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# Liminality Affect and Flesh

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Hugo Letiche<sup>1</sup>, Terrence Letiche and Jean-Luc Moriceau

## Abstract:

Liminality is an anthropological concept that has been influential in contemporary social studies. This article is written from an organisation culture and studies perspective wherein liminality has been seen: (i) as something that must be controlled, (ii) as a utopian call to creativity, and (iii) as a dystopian entrapment. Liminality has to do with whether the study of practice has been excessively cognitive whereby the human is reduced to concepts of control, efficiency and profit; and whereby the *soma* (Gr.) of the physical body is marginalised as mind, spirit, and ideation are prioritised. Thus, what of *sarx* (Gr.) or the flesh of existence (see Merleau-Ponty, Klossowski)? In this article we explore liminality evaluating its relationship to bodily-ness / bodyless-ness, affect and text. We start with a discussion of liminality as originated by the anthropologists van Gennep and Turner, and as pushed aside by Weick, but lionised as creativity by Kostera, and denounced as stagnation by Szokolczai. This is followed by an auto-ethnographic case study. The case study points to the *unheimisch*<sup>2</sup> of liminality which we examine via Pierre Klossowski's manifoldness. Realising that text about liminality and its embodiment easily becomes paradoxical (unembodied and affectless), we present a non-textual (i.e., not written) visual reaction to the case; again, in the spirit of Klossowski; and we conclude with reflections co-inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the physical affectivity of liminality.

**Keywords:** liminality; Arnold van Gennep; Pierre Klossowski; Monika Kostera; Victor Turner; *unheimisch*.

## Introduction

Starting with Karl Weick's interpretation of jazz (1998), organisation studies has understood imaginative creativity as consciousness and in effect as mind without body and as something that needs to be

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controlled (Hassard et al., 2000). Weick's 'process-thinking' is an activity of the mind. What is perceived, analysed and decided, is all in the mind; ideation is to be in control all the way down. Weick's 'mindfulness' assumes that everything relevant can be captured in consciousness. In his 'sense-making' (1995), there is no physicality; the goal is to predict, anticipate and control, i.e. the paradigm is one of mind-over-matter. The ambition is to shrink liminality and change as much as possible into thought.

What the anthropologists van Gennep and Turner understood as liminality is the zone of the 'betwixt and between', where there is a before and after that can be defined and stable, but a now that is indeterminant. The passage from childhood to adulthood, with initiation rites as the in between is exemplary. Rites of passage are meant to lead the person from one status to another. During such rites the person to be initiated exists without a clear social status or being. For Weick, not knowing where one is, what one should do, and what one's obligations and possibilities are; is an anathema. Weick blames 'not knowing' for causing disasters and even leading to death. Liminality for Weick is the blain to human existence that needs to be absolved before causing harm. Weick's attitude is representative of much of business studies. Ever since Taylor defined 'scientific management', it has been assumed that to make labouring bodies productive they need to be controlled by the 'mind' of management. Management theory is decidedly mentalist – business is all about planning, administering and controlling. The space between the one business plan or strategy and the next one is to be kept under control, to be as short as is possible, and to be disciplined. 'Improvisation', 'creativity', 'thinking-out-of-the-box' may all be lionised; but they are championed as ways of creating the next plateau of structure. One is not to stay in the in-between, but to emerge from it with superior governance or control. Liminality or improvisation may be fine as means of establishing more effective control; but is not to be valued in its own right. The current celebration of liminality as existentially valuable is not to be rhymed with business studies 'as usual', where it is assumed that existence is chaos, disorder and dangerous; and that order, organisation and purpose, need to be imposed on pandemonium before wreaks havoc.

