

EXPLORING THE WORK OF VICTOR TURNER: LIMINALITY AND ITS LATER IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Victor Turner broke anthropology free from cultural determinism when it was anchored in the reductionist theories of Durkheim. Like Tolstoy in his recognition of the origin of violence in government, Turner recognized the origin of the denaturing of cultures in culture's own penchant for the building of social structures in order to perpetuate itself. He saw in the cracks between structures, and in the liminal gaps necessary for changes in structure, the revival of the lost immediacy of social relationships and the *communitas* that is its mark. Nowadays one may include signs of spirituality in those gaps, although that spirituality has been a topic previously tabooed in anthropological circles or hidden under structural analysis. Turner saw the inconvenient truth that if structuralism as a value and philosophy (plus what we now see as the violence inseparable from the political state, along with neoconservatism and neoliberalism—business doctrines multiplied by themselves ad infinitum) were to continue as the world's philosophy, we would continue with wars and the smothering of the natural flexibility of social intercourse (see Robert Putnam 2000, who shows in stark figures how sociality in general is losing ground in our era).

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Turner was a follower of Martin Buber (1958) and Bakhtin (1969). He was a lover of that very natural social intercourse that these two describe—Buber's I-Thou relationship and Bakhtin's "free intercourse in the people's second world". During Victor Turner's ethnographic studies he was fascinated more by social process than by the 'social facts' in which the early social-structuralist anthropologists were interested, that is, the societal maintenance of the unchanging repetitions of kinship behavior. Turner delighted in the skills shown in the naturally occurring phenomenon of the social drama, with its frequent pattern of breach of the social mores, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or recognition of schism. Further, he followed the mysteries of ritual, its release of social power and healing, whereby the human being is changed in a manner we may now call spiritual, and he began to understand the fruits of performance whereby the 'subjunctive'—that is, imagined human relationships, dreams of how things might be, the getting inside of another's personality that happens on stage and in film—enrich human culture and release the actual possibility of the imagined events. Most of all he loved *communitas*, people together as 'ordinary guys', which he continually experienced with his friends, family, colleagues, field people and particularly the Manchester United soccer crowd.

Concerning Turner's theory of anthropology, it must always be noted that while the early thinkers he used, Marx, Freud, and Jung, had little anthropology, Turner had the benefit of the huge stretch and marvels of anthropological research to draw on, from highland New Guinea to Central Africa to Mexican calpullis and the Zapatistas, everywhere—varieties of Bakhtin's "people's world" on a planet-wide scale. Their consciousness, their soul, and their actions inspired by their sense of religion—which I call 'Power II'—were the key to what Turner cautiously approached.

We are now finding that close contact with people's various spiritualities tends to show up a contrast with the ethnocentricity of Westernized positivist thinkers. We realize that humanity all over the globe has been doing its own thinking on the quiet before ever we moderns got ourselves in the mess we are in. Anthropologists now have to trust the naturally developed ways of indigenous societies more than the skewed thinking of pundits who have a stake in complex structured systems. So anthropology has become more humanistic, requiring the documentation of real human situations and the use of stories, following the way indigenous people use them. We are getting down to the personal.

Therefore, after forethought, I am giving a 'flesh and blood' view of the anthropological thinker Victor Turner. This picture will have the effect of bringing down to earth the theoretical concepts involved in his personal thoughts, as I knew them as his wife, and thus my readers will be able to follow those concepts and the different directions they took in his life.

First, what kind of person was he? He was born in Scotland in 1920 and died in 1983. He had a vivid Scottish accent like Sean Connery. He was a very solid, real man. I see him in my mind's eye, my short stubby man, overweight, with badger-like stripes of black and white where his hair is going white over the ears but is still black on top. He's marked with energy; he's just a big, definitely 'there' personality. He walks into the room reading out from a book. He's onto some idea nobody's thought of. You add an idea to it and he suddenly builds it into something big, the implications of which go right out of sight. While he's saying all this his mouth shapes the words with fond accuracy and pleasure. There was this about Vic too: he was a flat-out character. In a sense, he was out of social control. His consciousness was regularly gone from him, escaped; it was there ahead of him, like the *arutam*-souls of the Jivaro Indians flying out ahead of their bodies over the battlefield. Vic did not put on side, that is, he had no 'dignity', no 'manner', no self-consciousness or masking of his real self, although he loved acting. I don't think calculating types ever realized this about Vic as long as he lived. And he realized they didn't realize.

Then for the life story of his thoughts. A certain little fact creeps in here, dated about 1932. It is not without significance. Victor Turner was a young boy of 12. He told me this story in 1943 when we were first married. We were visiting his home town, Bournemouth, in England. In the sunshine around the sandy corners of the suburbs, Vic showed me a red-brick Anglican church. It was locked when we tried the door.

"That's where the padre was minister."

"Padre?"

"That's what everyone called him. He and I were good friends when I was 12."

In 1932, Victor Turner's parents had already broken up: the father, Norman, a scientist in the new invention of television in Glasgow, the mother, Violet, a classical actress. Violet

had left Glasgow and her husband Norman, and had moved in with her own mother in Bournemouth. How did the padre get to know the fatherless boy? Way back in Vic's lonely days, the padre had shown him—had spread out before him—all the mystics of Christianity and many from the rest of the world: the Rhineland mystics, the Silesians, the Spanish Santa Teresa and St. John of the Cross, William Blake, St. Francis and his counterparts, Rumi and Al Ghazali in the world of Islam, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavadgita, and faintly far off, hints of Buddhism. Vic told me a story about the padre while we were walking along the sandy, pine-fringed avenues of Bournemouth beyond the church.

