “secularization” seems to have occurred after the massive burning of images of the Virgin Mary by Thomas Cromwell in Chelsea in 1500’s. Devotion came by the end of the century to be addressed to a secular Virgin Queen, Gloriana or Oriana, Elizabeth the First, to whom the liminoid humanists, the secular poets and dramatists, dedicated their rich symbolic offerings. Other arts have developed quasi-liturgical properties, or alternatively, have laid claim to the prophet’s mantle. Music, for example, has often been called “the religion of the intellectuals” while poetry as Blake and Rimbaud saw it was the language of the prophet and *voyant*.

Continuing to contrast “liminal” and “liminoid” we may say that *liminal phenomena* tend to be collective, concerned with calendrical, meteorological, biological, or social-structural cycles and rhythms, or with crises in social processes whether these result from internal adjustments, external adaptations, or unexpected disasters (earthquakes, invasions, plagues, and the like). Thus they appear at what may perhaps be called “natural breaks” in the flow of natural or sociocultural processes. *Liminoid phenomena*, on the other hand, may be collective (carnivals, spectacles, major sports events, folk drama, national theater, and so on), and when they are so, are often directly derived from tribal liminal antecedents, but are more characteristically produced and consumed by known named individuals, though they may of course, have collective or “mass” effects. They are not cyclical, but continuously generated, though in times and places sequestered from work settings in the “leisure” sphere.

Liminal phenomena are centrally integrated into the total social process, forming with all its other aspects a complete whole, and in its specific essence representing the “negativity” and “subjunctivity” of that total process, rather than its “positivity” and “indicativeness”; its possibility rather than its actuality, its “may be” and “might have been” rather than its “is,” “was,” and “will be,” or even a *via negativa* entered by everyone, not just by mystics. On the other hand, *liminoid phenomena* develop most characteristically *outside* the central economic and political processes, along their *margins*, on their *interfaces*, in their “tacit dimensions” (though, later, liminoid ideas and images may seep from these peripheries and cornices into the center). They are also, in contrast to liminal phenomena, plural, fragmentary and experimental – by “fragmentary” I mean the total inventory of liminoid thoughts, words, and deeds. Individual liminoid productions may, of course, be highly coherent because they

have passed, as Ben Johnson said, through “the second fire on the Muses anvil,” craftsmanship.

Liminoid phenomena, being produced by specific named individuals or particular groups, “schools,” “coteries,” tend to be more idiosyncratic and quirky than *liminal* phenomena, which are generalized and normative. They compete with one another in the cultural market, and appeal to specific tastes – while *liminal* phenomena tend to have a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of the widest effective community. *Liminal* phenomena, may, on occasion, portray the inversion or reversal of secular, mundane reality and social structure. But *liminoid* phenomena are not merely reversive, they are often subversive, representing radical critiques of the central structures and proposing utopian alternative models.

Another whole set of topics can be spun off this set of distinctions, for example, the ways in which both liminal and liminoid phenomena constitute metalanguages, (including nonverbal ones) devised for the purpose of talking *about* the various languages of everyday, and in which mundane axioms become problematic, up for speculative grabs, so to speak, where the cherished symbols of the forum, agora, and stoa are reflected upon, rotated, and given new and unexpected valences. I see the germ of such metalanguages and reflexivity in certain of the phenomena of tribal liminality – where we observe parodies of the sacred, and even playful mockery of the gods, let alone of chiefs, priests, and patriarchs.

Again, I can hardly do more than touch here upon the obvious fact, that even in so-called tribal societies, there is an easily recognized “*liminoid zone*” of culture. All anthropologists have encountered this: the great woodcarvers and painters who produce for delight as well as for ritual occasions, the singers of tales and composers of folklore, the manifold children’s games, some of which ironically comment on the practices and beliefs of their elders, the satirists who employ keen malicious wit to put down prigs and bosses and one another for the delectation of their mass audiences. On the other hand, there is a well-marked “*liminal zone*” in our own culture: in the liturgies and services of surviving religions, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, Masonic orders, Elks, Lions, Knights of Columbus, secret societies, political and criminal, in the *rites-de-passage* of Academia (anthropologists will recall Meyer Fortes’ analysis of the Anglican rites by which the atheist Sir Edmund Leach was inducted into the office of Provost of King’s), or of even more celebrated Academies – some will have read Claude Lévi-Strauss’ address after he had been formally and ceremonially admitted as Fortieth “Immortal” into the Académie Française, where he compared the rites, point by point, with those through which he had been given honorary tribal mem-