Liminality as inspired by van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967, 1969, 1980) focuses on the social rites whereby community is created and confirmed. We need to distinguish between the process and the results. The process evokes echoes of things like Bakhtin's carnival: situations where social norms recede, experimentation is rife, and it is acceptable to play with roles (1984). But as with Bakhtin, the end result is to be the

(re-)assertion of social order and custom. Liminality is temporary and it leads to the reassertion of normativity. We see that contemporary Deleuzian scholars have seized upon the liminal as pure process and as a way to champion existential experimentation (Roberts, 2018; Broadhurst, 1999). For them, the zone of freedom from social restraint is what counts and the prioritisation of the reimposition of order is rejected. But liminality in van Gennep and Turner is about disorder as a prompt for the establishment of order. The lesson of liminal experience is that you cannot escape your social role and what it demands of you. Liminality forces you to be who you are in the social matrix; it is a process meant to make acceptance inevitable. The 'in-between' does not stand alone; it is a zone between two points of order. Making the uncontrolled ambiguity of the liminal experience into a 'truth' all of its own is a counter-measure to the anthropological theory.

Monika Kostera, a prominent CMS scholar, in her current work has been emphasising the role of the liminal as essential to imaginative creativity (2022). She has argued that sociability, awareness and organisation are all under attack by entropy. Liminality provides sources of what the critical social thinker Bernard Stiegler has called 'negentropy' (2018), or principles of energising needed to counter the downwards spiral of entropy in the Anthropocene. Kostera's 'imaginoscope' calls upon us to tap into our sources of imagination, fantasy and creativity, in order to (re-)assert living awareness. Liminality is understood as a zone of imaginative inventiveness and as the creative boundary-zone. Kostera's project aims to strengthen ways of being that are less restrictive and more phenomenally powerful. Openness to circumstance is her key issue. In her liminality, the neophyte is meant to experience something meaningful, memorable and exceptional. The 'rite of passage' is not 'everyday' or 'mundane'. Liminality disrupts assumptions and identities, opening the person to take on new awareness. Anthropological 'rites of passage' make use of this openness to close off one phase of existence and to define membership in another. In Kostera's thinking openness is valued for its lifegiving powers.

Kostera's liminality does not seem to require embodied 'rites of passage' but rather acts of imaginative consciousness. Thus, her liminality is not the realignment from one state of awareness or status of being to another; moving through the non-space of identitylessness before it emerges in a new gestalt (Roberts, 2018). When we look at the actual rites and rituals of liminality, as described by the anthropologists, we immediately see that they are embodied and are very physical. The contemporary call for change via liminal imaginative creativity, seems to

understate the role of the body. Kostera, for instance, calls upon us to re-imagine existence as if we could be child-like and could look at spaces around us through our (rediscovered) 'child's eyes' wherein everything is exciting and unexpected. We are asked to experience the amazement and fascination of childlike existence. Exploring old things in an attic, or revisiting a forest clearing as if it was magical, are fantasy-exercises. Learning to look and see afresh; to experience wonder and delight, indeed is liminal, in the sense that it does not belong to the ordered structures of adult thought and awareness. The call for renewed awareness is a call to leave commonplaces behind and to enter into another space of awareness than that of the quotidian slur. There is boundary passing here from unimaginative conformity to playful delight; but the goal is not to come out on the other side in a specific social or intellectual place.

In her 'imaginiscope' (2022), Kostera appeals to the child's perspective of wonder and being, hinting at emergence into another alternative, social space or identity. But the appeal to child-likeness is disputable. Is childish consciousness really so fresh, emotive and authentic as Kostera implies? Rites of passage in anthropology follow a temporal progression: from baby to child, youth to parent, aged to death. Kostera proposes a reversal from adult blaséness back to child-like wonder. Such reversed progression was characteristic of the neo-romanticism of the 'counter-culture' of the 1960's. One thinks of the tennis match, played by clowns and without a ball in Antonioni's film 'Blow-up'. An observing bystander is drawn into the 'game' when the imaginary ball lands at his feet. He picks up the non-existent 'object' and throws it back, into play. Via mime and play the observer is drawn into imaginary action, leaving the concretely real and entering into the playful imaginary. This is a famous scene in a film and not an example of common social practice. And where does it qua human identity ultimately lead to; namely, to the discovery of a murder. In 'Blow Up' leaving the substantive and entering into the imaginary is not innocent, nor does it define a passage to some desirable new state. There is indeed quite a bit of literature and film analysis that refers to liminality (Szokolczai, 2000; Downey et. al, 2016; Phillips, 2015). One can see novels, films, plays, et cetera as examples of liminal progression. But it is a question of into what existential state one is invited to enter.