When I was about 12 years old, the padre fell sick with some complaint. I was asleep in my bed—must have been about 3 o'clock in the morning. I didn't really know much; I was just a boy. I awoke and saw a big oval light at the end of my bed. This light was like nothing I'd ever seen; it was warm, full of love—it was alive, *mild*. I looked and looked. I knew everything was all right. It went away after a time. Next day they told me the padre had died at about 3 in the morning. So I knew it was him, telling me something. (Turner 1943, personal communication)

Decades later, I started to call this event an 'actuality', a term begun by Michael Harner and myself: that is, the event did not originate in Vic's head, it was not a symbol, but it was something from 'out there'. It was an actuality. Vic wrote many poems about the experience of that light, discovering that only the word-music of poetry could catch the moment.

As Vic walked along telling the story, I felt as if I had seen that light myself, and the consciousness of it never went away.

He and I had met during World War II while he was doing conscientious objector work in the British army. In his off moments he was reading *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) by Margaret Mead, which he shared with me. He realized he had come across different ways that humans relate to one other: the Samoans and Westerners, for a start. He could see the differences again in Mead's other book, *Growing up in New Guinea* (1930), and again among the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean where the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1964 [1922]) shows a very neat social system among the indigenous people, operating like an organism within their own extended family customs, used by Radcliffe-Brown in his creation of the concept of social structure. At the end of the war, on Turner's return to his studies, he chose to do research in anthropology instead of English literature, which was then a matter of writing papers on books that discussed books of literary criticism about the books of playwrights, poets, and novelists, that is, writing papers on books on books. But it was the *actual events* in anthropological fieldwork that spoke to Turner. In our own lives too events had been happening all around us, real people acting in relation to one another, often passionately. Now in our new interest in anthropology we discovered there were direct studies being made of societies far across the globe, and that much in the experience of those people that was startlingly different. And they were alive, not fictional.

Thus it was that Turner joined Daryll Forde's department of social anthropology at University College London (UCL) for his BA, planning to do research in Africa for his Ph.D.—Africa being Britain's major anthropological field. Daryll Forde offered what was in effect an expanded human geography, found in his down-to-earth-materialist's book, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (1934). The title tells it all. Daryll was an "argie-bargie" guy as he told us, that is, he loved an argument. So did the students. So did Vic and I—Vic

having relayed his lecture courses to me in every detail. We received the Yoruba agricultural and kinship system in Nigeria parceled down to us from Daryll. We saw how patriliney arose from cattle-keeping and plow agriculture because men were essential in the handling of cattle, how descent was likely to be segmentary among such scattered communities, how a primary matter like soil conditions caused a fan-out of particularized customs and relationships among strongly localized tribes. In Meyer Fortes' *The Web of Kinship* (1949, also 1945) we discovered the Tallensi's complex overlayings of customs and obligations, all mutely and mutually understood, causing little nodal points in the overlaps where ritual mattered greatly. We learned that immense subtleties existed in this obscure tribe in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Meanwhile, whatever the field material indicated, the British school kept affirming that ritual arose from social structure, which arose from the means of subsistence. They drew these conclusions from the general assumptions of positivist materialism.

As regards our own eventual fieldwork, I hoped to go to the field with Vic, somehow knowing that a mother of three with her children was the right kind of person to study people. In the post-war England of 1948, times were hard for us, living as a family on a student's grant in an urban milieu. We were poor. Vic and I took to communism, which we thought might be the cure for hardships such as ours, joining a small group who studied Marxism. We learnt:

In machinery, objectified labour confronts living labour within the labour process itself as the power which rules it; a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital. The transformation of the means of labour into machinery, and of living labour into a mere living accessory of this machinery, as the means of its action, also posits the absorption of the labour process in its material character as a mere moment of the realization process of capital. (Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* 1981 [1941]: 693)

Cannot one see this, all over again, after what has passed, as still demonically true? But we were happy to read further in Marx that, once under communism, machinery would be used to do the work for the people, liberating humankind and bringing in a utopia:

in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing to-day and another to-morrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (Marx and Engels 1969 [1947]: 22)

It was not until six decades later I came across a passage stating the obvious catch in this. Tolstoy had told the world already, before ever communism came into being:

Railroads, printing presses, tunnels, phonographs, X-rays and so forth, are very good. They are all very good, but what is also good—good, as Ruskin says, beyond comparison with anything else—are human lives, such as those of which millions are now mercilessly ruined for the acquisition of railways and tunnels, which instead of beautifying life disfigure it.

To this the usual reply is that technologies are already being invented, and will continue to be invented, precisely to put an end to all the various miseries that plague human life [as Marx was happy to

predict]. But this is simply not true. As long as we do not consider one another as brothers and sisters and do not consider human lives the most sacred of all things—on no account to be sacrificed (...) we will always find ways to ruin one another's lives.

A time may come that those who destroy human lives for their own profit will be shamed by public opinion or otherwise will be compelled by law to provide safer measures. But as long as we don't live before [the sacred], we will, even after providing safer measures, find other means to exploit human lives for the sake of profit. (Tolstoy 2006 [1904]: 132)

Meanwhile, in 1948 the raw Marx was offering us a powerful lure. We joined a group, we took the newspaper, *For a Lasting Peace and a Workers' Democracy*. Our group adopted democratic meeting procedures, we agitated for workers' rights. However, we learned to our disappointment regarding matters of colonialism in Africa—which were sure to be our own political concern—that the Party was not particularly interested in what happened to Africans and the colonies. It was for the Africans out there to organize, create their own revolution, and enter the world struggle using the same political methods as in the metropolitan countries. There should be no sentimentality about the beauty of their pristine systems. Such peoples should cast off their rituals which were only opium for the people, and organize for action.