bership in a group of North-West Coast Indians – thereby calling attention to certain universal, symbolic structures in liminal ritual. Furthermore, there can be “reliminalization” of the liminoid. I think this is what may have happened to pilgrimages in the later Middle Ages. Formerly, like all liminoid phenomena, an effect of multiple individual choices and arising spontaneously as a counterthrust to the corruption of ordinary life in manor and village and town, pilgrimage became built into the structure of Christian culture as a “penitential system,” as a rite of passage for readmitting criminous and reprobate individuals into the *Unam Ecclesiam* and, indeed, into civil society. Again, when a group of liminoid artists constitutes itself as a coterie, it tends to generate its own admission rites, providing a liminal portal to its liminoid precinct, a portal, to throw in a liminal monster or two, guarded by three-headed dogs and flaming-sworded angels. Nevertheless, despite the coexistence of liminal and liminoid phenomena in all societies, it remains true that in complex societies today’s liminoid is yesterday’s liminal.

Here I will add a few comments on some social and psychological aspects of liminal and liminoid processes. I have often spoken of “communitas,” or social antistructure, meaning by it a relation quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances. I distinguish between three types of communitas: (1) the *spontaneous*, “existential” type I have just mentioned, the wind which bloweth where it listeth, and which defies deliberate cognitive and volitional construction; (2) *normative* communitas, the attempt to capture and preserve spontaneous communitas in a system of ethical precepts and legal rules, something akin to Weber’s “routinization of charisma” – though here the charisma is “pentecostal,” something that descends on a group and is evanescent, rather than a constant personal attribute; and (3) *ideological communitas*, the formulation of remembered attributes of the communitas experience in the form of a utopian blueprint for the reform of society – “ideological communitas” seems already to fall into the class of liminoid phenomena. At the opposite pole to spontaneous, existential communitas is “social structura,” in the sense of American and British structural-functionalist sociologists and anthropologists. Robert Merton puts it as well as any, when he defines structure, not as Lévi-Strauss would, as a system of unconscious categories, but as “the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences,” on the whole consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society. When we participate in social structure thus regarded, we gain through being presented with an orderly social world, with a recognized system of social control, with prescribed ways of acting towards

people by virtue of our incumbency of status-roles. But we lose immediacy, we are constrained by laws and conventions, and we are usually limited in the degree to which we can “play” with ideas or innovate behavior. Recognition should be given, if this view of the social is a valid one, to *both* key modalities of human relatedness, structure and communitas, if the social process and personal life are to develop fruitfully and usefully. Hypertrophy or atrophy of either may well produce social conflicts and psychological problems. Repressed communitas may be as warping as sexual repression.

Now one of the social aspects of “liminality” is probably to produce optimal conditions in small-scale preindustrial societies for the emergence of communitas among liminalities, particularly among those jointly undergoing initiation. The levelling and stripping processes I mentioned earlier – the reduction of initiands to a sort of common human *prima materia*, may have the effect of strengthening the bonds of communitas even as it dissolves antecedent social structural ties. Initiands frequently lose their very names, their previous kinship ties are situationally annulled, similarly their former residential and political connections. But they are often allowed, even encouraged, to form small groups of friends in the seclusion camp – and such ties of friendship often endure, whether institutionalized or not, throughout life. Friends of this type, among Ndembu, may even act as mediators if there is a blood-feud between their respective lineages. Liminality-originated friendship exists in our own society, of course. Members of the same class at Sandhurst or West Point, regardless of national, state or class origin, continue to meet ceremonially, whenever possible, throughout life. The same is true of gatherings of alumni on American campuses in the summer, a liminoid time of leisure.

So I am speculating that certain kinds of liminality may be conducive to the emergence of communitas. Again, there is a difference between the tribal-liminal and the industrial-liminoid. In the former, the whole group is engaged in this process, directly or through its representatives. In our society, it seems that the small groups which nourish communitas, do so by withdrawing voluntarily from the mainstream not only of economic but also of domestic familial life. The social category becomes the basis of recruitment. People who are similar in one important characteristic – sex, age, ethnicity, religion or some aspect of a religion, or in the possession of a common physical or mental condition, often pathological, standing in a local community, trade, profession, and so forth, withdraw symbolically, even actually, from the total system, from which they may in various degrees feel themselves “alienated,” to seek the glow of communitas among those with whom they share some cultural or biological feature they take to be their most signal mark of identity. Through the route of

“social category” they escape the alienating structure of a “social system” into “communitas,” or social antistructure.