The recent celebration of play and fantasy, such as in 'serious play', seems to lead to 'permanent liminality', which is really the absolute opposite from van Gennep and Turner (Schrage, 2000; Statler et. al; Kane 2004; Statler et al., 2011; Flemming, 2005; Roos et al., 2001). 'Permanent liminality' has been studied by Arpad Szokolczai whose

interpretation of the liminal is our antipode (2000, 2017). Szokolczai asserts 'that the individual subject, with self-management based on his/her desires and interest, has become the foundation of the modern world' (Szokolczai, 2000: 208). Individuation and subjectivation in personal identity is the triumphant norm. Liminality is conceived of as a means to the creation of the liberal individual 'Self'. Two assumptions to be defended here are rejected: (i) all 'being' starts with affect, and (ii) all relatedness entails the 'flesh of the world'.

Szokolczai's asserts that the episteme of the individualised self is crucial to the historically triumphant modern form of being. Within this episteme constant change and social dynamism are self-evident. In effect, 'liminality' is here understood, as a form of 'accelerationism' (Szokolczai, 2000, 2017). Social, political, economic and cultural being in contemporary modernism, supposedly influence one another in an ever-increasing drive to change. Products have ever shorter life-cycles; business strategies change ever more rapidly; means of communication are increasingly furtive; social identity is all the more temporary.

Szokolczai asserts that while anthropological liminality was a three-stage process, present day liminality is more a matter of societies getting stuck in one of the three phases and thereafter being unable to get out of it. Those locked into the first phase of disengagement are in constant denial of relatedness; they withdraw, keeping distance from Other and refuse change. We are supposedly each other's 'brothers' or 'sisters' – all together in being led into the liminal space of change; which we never achieve. The 'guide' or 'leader' is present and all-powerful; but there is no actual motion towards the imagined zone of change or creativity.

Those locked in the second phase of liminality are embedded in an ethos of constant change for change's sake. They do not have contact either with a 'where they are coming from' or with a 'where that they are going to'. The liminal space of the 'betwixt and between' just 'Is'; it has lost its borders. Existence as constant change is a roller coaster of simulated thrills, where nothing ever comes of all the activity. The phase is characterised by unlimited social enactment or role-playing; an endless 'as if' with no social relatedness or meaning. One's role is not to have a role, and to be doomed to play at roles leading to psychological exhaustion from the lack of attachment. The current society of 'burn-out' resembles permanent liminality locked into the second phase.

To be frozen in the third phase, is to have a past and no future. One has emerged from formative experience with a fixed role that allows for no further development or freedom. One is constantly 'on-stage' in the

sense of called upon to perform one's role without freedom of self, change or agency. Identity is petrified. A near total loss of feeling results; one is numb to Other, because one has no real ability to respond. The principle of affect – the human as that which is touched by Other and circumstance; is exhausted and repressed. Worse than 'burn out' this resembles schizophrenia, with all disjointed and not attached to Other, circumstance or events. In a society locked into such a stage, complot thinking, political violence and 'fake-news' are to be expected.

While there is much that seems sociologically relevant in Szakolczai's thought, he has turned liminality into a social-historical monster, imprisoning existence in a futureless rigidity. Szakolczai's 'permanent liminality' as a form of 'accelerationism' that exhausts the individual and the group, leading to a mass breakdown of relatedness, may well be accurate enough. The celebration of so-called 'creativity' for its own sake, without attention to how identity and self can be shared as a source of intra-relatedness, perverts the self into a closed-off monad incapable of ethical being. 'Permanent Liminality' indeed leads us to an ethic-less form of individuality wherein all sources of meaning are thwarted and exhausted.