Still, the UCL courses went on. Africa grew in fascination for Turner and me. A fire lived on in Turner beneath the official cold iron, the iron march of the proletariat. However, the Party remained as our moral stance. Turner wrote on Nadel's West African market women (pure economics); Evans-Pritchard's leopard-skin chiefs among the Nuer (a structural anomaly); Max Gluckman on the Barotse flood-plain of the Zambezi in a classic study of human ecology, *The Economy of the Central Barotse Plain* (1941); Evans-Pritchard's Nuer floodplain of the Nile (almost pure rational geography); the marvels of Ashanti kingship written by Rattray, who was a socialist; and ancestor worship—which was taken to be the collective representation of the power of the elders. What we gathered was something like this: The Africans mistakenly fancied the ancestors were around them. This mental 'glitch' of theirs, we learned, arose from the psychological effects of the cruelty of the superego. For this we were using Freud. Turner wrote skilled papers on political systems where custom was king, a state of things persisting in what, we gathered, were static, untouched communities living through unvarying cycles, or alternatively, where custom was king in stagnant systems perpetuated by power-greedy potentates. You take your pick. We were told quite seriously that the colonial system's main function was to hold the peace—the Pax Britannica. However, we read Evans-Pritchard on the witch-bound Azande of the Sudan. At that time 'E.P.' was a shaken positivist, an osmotic man. He actually saw a spirit among the Azande (1976 [1937]: 11). He wrote his book to show the blood-red paths of fear in an African village and, in so writing, he showed the Azande consciousness of the spirit's force.

Turner toiled on. He had three children to feed. We were "in the mesh", as Sartre put it. On the one hand we kept our communism private. On the other, we 'knew nothing' about spirits.

Max Gluckman, heading the Manchester department, obtained a fieldwork grant for Turner. Gluckman taught us to understand the difference between law among on-the-ground communities such as the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia and among the bureaucratic

systems that the metropolitan countries had invented and forced themselves to obey. We too intended to go to Northern Rhodesia to study political systems. For some time Max had been mulling a certain breakthrough. This was a break with the 'structuralism' world of theory, to look instead at human life as *process*, things moving, not static. Max's students—Vic Turner 1969, Arnold Epstein 1958, John Barnes, Jaap Van Velsen 1964, Ian Cunnison 1960, and others—welcomed this. Human life as what it is, dynamic, not static, shifting and tumbling on through time—that is what we saw in Max's accounts, not analyses of archetypal structures of kinship—which were by then not the most exciting topics in anthropology.

When we finally went to the field among the Lunda Ndembu of Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, we found not only differing social structures but quarrels, long-term ripening and fragmenting social dramas, initiation ceremonies, funerary rites with masked dancers, rites of ancestor worship, and passionately collective healing rituals. Anthropological analysis had been relating such rituals to the existing state of the social structure. But they were living events, and in the course of time we documented many of them. We were living in a rich brew of active and gossiping people. Vic and I, among the crowd at the coming-out dances, were just extra crowd members, slightly unusual in color but that's all. Vic made friendships among the men just as they made friendships with each other; he was not there as an 'investigator' of the place in the sense of 'conducting' research (as if it were an orchestra, or a police search). No, we enjoyed the rituals as the others did only they were new to us. Apparently the events were never stale to the others either, any more than Christmas is stale to us. (I still ask: why isn't it?)

How can I describe Vic going off with Musona for a walk up the road to see Sanganyi or some other jolly headman, probably in search of millet beer? Vic called into the kitchen, just as he used to call his friend in the soccer team in Bournemouth to come out to practice—with a beckoning with the head. Musona rapidly wiped his hands on a bit of rag and smoothed his shorts, his smile crinkling up his face. Then he positively leapt out of the kitchen on his spider legs, and the two would be off, Vic 'tanking' from side to side (like a tank over rough ground). Vic's black hair would float up in wings on each side as he talked nineteen to the dozen to Musona who was devil-may-care and joking. Vic's slightly upturned nose gave nobody, ever, any cause to call him superior, a pedagogue, 'snotty', as we used to call it, a person with a long nose, supercilious. *He* had been looked down on in the days when he refused to fight in World War II. Like the working class, he knew what it was to be the underdog. But he was conscious and cheerful, resistant and tough. He identified with everybody in Kajima Village, including old Sakazao the sly one, who glowed a little when Vic was around. Vic would give out cigarettes, shooting them out to everybody like bullets.

He wrote down everything. Later, in 1975 (*Revelation and Divination*), he managed to write down the true spirituality of a great ritual, the Chihamba, for he had been reading the mystics again. But at the time when he experienced the Chihamba ritual in 1953 he was privately supposed to be a Party member.

Now I am proud to maintain that the party did an indispensable job for Turner and me. Without knowing it, it had nudged us both through the membrane of the elite into the beloved world of the non-elite, the ordinary people, and that for good. Neither of us could ever renege on these folk. *We knew* the superior moneyed classes, their wealth-loaded

camels jammed in the eye of a needle. They were done for. Also, it was through the party that Turner's eyes were opened to what I call the very precious 'thing-mysticism' of the Ndembu, something that could also be termed *spiritual* materialism, the sense that everything has meaning and is holy. Thank the Party for that too, though the members would have no idea what it was. We knew, furthermore, that when we returned to England Turner would be forced to translate mystical matters into academic terminology to gain his Ph.D. As for Party officials, as distinct from the genuine leaders of the ordinary people, they would tear their garments at the very notion of thing-mysticism. They were pure positivist materialists without a crack in their armor. But we had escaped the strictures of their hide-bound system by slipping down a crack in it—a crack they had not noticed. This crack dwelt in the very nature of things. What we saw was this. A crack is given to humankind in its very biology, in the chrysalis stage of puberty, when the child becomes something quite different for a time, before finally unfolding into adulthood. There is no such thing as gradual development. There is a time of apparent stasis during the rite of passage where, for example, in Africa, the individual is secluded; but far from being a time of stasis, things are happening offstage which verge upon the eerie.