This may well be “normative communitas” only, but there is no doubt, if one listens to enthusiastic members of street gangs, the Lion’s Club, branches of the women’s movement, Catholics for Peace, the New Mynyan movement, Rock Climbers’ clubs, poetry reading and writing groups that subjectively these people have a sense of being at times what Buber would call, “an essential We,” or what David Schneider would call “symbolically sharing common substance.” Furthermore, in the retreats these groups make for themselves, they generate sensorily perceptible rituals and symbols which frame and consolidate their identity as a communitas. The paradox of such groups is that while existential communitas is in feeling-tone a striving towards the universal, to an open society and an open morality, the normative communitas they achieve often separates them as so many symbolically framed “in-groups” even more completely from the environing society. The social-engineering trick, I suppose, is to keep the pipeline open between the society in general and each of its communitas groups, so that the former is seen as an amplification of the latter, and the latter is seen as an “organ” of the former. There are, however dangers of “totalism,” in all this which are highly undesirable, the danger of the “corporate state”, for example.

Finally. I want to focus on a concept, “flow,” which has recently been the subject of some fascinating research by a Chicago colleague of mine, a social psychologist, Mihali Csikszentmihalyi. The precise nature of the connection between “flow” and “communitas” is in question: as we shall see, Csikszentmihalyi stresses the competitive, “agonistic” frames of “flow,” while I see communitas as often arising out of the cessation of agonistic processes. In an article in a recent number of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, “Flowing: A General Model of Intrinsically Rewarding Experiences,” Csikszentmihalyi speaks of “flow” as the “holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement,” and is “a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part.” Csikszentmihalyi’s earlier work was in the study of play and sport, and he collected many responses from mountaineers, rock-climbers, footballers, hockey-players, chess-players, long distance swimmers, basketball players, and made his preliminary generalizations about the state of flow on the basis of these. Now he is extending “flow” beyond sport to the “creative experience” in art and literature, and to religious experiences. Tentatively, he has located six elements or qualities or distinctive features of the “flow experience.” These are:

↓ (1) The experience of merging action and awareness: there is no dualism

in flow; while an actor may be aware of what he is doing, he cannot be aware that he is aware – if he should do so there is a rhythmic behavioral or cognitive break – self-consciousness makes him stumble. Pleasure gives way to problem, to worry, to anxiety. The player loses the point, the rock-climber slips, the swordsman gets pinked. A personal cavil here: is it not precisely through the effort to resolve such problems of reflexivity that knowledge advances?

(2) In Csikszentmihalyi’s view, this merging of action and awareness is made possible by a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field. Consciousness must be narrowed, intensified, beamed in on a limited focus of attention. Past and future must be given up – only *now* matters. How is this to be done? Here conditions that normally prevail must be “simplified” by some definition of situational relevance. Bracketing and framing are employed. Sometimes this is by physiological means – drugs (including alcohol) which do not so much “expand consciousness” as limit and intensify awareness. I can see some help from this for the study of liminal and liminoid rituals, where social structure is simplified – elders and juniors, initiators and initiands – and action may be reactualized. But Csikszentmihalyi looks for his first model in Western games and sports. There intensification is brought about by, on the one hand, formal rules, and, on the other, by motivational means, for example, competitiveness. A game’s rules dismiss as irrelevant most of the “noise” which makes up uncontrolled, daily social reality, the multiform stimuli that impinge on our consciousness and sensorium. When we play football or chess we have to abide by a limited set of norms. Then we are motivated to do well by the game’s intrinsic structure, often to do better than others who subscribe to the same set of rules. Our minds and wills are thus focused sharply in certain known directions. *Rewards* for good knowledge and invincible will, when harnessed to tactical skill, complete, for Csikszentmihalyi, the focusing. But he is much more interested in the flow induced by these means than in the rules, motivations, or rewards. He believes that this is what makes the participants accept the rules, too, for the sake of a flow experience. The participants should also have “inner resources,” the “will to participate” (like other liminoid attributes this goes back to voluntariness, one *chooses* to play), the capacity to shift emphases among the structural components of a game or to innovate by using the rules to generate unprecedented performances – the sort of thing a great coach can do, as well as the players in team games.