The comparison between Weick, Kostera and Szakolczai shows us how the (i) rejection of liminality leads to excessive rationalism, (ii) how the lionising of the creative dimension to liminality may be too partial, and (iii) how the reifying of the phases of liminality imprisons the 'Self' in a despondent rigidity. To summarise:

Rational Control of Change	Karl Weick	Sense-Making
Creative Utopian Liminality	Monika Kostera	Imaginoscope
Dystopian Permanent Liminality	Arpad Szakolczai	Accelerationism

Liminality without shared social existence can produce fantasy or literary success; but it is not embodied, or socially relational. Other is imagined but is not an actant. We can take on a sort of Deleuzian position: 'I make ideas and thus I exist' – but this is a disembodied concept of existence. What if we demand that for there to be liminality there have to be concrete others, circumstances and events? What if we see liminality as the social enactment of identity and purposiveness? We propose to see liminality as concrete embodied social event(s) and not merely as ideation. Real minds and bodies in concrete circumstances, confronted by liminality, have to adjust, redefine themselves and find a strategy to survive. The pain and fear of liminal situations and experiences seems to

have disappeared from creativity and serious play literature. Openness is not really self-evidently a rewarding or pleasurable experience. Passage from one position of safety, through the unknown and forbidding, to an uncertain new circumstance, is not self-evidently something to choose for.

This article attends to the fundamentally disruptive quality of passing through liminal space. We will do that through an auto-biographical story, but also by visualising the extreme experience of liminality. Not by the rationalising or ‘sense-making’ of the liminal; but by the expressive visualisation of the passage through the threatening and untamed unknown, can we try to reflect the ‘power and terror’ of liminality. In this article we want to return liminality to what it most often is: risky, embodied, frightening and without any guaranteed end. The flight into liminality as innovation and creativity makes the dangerous seem tame; and promises order where guarantees really may be lacking. Liminality as bodily circumstance and not just idealisation, it is risky and fraught.

In Section One we will describe a case of liminal experience; in Section Two we reflect theoretically on liminality as experiential and in an art-based form; and in Section Three we Discuss and Reflect upon engagement with liminality. Thus, we begin with description, continue with visualisation and theory, and conclude with an attempt at partial closure. The article is about liminal rites of passage and their performative structure and it is intended that in its structure that we parallel its theme.

## **1. An Auto-Biographical / -Ethnographic Case of Liminality**

### *1.1 The Fire*

I was sitting twenty meters from where I am now sitting writing this text, it was the 25 August – a few moments after having drunk coffee with my wife, I heard the neighbour woman shouting from behind me.<sup>3</sup> I stood up, turned around and saw the flames. I ran to the road and joined the small gathering of neighbours who were excitedly gesturing; looking at the flames and talking uncontrollably. I shouted for my wife to come out of the kitchen and to join me. The flames were gushing up the granite walls of the cul-de-sac, just behind our house – in a couple of minutes a small fire literally became a wall of flames. The wind was moderate but strong enough to keep the fire moving away from us, further up the wall of the cul-de-sac, and onwards into the little valley up and beyond (Figure 1). One could hear the dry bushes taking flame and exploding



*Figure 1.* The fire on the hillside (Photograph Didier Jedlickza).