I became very familiar with the Ndembu girl's rite of passage. First she was a 'baby', and a 'dead' person too. The women laid her passive body down on an antelope skin in the woods, in the bosom of nature, at the foot of a young tree that exuded milk from its leaves, and there she lay in what they called the *ifwilu*, the death place, curled up like a fetus, and the women covered her from head to foot with a blanket. She slept, enchanted. In full daylight she lay asleep while high festival raged around her, with folk drumming, dancing, leaping from side to side, clapping, chanting boisterous and salacious songs. Not until sunset did they take her body from the death place to bear it like a corpse and also like a womb-enclosed baby into its new seclusion hut. Into the rafters of the new grass hut the women placed a small string of white beads, hidden from view.

"*Diyi mukishi*; this is the spirit of the mothers," they said. It was about thirty beads on a string. The idea was, any one of them could be your future child, you can have your pick. But you mustn't look at them.

What is this mystery in the middle of ordinary life?

After three months of training in the art of eros and in the supreme 'coming-out dance of the jiggling breasts', the coming-out day dawns. The women enter the hut and bear the girl away to a secluded spot to be anointed and garbed for her final display. First they hide the white beads in the part of her hair. Then, dressed like a queen, breasts bare, enswathed with beads, she dances for them all, harnessed on her back and calves with susurrating rattles. As I watched the girl's initiation I saw how they had literally been hiding her in the seclusion hut, and hiding the things they did to celebrate her majority. The things they hid were anomalies. One sees anomaly after anomaly in the initiation world: a super-attractive world that is like nothing else, not like hut-building, digging, and cooking. Not like quarreling with your sister. Just a matter of this: stay still and it will come.

Is sex just a physical thing? Is its awakening comprehensible to the psychologist? Biggest question of all, are the customs of initiation those of 'Power I', that is, obedience to the mores, serving the men—in a word, social structure?

Or might there be a 'Power II'? How could these custom be of the nature of Power I? Something else was going on, and Vic and I later called the phenomenon, whatever it was, 'liminality', found in the liminal or threshold stage in the rite of passage. We documented both the girls' rites (1968: 199–268) and the boys' (1967: 151–279), and, item after item, we began to earmark the points that were not part of the 'structure' picture, that were off the graph. For the girls these were: taking her away from her mother; the public indecency of the songs; the hidden white beads that they called the spirit; her mentor chosen from a generation not her mother's; the defiance of the women; the girl's identity as dead, as a baby and as a mother all in one; her disappearance like a spirit just before her public dance; the testing of her husband on their first night together—all was in contradiction to the structures of society. These were 'spirit' characteristics, not structural ones.

Primarily one is confronted with the death feature. You die to the old life and are born into the new. 'Die' is a rather strong word, not used in graduation ceremonies in the United States. Were these Africans mad, or morbid-minded? Incidentally, why is this 'die to live' feature also a favorite of Christianity? We're not preaching Christianity here, we're getting the ideas that all the religions have, without distinction—the Buddhists' 'no-mind', for instance, where the ego can die, and no loss. 'Death' here is the membrane from one recognizable world into another. This idea—of something beyond death and the consciousness of sometimes being in a different world—is found everywhere.

The spirit beads, also, involved in initiation, the white beads, are very secret. It can be argued, "Don't they represent the matrilineage, though? Aren't they just a fancy of the people so that the girl would respect her mother and grandmother better? Weren't they charms, fetishes, and magic—merely that?" One should try following down those beads and the sense of recognition in those who kept them clean and safe from one generation to another. "This is the spirit of the mothers, from generation to generation"—"*Diyi mukishi*." They kept saying it plainly. They recognized the beads as what, in 2007, I now name 'an actuality'. The Ndembu understood the holiness of the beads. They whispered these things to me. They were naming *the spirit itself*. Native Americans ('First Americans') know animals of this nature. Victor Turner wrote briefly about the matter in *Revelation and Divination* (1975). I now see a little better what the sacredness of an object implies, compared to the sociological meaning anthropologists have given to religious symbols and metaphors. I recognize also that the acts the Ndembu perform in ritual are keyed in to the actual Sacred, and that its symbolism is not derived from levels of their psychology nor their positions in society.

Turner and I knew of other African initiations, among the Yao, Bemba (Richards 1982 [1956]), Thonga, and Nyakyusa. We simply could not see any of them as straight representations of respect for the customs. They were hung about with indications of spirituality, here, there, and everywhere.

This new explanation of ritual emerged in the first place from an anthropological point of view and not from religious studies, owing to Victor Turner's training, his opting for anthropology. Anthropology remained his home because of its lightsome touch with everybody in the world—"I think that nothing human is alien to me" was the motto of the discipline—as it were, "I am kin to it all". It will be seen how Vic was first a mystic at twelve years old. However, as a university student he had gone through a stage of dryness, of sheer positivism, the politicization of life; and the mental drill it entailed walled off

poetry, magic, and religion from him. For instance, during the dry time, the poet Rilke meant nothing to him. All such matters as poetry and the arts were to be regarded as the creations of culture like everything else—social constructions of reality. (But how could they be so regarded?) Even up to the 1990s and beyond, even now, much of anthropology teaches that religion is “an expression of the social structure”—therefore in some way or other, it is “constructed” or “fabricated” (Rappaport 1999: *passim*).

In his anthropology, Turner was ranging among different classes of facts—social facts with respect to Durkheim and psychological facts with respect to Freud. But he also kept in mind non-rational facts with respect to Søren Kierkegaard, and this with regard to paradoxical experiences. I remember how Vic read Kierkegaard’s book on paradox ([1843] 1985) as long ago as 1943. Kierkegaard boldly faces the accounts of God’s irrationality in the Old Testament, particularly over the question of God’s requirement that Abraham should slay his son Isaac. For Vic and me, the gap between plain rationality and something divine—shown when one is in the hands of a spirit who is taking the initiative—appeared just there in Kierkegaard. The path of our own lives was soon going to be swung in yet another direction, for when we came out of the field and Vic had completed his Ph.D., we became Catholics, having, in a sense, been converted to ritual by the Ndembu. Now we were not so afraid of paradox and the non-rational, and we were companioned with the courage of Kierkegaard. Later I needed the same courage to face and affirm the reality of spirits (E. Turner 1992).