(3) *Loss of ego* is another “flow” attribute. The “self” which is normally the “broker” between one person’s actions and another’s, simply becomes irrelevant, when flow begins. Translating it into my terms, the “self” Csikszentmihalyi is talking about, is the broker that functions in the field

of "social structural" relationships. The non-self or non-mind of flow awareness is highly characteristic of existential *communitas*, as well as of what Suzuki would call "Zen-awareness." For Csikszentmihalyi's games view of flow, the actor is immersed in flow – he accepts the rules which are binding on the other actors – no "self," in the ordinary sense, is needed to bargain about what should or should not be done. Reality, says Csikszentmihalyi, tends to be thus "simplified to the point that is understandable, definable, and manageable." He then insists that this also applies to "religious ritual and artistic performance" as well as to "games." Consensus about framing is a necessary if not sufficient condition for flowing.

(4) An actor in flow, says Csikszentmihalyi, finds himself *"in control of his actions and of the environment."* He may not know this at the instant of flow, but reflecting on it he may realize that his *skills were matched to the demands made on them by ritual, art, or sport.* This helps him to build up *"a positive self-concept."* For, outside flow, such a subjective sense of control is difficult to achieve, due to the multiplicity of stimuli and cultural tasks – especially, I would hold, in industrial societies with their complex social and technical division of labor. Perhaps, there is a similar motivation behind the withdrawal of persons into initially categorical groups based on selected characteristics, I mentioned earlier, and participation in sport – each helps people to build up a positive self-concept, in the face of the many-selved "Protean man" of social structure, by means of the no-self flow experience. Anyway, it is certain, Csikszentmihalyi argues, that with control, in, say, the ritualized limits of a game or the form of a poem, a person may cope, worry goes, and fear. Even, as in rock climbing or Formula One driving, when the dangers are real, the moment flow is elicited and the activity is entered, the *flow delights eliminate the consciousness of danger and problem.*

(5) *A fifth feature of flow is that it contains coherent, non-contradictory demands for action,* and provides clear, unambiguous feedback to a person's actions. This is entailed, Csikszentmihalyi says, by the limiting of awareness to a restricted field of possibilities. Culture reduces the flow possibility to defined channels – chess, polo, gambling, the stock market, liturgical action, miniature painting, yoga exercises, and the like. You can confidently "throw yourself" into the cultural design of the game or art, and know whether you have done well or not when you have completed the round of culturally prefigured acts – in the extreme case, as in completing the race at Le Mans, if you survive you have performed adequately – in other cases, the public, the crowd, the audience, or the professional critics have an important say, but if you are a real "pro," the final judge is yourself, looking back on your work or performance with estab-

lished criteria in mind. Csikszentmihalyi shows himself here as being in the classical not the romantic tradition, in his stress on self-imposed limitations or accepting the rules of the game. For him, "flooding" is not "flow." Flow is channeled and terminable by fiat. For the true romantic, the formal rules that center attention are only the beginning, discarded when Fancy starts to fly. Shelley, for example, in his "Lament for Adonais," after Keat's death, uses a conventional poetic form to get started, but finds himself – fairly quickly – "driven darkly and fearfully afar" to where "the soul of Adonais, like a star, beacons from the abode where the Eternals are." The same distinction would probably hold between priestly and shamanic ritual.

(6) Finally, *flow is autotelic,* in the sense, that it seems to need no goals or rewards outside itself. Cultural forms such as sports and arts, according to this view, are set up for the sake of the flow they may induce, not for the particular rewards they may appear to offer, the prizes, trophies or fame.

Relating "flow" to "*communitas*." I would have to say that while I go along with Csikszentmihalyi's notion that flow involves a *merging of action and awareness,* an ego-less state that is its own reward, and that *communitas,* too, has these attributes, as he writes in a recent monograph, I do not agree with him that flow requires "formal rules" and circumscription in space and time as preconditions. *Communitas is a sort of shared flow* – but it can and does occur both in structured and unstructured situation. On the other hand, any games, sports, artistic performances, musical compositions, poems, and attempts at meditation, are totally without flow, frustrating in the extreme to those who have recourse to them primarily for the "flow" experience. In protracted games, too, the moments of genuine flow are few and far between, even in some regarded as "classical" and "memorable." What the framing of sociocultural processes may do, however, is to call attention to the presence of flow, even perhaps to amplify it. But such framing is not necessary for flow-production. Flow clearly has strong physiological, including sexual overtones: flow of milk, flow of semen, flow of blood, flow of urine; there are also metaphorical uses, such as flow of thought, flow of ideas, flow of work, flow of production. Flow clearly crosses the *work/leisure divide* I spoke of earlier. But the work domain itself is heterogeneous and complex and has its liminal aspects. All these usages imply some kind of psychosomatic basis and they imply too an endogenous process that has a definite beginning and end. This processual form is not imposed from without by rules: as William Blake said of fire: "Fire finds its own form." So flow finds its own form. Nevertheless, since we are animals with culture, flow elicitation may well be