like firecrackers. The fire jumped from bush to bush almost magically – with the ground between the bushes smouldering and slowly burning. The chatter of the excited and nervous people seemed rather irrelevant; we really had nothing to say and no ability to do anything. Our garden hoses were too small and too far away from the flames to have any significance. We were beside the point – not really threatened but nonetheless afraid. The fire brigade had already been called. We just had to wait for a forest department jeep to arrive. Meanwhile, most of the village had gathered at the end of the road. Someone had a fire extinguisher; another person smothered some flames with a blanket as a few flames moved towards us and the village. The cul-de-sac and the valley above had changed into a flaming spectacle – the charred rests would form a visual scar for several years, but none of us at the time cared about that. We wondered where the fire had come from and if, indeed, we and the village were safe. For me, it was a repetition of two years before, when some children had set fire to some bushes in exactly the same spot. But that fire had stayed contained in the cul-de-sac. This fire was already moving onwards to the valley above. The first fire had amazed me – its power, unexpectedness and the brilliance of the firemen’s airplanes, which had put it out. This second fire was a repetition – I’d seen it before and I had an idea what would happen. Forest service jeeps would show up and protect us and the village with a mixture of water and chemicals (Figure 2). Then, the airplanes would arrive, and dump their mixture of water and chemicals on the fire. They’d dump their fire-fighting loads, loop over the village and head for the Lac de Salagou a few kilometres away. There they would fill their planes with water and return to fight the fire. The planes would come in so low that we’d all duck as if they could touch our heads. At first, one is amazed that the planes do not crush against the walls of the cul-de-sac, but they jump upwards after they’ve dumped their load and fly every time safely off.



*Figure 2.* The forest service jeeps (Photograph Didier Jedlickza).

The trick is amazing at first, but after a while one knows that the planes will survive. Tension alternates between being enthralled by the pilots' brilliance and being fearful of our own irrelevance. In our total powerlessness, we probably exaggerate their skills and we quickly will turn to looking for who is responsible for starting the fire. Who is to be scapegoat-ed for what has happened – who set the fire, and how should they be punished?

At 17:30 I was suddenly thrust into liminality. At home in Saint Saturnin I felt accepted and safe. Now, I was being led away with my wife in a police car to be incarcerated, separated from her and be held captive in the offices of the 'gendarmerie nationale' seven kilometres from our house for more than five hours. I was not allowed to travel in my own car, and had been ordered to sit in the backseat of the police car. I was wearing a scruffy polo shirt and Bermuda shorts; I was not allowed to change my clothes. The police seemed to find it very generous of them that they were not handcuffing me.

I suddenly felt erased from the village. The identity I had of myself as an accepted and valued member of a community, constructed over twenty-two years, was suddenly gone. Rather than being a 'good neighbour' I was suddenly forced into the nonspace ruled by the 'gendarmes'. The police station was a rather crummy nondescript prefab building. A place 'we'd' never come. None of the agents are from the Languedoc. Locals might have opinions, knowledge or roots in the region; so only outsiders are posted. Suddenly, I felt myself a non-person, below respect, no longer part of the village that I thought I had in a modest way become a part of.

At 19.53 the gendarme Antonio Albrizio began his questioning. His first statement to me was: 'We know you set the fire, so explain why you did it.' My answer amounted to: 'Have you gone mad?' Was this

an atypical pseudo-event or some sort of unexpected and bizarre initiation rite? I neither felt that I was altogether myself nor entirely not-myself. I was in a liminal space of uncertainty and perhaps change. This was liminality or in Latin 'threshold' (*limen*) and the state of being in-between. I was in-between freedom and imprisonment; in-between belonging and being respected, and being subjected to abjection – but why? I was not altogether myself, nor was I yet a criminal. This intermediate space was very uncomfortable. I was caught in a process of transition that I neither desired nor approved of, but over which I had no power. I did not believe that I either merited or deserved this situation. I was separated from my village, my wife, and in a way myself.

I had seen the village mayor Jean Claude Aussel talking to the police. I had visited him the day before; pleading with him to have the illegally dumped building materials in the cul-de-sac cleaned up. The builders had left a pile of straw, wood and cardboard, which was very inflammable, piled up in an ugly heap some 250 meters from our house. Aussel admitted that it was illegal, but said confidently: 'But it is already August and there has been no fire'. In July I had also asked him to take care of it, and he'd promised to do so. Two years before children had set a fire in exactly the same place. Summers are extremely dry and hot; there is a major danger of fire. But this is the south of France and you know that things do not necessarily get done.