Kierkegaard’s paradoxes about ‘paradox’ came back to Turner when he finally wrote the full account of the Chihamba ritual—a ritual that Max had warned him not to make the main theme of his dissertation. When Turner published it in 1962 as a museum paper he gave it the title *Chihamba the White Spirit: A Ritual Drama of the Ndembu*. When it was republished in 1975 in a book that included a long discussion section he gave it the title *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*. It was a book that surfaced irrepressibly like the subject of that ‘revelation’, the white hump of Kavula himself, the Ndembu thunder god, who had surfaced from under the earth in the African forest. We realized we were facing paradoxes again, the manifestations of antistructure, for the god Kavula was both good and savage. His image was constructed out of wood by the hands of the adepts, yet this was, *was* the thunder god; the neophytes ‘killed’ him with the thumping of their rattles in a ritual of sacrifice, yet they were ‘innocent’ of murder and the god grew up again in the cassava. Kierkegaard says that the nature of the godhead is pure paradox and that these paradoxes have to remain in their strength as paradoxes. For Vic, the paradoxes among the Ndembu were not analyzable in accord with social-structural or psychological principles.

If one cannot analyze, what can one do with this material? Just give up and change one’s career? Jung asks whether, when one “reaches the bounds of scientific understanding [and crosses over into] the transcendental (...) no further scientific statements can be made” (Jung 1928). Yet Jung himself was determined to include as scientific facts much of what we would call occult. Jung always had trouble with his own resolve. Even though he said in one passage (1928: 194) that the contents of psychic experience were “real,” in another he said, “The great advantage of the concepts ‘daimon’ and ‘God’ lies in making possible a much better objectification of the *vis-a-vis*, namely, a *personification* of it” (1928: 337). Are experiences of the presence of God real, or invented in the mind and by society? Are they a matter of ‘personification’?

In Turner's dissertation he had been forced to show how the ritual reflected the social structure. Max Gluckman felt that for a dissertation it was necessary to lay out the structures of the society as a preliminary for further explorations. But what Turner demonstrated was that Chihamba was part of the social life of the Ndembu in process, so Gluckman as the author of process anthropology was content. Religion is part of social process and vice-versa. 'Process' had already become the revolutionary idea of 'putting into motion' the structures and forms, switching on the machine, as it were, and seeing it in operation. I say this in irony now. The move to process was but a minor correction of one of academia's worst booboos—that is, of viewing the object of its study as static form.

Turner loved social process and was already working deeply in it. But he also held in his hand the complete documentation of the Chihamba ritual with its curious consciousness of a demigod—this was shining like a light. Yes, he had done what Max suggested for the sake of the children, but after that, he would let academia see.

By 1963 he was a senior lecturer at the University of Manchester, England, having published his dissertation on Africa under the title *Schism and Continuity* (1957), also the museum paper called *Chihamba the White Spirit* (1962) and a number of major articles in journals and collections. In 1963 he was offered a full professorship at Cornell in the U.S.A. We all relocated to be near Vic's mother at Hastings while we awaited the final arrangements of the move.

While still in England, over the New Year 1963 to 1964, just after the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, the lives of Turner and myself in Hastings grew step by step more liminal—'betwixt and between'. We were the subjects of our own theory that was developing right there. For instance, we were no longer in Manchester, Turner having been appointed to Cornell; our visas were in question because we had briefly been Communist party members (a membership we now felt to have been crazy) and were awaiting special defectors' visas—therefore we were neither here nor there, feeling the uncertainty of it; we were renting a house in the ancient port of Hastings, roughly at the spot where William the Conqueror first penetrated Britain, thereby creating a changing point in British history. Hastings was a gateway into Britain, whereas we needed a gateway out. Our house was beside the Bourne, a stream that joined land to sea; our daughter Rene was a teenager, neither a child nor an adult; and both Turner and I were in the middle of a complex change in our entire anthropological philosophy. Worse, there occurred John Kennedy's assassination. This was threshold living at every moment. The world would never be the same again! And what had Turner been reading? None other than Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960 [1909]). Then and there, in the Hastings public library, Turner wrote an essay that emerged from the experience of waiting. It was entitled, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Les Rites de Passage*."

Turner had learned on his pulses what liminality was: 'the threshold place', under the lintel, the limen, and he recognized it in *The Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep had sifted through large numbers of the world's rituals concerned with change. Turner recognized these rituals as the anomalous moments 'in and out of time' that did not belong to the prevailing social structure. They were threshold events, termed later the 'crack in the mirror'. In those rituals appears a celebration of in-between-ness itself—the rituals we now know as initiations. In-between-ness, the stage in the middle of change, has a strange character, out of this ordinary world. On my part, I had seen the strange acts within the Ndembu girl's

initiation. When Turner applied Van Gennep's passage theory to the rituals and symbols of the boys' circumcision camps among the Ndembu, he had noted the figure of the anomalous spirit dancer from ancient times who appeared in the seclusion period. The masked figure was liminal, nobody's known relative but an ancestor from very distant times, slightly mad, huge, and with the appearance of a lord of spirits. Turner found that circumcised novices were secluded in a forest world full of spiritual significance. The boys' own acts were spiritual acts: for instance, even their reentry back into the world of the everyday was sudden and unexpected, like the coming of spirits. It should be noted that Turner did not use the word 'spiritual' as often as I do. Then it still bore the anthropological taboo.