a function of certain key symbols. Again, it is a matter of particular cultural symbols in concrete situations not of abstract systems of symbols. Group experience may lead to the selection of certain symbols as the best flow-elicitors. My guess is that these would be liminal or liminoid symbols or symbolic actions, precisely those which are associated with social anti-structure, and which are initially associated with ritual process. These tend to be levelling, frame-breaking, hierarchy-toppling sorts of symbols. They may be in the ludic form of verbal and practical jokes, *jeux de mots*, witty paradoxes, and so forth, or in the serious form of reference in terms of the shared experience of the group to what equalizes us all, the biological facts of "birth, copulation, and death," and "the troubles of our proud and angry dust" which teach us that we *are* dust, to compound T.S. Eliot, A.E. Houseman, and the Ash Wednesday liturgy. If we focus, for example, on the liminoid genres of literature, on scenes and moments famous for the quality of their *communitas* and flow, such as Achilles's encounter with Priam in the *Iliad*, the episode of Raskolnikov's and Sonya's long, painful discovery of one another in *Crime and Punishment*, so well discussed by Paul Friedrich, the *communitas* of the liminary outcasts, Lear, Tom O'Bedlam, Kent, and the Fool, in the scene on the heath in *King Lear*, in the serious vein; and the women's *communitas* in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and many episodes in *Tom Jones*, *Don Quixote*, and other "carnivalized novels", in the ludic, my hunch is that there will be key symbols which "open" up relationships to *communitas*. And that in life, too, key symbols, will emerge to presage experiences of *communitas*.

Let me conclude by saying that in all societies "flow" symbols are most likely to be found in association with beginnings and transitions, genesis and exodus. In tribal society they are linked with the liminality of rites of passage and seasonal feasts; in complex large-scale societies, primarily with the liminoid genres of leisure. And "flow" symbols, often but not always, go with the capacity to "play", just as in sexuality and lactation, foreplay elicits physiological flow. The study of such transitional processional, liminal, and transformative phenomena will surely help us to "loosen up" structural anthropology, and possible to "disalienate" the work process.

CHAPTER IV
TRANSFORMATION, HIERARCHY AND TRANSCENDENCE:
A REFORMULATION OF VAN GENNEP'S
MODEL OF THE STRUCTURE OF RITES DE PASSAGE

Terence S. Turner

I. VAN GENNEP'S MODEL OF THE STRUCTURE OF RITES DE PASSAGE¹

Van Gennep's formula for the structure of what he called rites of passage has become an anthropological commonplace, perhaps even a cliché (1909). The features which he was the first to identify as comprising the universal pattern of such rituals are so well known as hardly to need recapitulation here.² The essential idea is that rituals that mark transitions between temporal periods, spatial zones, or social states or relations of various kinds take the form of a sequence of three distinct types of rites, corresponding to and expressing the three phases of the process of transition itself: rites of separation, rites of the *limen* or *marge*, to use Van Gennep's terms, or of transition, to use the equivalent adopted by his English translators; and rites of aggregation (incorporation or reincorporation). Of the general points adduced by Van Gennep in elaborating his basic scheme, I will mention only one. Van Gennep noted that the rites of the medial, liminal or transitional phase tended to display characteristics different from those of the initial and final phases of the ritual, which often amounted to inversions of the properties of profane social organization or secular space-time bracketing the rite as a whole. This inverted quality of the liminal phase was summed up by Van Gennep in his notion of the "pivoting of the sacred," whereby those actually going through the rites of the *limen*, who are thereby set apart from the rest of (profane) society, view the latter as if it were "sacred" and therefore prohibited or dangerous to them.

The validity of Van Gennep's formulation as a descriptive framework for the structure of *rites de passage* has been confirmed by subsequent research,³ but the pattern which he identified has never been successfully accounted for in theoretical terms. Van Gennep himself made almost no attempt to do so, beyond the general affirmation that the phase-structure of the ritual reflects that of the social transitions it mediates (he stressed, for example, that different phases of the ritual might be stressed depending upon the type of social transition involved, e.g. rites of separa-