Now I was in Gignac, accused of being an arsonist. The whole village including our house could have burned down. But luckily, the wind had blown away from the village and not towards it. A whole forest had burned; at one point the firemen had received a mobile telephone call from a woman somewhere in the fire zone who had lost her bearings. She was with her children. Nothing was ever heard of her again and no one afterwards knew who it had been. She must have escaped.

My liminality, following Victor Turner (1967), is to be seen as divided into three steps: separation, marginality and incorporation. Liminal experience is part and parcel of a boundary problem linked to the divide between the sacred and profane. The borders are impure – they are made up of both what-has-been and what-will-be, of purity and impurity, of order and disorder. My reversal entailed sudden non-belonging. I had been forced to enter this nonspace. I owned a house in the village, but suddenly I had no right to be in my house, or for that matter to be a member of the community, or to be in any space familiar to me. Yes, I had complained that there was a fire danger; but was it insane to think that I would want to prove my point by setting the fire

myself? The mayor had been lax, he had favoured his old mates (the builders who had dumped the garbage). Seemingly, he was out to define the communal and communing on his own terms.

Why did the aftermath of the fire terrify me? The gendarmes were annoying and stupid, but were they really threatening; and if so, exactly what did they threaten me with? Now that I know how the fire started, I am just as glad that the gendarmes had been 'off-sides' from the start. Once released we returned to the village. Within a quarter of an hour, I knew which children had accidentally set the fire – those of the man who had fought the flames with the blanket. But if the gendarmes knew this, the family would be accountable under civil law for the forest that had burned down and they did not have insurance to cover such a civil claim. No one, including myself, was going to tell the police what had really happened. The fire would remain a 'non-lieu' as far as we were all concerned. A 'non-lieu' is a legal procedure that has had to be abandoned and has remained unresolved; it is a non-place (Augé, 1995). This 'non-lieu' was something we all 'knew' but would not 'voice'. But the 'non-lieu' also operates on an unconscious level; that of the desires, passions and emotions that led us to keep quiet. The 'non-lieu' of the fire has become part of the unconsciousness of the village; part of the substrata of assumptions that defines the 'place'.

What was I so afraid of? For six weeks after the fire I felt myself *unheimisch* – unsettled in my relationship to 'place'. *Unheimisch* implies 'uprooted' or 'not at home'. It is a Dutch word adapted from the German 'unheimlich' (eerie) and 'heimisch' (native, domestic, [at] home), describing something as unpleasant, uncomfortable, uncanny, distracting, and in disarray. 'Unheimisch' does not exist in the German vocabulary; it is a word that has migrated from one language to another, possibly without ever having been at home in its first tongue.

Likewise, I had migrated to Saint Saturnin without ever becoming or intending to become French. Saint Saturnin is a village much of which dates from the Middle Ages – defined by narrow alleyways, ramparts, towers and fortifications, the Gothic church (constructed fifteenth – sixteenth centuries), and by the wine appellation contrôlée rouge. Lucianus (St Saturnin de Lucian) was the local Roman commander of a settlement, which existed on the same spot between the first and fourth century AD. St. Saturnin is picturesque, intimate, and for me special. I was accepted by a group of persons who met nightly on the terrace of the local inn (Le Pressoir) to drink glass(es) of wine, to joke and to chat. I was afraid that the myth would end; destroyed by the policemen, the mayor and the law; by fear, jealousy and pettiness. Why or how had I identified St Saturnin as a sort of 'home' or 'safe haven'? This was the

aporia to my (not-)belonging. My panic, sorrow and trauma of being arrested revealed the existence of the aporia.

### *1.2 After the Fire*

A fortnight later back in Holland I had dinner with a Dutch judge and his wife. The judge informed me that the French justice would never abandon such a charge of arson and that as foreigner that I had no chance of escaping the penalties. The potential impurity – the foreigner who complains about a fire danger – would not be accepted. Ritual purification was inevitable. The judge wanted to know if I had a good lawyer. He ‘knew’ that I would not get impartial justice in France and that the erasure of the impurity would turn out very badly for me.