Furthermore, among people in a situation of liminality Turner also found what he termed 'communitas', the comradeship and fellowship of people in the midst of liminal ritual. *The Random House Webster Unexpurgated Dictionary* (1998) now defines 'communitas' as: "*Anthropol.* The sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among persons who experience liminality as a group." Communitas between people, the great mood of most of the rituals of the people, is a phenomenon anthropologists themselves experience in the field, often around a log fire, and they see it manifesting itself in others. Before Turner ever did fieldwork he had already experienced it, as most people do at various points in their lives. It was the sense of one's fellows as basic unaccommodated human beings. He had a sense of this when he was in the British Army in World War II as a conscientious objector, loading food onto railroad wagons. He and the men really liked each other, just as in *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Solzhenitsyn (1996 [1962]), in the scene of men in the prison camp in Siberia building a wall, finding joy in working together. Turner himself felt this phenomenon—then not identified in the social sciences—among the boys in the circumcision camp: that is, the comradeship of those under ordeal together. Communitas was also there in the Ndembu healing ritual of Chihamba in which Turner and I took part in 1953, among the patients who were in passage between illness and health. Communitas is a very simple thing but an enormously important part of social life. It does not often find its way into the social sciences because scholars 'do not know what to do with it'. It can also be seen as unconditional love (as in the Maori term *aroha*, the friendly hand as an immediate cure for depression and fear) outside any differentiated respect for rank, moral status, and social structures. It flourishes best in those precious times when stress about status has flaked away and nobody bothers about rank—often, curiously, when there is *much* stress about mutual safety, as in disasters or during intensely hard work. Then, curiously, people find themselves to be just ordinary people after all, not the anxious prestige-seeking holders of jobs and positions they often are. And they like their fellow humans better this way. People see each other face to face. All the little details matter. People's personalities stand out in 3D, and they are somehow lovable, gifted. No one nags anyone about regulations—though they follow the old customs with relish.

So, Turner realized he had stumbled upon an anomaly, a flaw in the theory of society held by the leading sociologist of the century, Emile Durkheim (1965 [1915]). Durkheim had no sense of 'in-between' times nor, in particular, of the betwixt-and-between liminal phase within rites of passage—no sense of their paradoxical nature. He had no sense of communitas beyond his own concept of 'effervescence', experienced—presumably—by people when contemplating the greatness of their own man-made social structures. Now Turner realized that liminality and communitas were social facts that were not Durkheim's kind of social facts.

Victor Turner and I finally made the trip to America in February 1964. Soon after we arrived at Cornell Vic gave his paper at the Annual Meetings of the American Ethnological Society at Pittsburgh, in March 1964. It was published in *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, 1964.

Back in Britain the concept of *communitas* was received with puzzlement by Max Gluckman, Turner's old professor, and by other colleagues. They were concerned about the suitability of such material for anthropology. Even so, once he was at Cornell, Turner went ahead and strengthened the concept, especially in the later essays in *The Ritual Process* (1969), his major contribution to anthropology. Here he first reached the anthropological world with the study of *communitas*—this apparently non-anthropological phenomenon found in the liminal phases of rites of passage. (But *can* anything human be 'non-anthropological' or alien?) Furthermore he located it in what an entire nation might be going through when in a state of change, as in India.

Before we left for America we had already become Catholics. Turner published the book *Revelation and Divination* (1975) in America, a full volume as we have seen, with further discussions of the Chihamba ritual and also a section on divination. In these discussions his restrictions loosened and opened up. Now he interpreted the unnamed Ndembu demigod as a real presence that had come into the people's consciousness as a total whiteness, complete, beyond logic and partiality, an appearance of the divine unknowable. Again it was a matter of "*Diji mukishi*," as the medicine men said: "It is the spirit". Turner's argument held. This was an opening of one of the doors. His interpretation was the people's interpretation.

More closed areas in Turner's anthropological thinking gave way once the process had started. Now Turner was reading St. Augustine's *City of God* (2003 [AD 354–430]), on the two cities, the city of God and the city of man. For Victor Turner the city of man was the world, with its dominations, powers, structures, laws, force, violence, business cares, and family jealousies: a world of 'Power I'—'structure'. The city of God was the oneness that he had known through Meister Eckhart; it was the place where the last shall be first; it was *communitas*; community feeling beyond the alienation of the laborer from her work (what Karl Marx first thought of and lost sight of); strange ancestor figures; a milieu that is 'betwixt and between' the ordinary business world; of the world and yet not of it; and thus, the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't effect, what one might term 'Power II'—antistructure. It was what happened in the so-called 'liminal' or threshold period in a rite of passage and it was its own thing and had its own meaning in its own right.

Turner's mysticism was poking its head above the soil and opening into a sweet-smelling flower. Then he saw his Africa notes and went to work. It struck him that what he had been through in Chihamba showed an understanding of religion that was no longer just a matter of orrectic symbols representing a need in the unconscious, but had shown him the possibility of ritual as a serious, existential, effective entry into the world of spirit powers. He said that the particularities of the entry could not be reduced to laws, they flowered in the realm of antistructure, which realm seems to be an analogue of the 'other reality' of the shaman journey and its curing rituals. Turner wrote that the forked Ihamba pole, the shrine *chishinga*, sacred to the power of Wubinda, the spirit of ritual huntsmanship,

is regarded by Ndembu not so much as an object of cognition, a mere set of referents to known phenomena, but rather as a unitary power, conflating all the powers inherent in the activities, objects,

relationships, and ideas it represents. What Ndembu see in a chishing'a, made visible for them in its forked and awe-inspiring nakedness, is the slaughterous power of Wubinda itself. (Turner 1967: 298)

Symbols are thus more than ritual markers or representations or statements about the ritual world, but powers themselves, effectors, triggers of the 'set-aside' condition, opens through the barrier that encloses a secret. Furthermore, they are the god itself, that is, an actuality, a sacrament, an appearance, visible, as in the African ritual quoted above by Victor Turner. It should be noted that there is no ranking when one encounters sacredness; one kind of sacredness in one religion does not have preeminence over that in another, in spite of the overwhelming temptation that exists to claim it exclusively. Insofar as ranking develops, the sacredness *disappears* and fighting begins.