My malaise was grounded in my need for affirmation, openness and warmth, and my fear was that ‘St Sat’ (as my wine drinking troupe of ‘lefties’ called it), as a mythic source of personal confirmation, was being destroyed right in front of me. When it is all said and done, St Sat is not really the mythic ‘safe haven’ I had storied it as. The feeling of belonging had originated with my ‘guides’; that is, the two men who had introduced me to the village and its ‘commons’: Jean-Noel Gaston and Didier Jedlickza. There was a hangar-like building in the village where in the 1950’s once a week, films were projected. The ‘film-man’ with his projector and screen rotated between the local villages. This was before television and was the biggest event of the week. Once television took over, the building stood empty and unused. Jean-Noel was a local boy who bought the building and converted it into a bar-restaurant. He was a product of the 1968 rebellion and a ‘gauchiste’. When I (with my family) arrived in the village, he had recently lost his wife to cancer. He had inherited a daughter from a prior relation of her’s and had a son from a prior relation of his. He was running a café-restaurant and trying as best he could to father the two adolescents. Following his political instincts, he was generous, socially engaged and was someone who was very ‘present’. Summers, around 23:00 a group of mainly leftists collected at the café to drink the local wine, and talk. Didier and Christine were part of that group; Christine’s sister and her husband were less frequent participants. They all came from Paris and were involved in professional training and social work. Their politics varied from communist to more anarchist leftism. It was wine and debate; I quickly joined in. They all loved ‘St Sat’ for its medieval beauty and together formed a lively and even passionate group of persons; with a Belgian therapist, the wife of a piano tuner, et cetera, often joining in. Quickly I could order our wine

and pay our bill at the end of the month; we were 'locals'. It may have been part of the zeitgeist, but the romantic love of the village was real enough; while many of the actual vigneronns actually were Front National voters.

When my son, then three to four years old, was hungry he used to wander into the village café-restaurant take bread out of the bread basket and wander on; everyone approved and found it normal. The old lady who sells her son's fruits and vegetables, always explained how to prepare them, but in such strong dialect that we never really understand what she said. Stories that sound typical of 'life in southern France' and are kitsch. The popularization of the French countryside has made such stories sound false. The assertions of sentimental acceptance and affective openness now easily ring false.

After another week or so, my sense of panic and humiliation passed; I realised I could take some action. I called a few Dutch friends and got an introduction to a Professor of criminal law at the Sorbonne, who assured me that the justice ministry officials at Montpellier were 'serious'. He promised to have a word with them the next time he was in Montpellier and thought that I would probably not ever hear anything more about the matter, as I had never been officially 'accused'. And so it happened. He never sent me a bill. The events were swallowed in the in-between – in a gap between free and imprisoned, feeling accepted and being an outcaste, balanced between safety and danger.

The fire and its aftermath projected me into a realm wherein the nightly wine drinking group had nothing to say. Suddenly 'my village' was dissolved by a mayor, out to save his own skin, and police officers who were fairly incompetent, and certainly not planning to treat me with any respect. Two days after the fire, the agents showed up unannounced at our house and demanded that I sign a document stating that they had the cloths with them that I had worn the evening of the fire, which they had seized that night. They wanted to send the clothes to a lab for testing. After a sleepless night, I went to the regional office (superior to their post) and made a statement that the cloths had been in the gendarmes' possession for 48 hours not sealed or identified, and that I did not trust that the clothing had not been tampered with.

Even though I eventually emerged relatively unscathed from the incarceration it marked the end of the wine drinking utopia. Jean-Noel, true to his politics, had never paid his taxes, which he got away with for some twenty years. Finally, the French state intervened and in effect forced him out of business; he retreated to selling pizzas from a pizza-truck some fifty kilometres away. Christine, Didier's wife, contracted some sort of multiple sclerosis and became an invalid. Didier's

career suffered from his care tasks for his sick wife and for his three adolescent sons. From how difficult his life had become and how much regret he had to undergo, he drank too much and died of a heart attack. Thus the 'guides' who had introduced me to a mythic village, which I had identified with, ultimately were brought to tragic ends.