He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise
(William Blake, Erdman's edition, 1970: 461 [1757–1827])

In the course of time the Turner family moved from Cornell to Chicago and in 1977 Turner was appointed William R. Kenan Professor of Anthropology and Religion at the University of Virginia. Throughout, Vic did not at all like the 'high-up' positions into which people pushed him, and would try to break the formality of meetings by making awful puns and spreading communitas. He was writing with perception, yet many people, seeing his writings, mistook him for a dry academic scholar, a structuralist. But he taught what communitas was—it is there in print.

A number of researchers in anthropology became our buddies—one can only call them buddies, a bunch of people who were working on ritual and symbol and who often collaborated. We were all mutually fascinated by the rich and complex nature of the material each one of us had explored. The siblinghood of all of these was something beyond all natural siblinghood. Their names glow for me: Barbara Babcock 1984, Barbara Myerhoff 1974, Don Handelman 1977, Bruce Kapferer 1983, Roberto Da Matta 1991, John MacAloon 1981, Richard Schechner 1985, Eva Hunt 1976, Terence Turner, Urban Holmes 1976, Masao Yamaguchi, Edward Bruner (Turner and Bruner [eds] 1986), and the Institute of Religion in an Age of Science. Last of all I mention Roy Wagner 1986, truly visionary. He had cracked the impossible ritual code of the Daribi of Highland New Guinea (1986), telling us they are one of the most intelligent peoples on earth. All these personalities would meet in a bunch from time to time—the talking was electric. Once, when I wasn't there, lightning literally flew in and out of the window. The hugging was continuous, the numinous sayings magical. I remember occasions when we all hugged in a bunch. We rejoiced in the communitas while it was on. Many books were written. Many felt our excitement, but up to the 1980s the implications hardly registered at all in mainstream theory, which remained rationalistic and academic.

Looking, then, at the last half of the twentieth century we see that anthropology has gone through a number of stages since Turner's first training. In the early sixties Turner was setting up the proposition that rites of passage, that is, transition rituals, bore a peculiar characteristic, that of signally *not* giving expression to the social structure and the ranking

of persons in the economic and power structure, but breathing an odd and inverted message that he called 'liminality', from the word 'limen', a threshold. We saw that the betwixt-and-between nature of a rite of passage cracks the structures of society open and lets people through to what it really is to be human, and to the spiritual things that go with it. This notion was hardly out in the open before French structuralism hit it a fearful blow—apparently—claiming that the structures of the mind shaped all human thought—hard-wired structures such as binary discriminations—which later turned out to be located in structures only in the left side of the brain. Soon politics entered anthropology again with Foucault, a valiant fighter against hypocrisy, greed, the power of 'the State' and, ultimately, organized religion. This was, strictly, politics. Then came interpretive anthropology, a step nearer to the curtain that covers spiritual things, as though listening through it. This was anthropology studying how people interpret what was happening to them in their lives, listening to them. Interpretive anthropology was also itself its own search for the meaning of their cultural symbols: these two things, studying a search, and occupied in a search. Unfortunately the anthropologists' philosophy was positivist, they had no words, no notion of the people's own meanings; they could only interpret 'down'. This could have sidelined Turner's curious findings in liminality and the transformative power of ritual because it overemphasized the scholars' own interpretations, those of the best minds in the discipline, who had been delving into the meanings of ritual symbols in indecipherable academese, armed only with western psychology and using the various deep psychological structures they claimed to detect in the people's religious behaviour. This is the kind of claim implicit in interpretive anthropology that holds that academics know more than the indigenous peoples. The attitude has earned anthropology the dislike of almost all Native Americans and crippled the religions of many other cultures. Why is it that the peoples' own deepest recognition of the divine—in their several ways—is to be handled by people with no experience of the phenomenon, with such an air of authority and dominance over the field of social science?

However, among those interpretive anthropologists who were searching for the meaning of the symbols, some went further. These were the radical empiricists who for the sake of wholeness in their work needed to include 'what the natives see'. Victor Turner's work on the analysis of symbols guided them there because he listened to the exegetic level of meanings in a symbol, that is, the interpretation as the natives gave it.

At about this time, much was about to change. In 1980, before Victor Turner died, he co-chaired an important conference panel on the anthropology of experience at the American Anthropological Association annual meetings.¹ This turned the viewpoint of the anthropologists of religion around toward a much simpler issue. What does the anthropologist actually experience? Anything, there in the field? Oh, too much—has been the usual reply. We shouldn't try using *our* experience. Where would objectivity be then? To which Colin Turnbull in 1990 valiantly replied:

Victor Turner clearly recognized that if we are to understand total social phenomena, then something more than objective study is required. What is needed for this kind of fieldwork is a technique of participation that demands *total involvement* of our whole being. Indeed it is perhaps only when we truly and fully participate in this way that we find this essentially subjective approach to be in no way incompatible with the more conventional rational, objective, scientific approach. On the contrary, they complement each other and that complementarity is an absolute requirement if we are to come to any full understanding of the social process. It provides a wealth of data that could never be acquired by any other means. (Turnbull 1990: 50–51)

“The subjective approach is an absolute requirement if we are to come to any full understanding of the social process” (p. 51): the result has been that today many anthropological studies have appeared in which the authors frankly state they *were* emotionally involved in their people’s religions. This, of course, is not a dictum to be used by all, because great humanists and better anthropologists than ourselves have been content with a limited range of religious interest with no specialization of that kind. The new thirst, though, has been for ultimate and real participation with those who experience spirituality.

More and more researchers have been taking on the task of the anthropology of experience (Duncan Earle 2007, Tim Knab 2003, George Mentore 2007, Laura Scherberger 2005, Tenibac Harvey 2006, Bonnie Glass-Coffin, personal communication, January 2007, Barbara Tedlock 2005, Dennis Tedlock 1990, William Powers 1982, Jean-Guy Goulet 1994, H. Stephen Sharp 1996, the perspectivism of Michael Uzendoski and Vivieiros de Castro, Bruce Grindal 1983, Colin Turnbull 1990, Benetta Jules-Rosette 1976, Paul Stoller 1984, John McCall 1993, Benjamin Ray, personal communication 2005, Steven Friedson 1996, Roy Willis et al. 1999, Alma Gottlieb et al. 1998, Jennifer Nourse 1996, Larry Peters 1981, Robert Desjarlais 1992, Carol Laderman 1991, Roberta Culbertson 1995, Suchitra Samanta 1998, Maarit Forde, and others).² They have found that when they handle spirit events and experience them they are surprised and heart-warmed, for they find them curiously effective. So it is possible that we have got religion all wrong. The ordinary folk from whom these anthropologists are learning *are* dealing with spirit entities.

Curiously, at the selfsame AAA meeting in which Turner chaired the ‘experience’ panel he picked up a volume in the book exhibit entitled *The Spectrum of Ritual* edited by d’Aquili, Laughlin, and MacManus (1979), three anthropologists of the neuroscientist persuasion, who present articles revealing new work on the right side of the human brain, the so-called empty side. Researchers now know much more about the highly complex contents of the right side, knowledge which places its workings in a fascinating and honorable position vis-à-vis the left, the rational useful side with its speech and mathematics. The right side is the one that makes leaps and grasps ideas, that appreciates gestalts, and puts together odd and now obvious parts of the puzzle of human life, using what we now recognize as the right brain function (see Turner 1983, 1985). In fact, this side of the brain reveals a mysterious process like divining. When the random complexities of a problem can be jumbled and tossed, without any expectation of sense in them, then, somehow, where two or more ranges of them cross one another other, certain significances light up and a part of the brain recognizes these in a kind of flash, like a flash of light (Rowan Webster, November 8, 2007, personal communication). More curiously still, in my studies of shamanism after Turner’s death I found the same kind of faculty at work among Iñupiat shamans, and I recognize that I had been encountering the same thing in Africa earlier. The situation now is that the way is open for a full and respectful documentation of this faculty. I see this in studies that I find broadening around me, especially in healing, shamanism, and the study of consciousness (see E. Turner 2007). What the brain often becomes aware of and knows is what cannot be known within the limits of a rational sensorium. The sensorium involved is one that includes the sense of the spiritual: the logical is not enough.

The need for emotion is already recognized. In 1994 Antonio Damasio wrote *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. This book was brought to my attention by my son Robert Turner, a neuroscientist. Damasio, in neurology at the University of Iowa’s

College of Medicine, draws on his experiences with neurological patients affected by brain damage to show how the absence of emotion and feeling due to damage will break down rationality itself. Rationality cannot work properly without emotion. It cannot be 'pure'. Moreover, in 2007, Moll and Jordan Grafman, neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health, scanned the brains of volunteers while they were asked to decide whether to give a donation to charity or keep it for themselves. The scanning were showing that when the volunteers chose the generous act, thinking of others, they were using a primitive part of the brain that usually lights up in response to food or sex. Thus, altruism does not appear primarily to involve complex moral decisions suppressing lower selfish urges, it is part of the necessary base-line of the brain, hard-wired and pleasurable (Vedantam 2007).

Another finding concerns the power of music and its place in the brain. Anne J. Blood and Robert J. Zatorre (2001) describe how cerebral blood flow changes were measured in response to subject-selected music that elicited the highly pleasurable experience of 'shivers-down-the-spine' or 'chills'. Subjective reports of chills were accompanied by changes in heart rate and respiration, and in brain structures known to be active in response to stimuli such as food and sex. This finding links music, a gift closely related to spirituality, with biologically relevant, survival-related stimuli involved in pleasure and reward.

Most recently *The American Anthropologist* has given a good review of *Spiritual Transformation and Healing: Anthropological, Theological, Neuroscientific, and Clinical Perspectives*, edited by Joan D. Koss-Chioino (2006), a book on radical empathy and healing (Burke 2007). The review drew attention to the recent strong interest in the concepts of 'spirit' and 'spiritual transformation', defined in the book. Radical empathy, seen as a total, self-abandoning act of service to the other, is the magic that is essential for shamans and healers to accomplish their work. The review praised the importance of the book in the field of medical anthropology. Moreover, the book gives evidence that neuroscientific studies are supportive of the concept of spiritual transformation.³

Thus what we are seeing, what began with process anthropology, liminality, and the new experiential ethnographies and has even appeared in brain studies, is the growing liberation of anthropology from the shackles of its earlier cognocentrism. It is interesting that we might even call the whole of things: 'nature'—with the help of the perspectivists and the neurobiologists, extending our coverage of 'nature' to the kind of world the Inuit see, and the Sámi, the Khanti, Sakha, and many other peripheral peoples, then to the Indic philosophers, Taoism, right on to the inner spiritual life of the great religions. Many of us anthropologists are now with these, listening with our spiritual faculty, trying to understand that faculty itself and the vast and genuine findings in the field that have opened up in the 1900s and 2000s.

NOTES

¹ The panel papers were published as *The Anthropology of Experience* 1986, edited by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner.

² See a detailed and chronological coverage of this expansion in E. Turner 2006.

³ It may be said that even the long-term history of *communitas* and human rights, which shows an unflinching development from the times of ancient humanity (perhaps even before, existing as a similar sense in animals) may give hints of the physicality, the biology, of the spirit faculty.

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