## **2.0 Aftermaths of Liminality**

Understanding the fire as a liminal event, we see: (i) belonging; (ii) incarceration; and (iii) working through; preceded by the 'guided' process of: (i) arriving, (ii) joining, and (iii) belonging. The affects of *unheimisch* feelings of being threatened, out-of-place, estranged, deserted and vulnerable, are evident. But what did the 'I' persona really fear? We can try to convey the 'punctum' of the fire (Barthes, 1982); but how do we make contact with the embodied affects of the event? We can claim that affects of 'panic', 'disorientation', 'rejection' and 'fear' rained down on the 'I' persona. But the gap between the affects and concepts is enormous. Affects are directly physically present; ideation is not. As Pierre Klossowski has argued, reason and rational thought is of a totally different order from the realm of expressive experiencing (1997). If we say there was 'panic', we assume that there is a single something, called 'panic', that each of us recognizes and knows. But the assumed coherence of ideation does not match up with experience. When the 'I' tried to explain his attack of *unheimisch* feelings, he discovered for instance that the Dutch judge did not really 'understand' what he was talking about.

Affects do not reach expression unproblematically. The assumed univocity of discourse is really not justified. Klossowski goes so far as to claim that we are constantly dealing with simulacra or imaginative efforts to voice affect that are precarious, tendentious and unstable (1995, 2007). The creation of images of circumstance in our simulacra explains the constant flow of contents of consciousness but it does not assure communicability. There are no universal principles of rationality in the flow of simulacra; there is no principle of universality. To each circumstance, consciousness, and event its own simulacra.

The fire and the resulting reactions were affects where there is no certain unity between the event and the person, the person and the ideation, the ideation and the symbolization, the text and the reception by Other, or the Other and the original event. Powerful simulacra may make the chain of event, thought, communication and understanding, seem seamless, but they really are not. The production of simulacra is an irrational process driven by affect. Thought and text are products of

processes of metamorphosis invisible to consciousness. Liminality, as the passing through of a process of initiation from event, via aporia to thought; is a constant. It is when the process breaks down, or the simulacra does not self-evidently work, that we are confronted with the leap from affect to ideation as problematic, and it attracts our attention.

Kossowski's criticism is of 'the code of everyday signs' naively used to link experience to ideation, as well as affect to text (1969). It is a code that makes reality constant and predictable, rather than challenging and demanding. The crux is that the conditions for the possibility of the code and its production of ordered text, have no foundation; the realm of simulacra just 'is'. What is tendentious is that when affect, desire and 'jouissance' disappear in the rationality of ideation and text, that the simulacra are assumed to be 'real'. For instance, our field of organisation studies is entirely prejudiced towards seeing order and rational action. We can only with greatest of difficulty, within our field, acknowledge desire, passion, revulsion and anxiety; the conceptual cadre or instrument of expression with which the field operates, has the greatest difficulty both with direct bodily awareness and affect. In fact, if you take away the instrument of rationalizing, there is not much that remains.

What if, as Klossowski argues, there is no predetermined or limited identity or self (1995). What then becomes of the assumption of an economic and organisational order that precedes and grounds organisational order? Without the foreclosure of signification in a rational code, meaning is wide open, indeterminate and flexible. All communication becomes liminal in the sense that meaning-making has to be constantly negotiated, recreated and experienced. The assumptions of unity of command or of organisational identity suddenly are up-for-grabs. Rational sign systems, such as those of business strategy, are built on simulacra that can perhaps be socially enforced, but cannot be rationally grounded. The intensities of 'leadership' or 'entrepreneurship' are strong affects with the ability to command powerful simulacra; but there is only a will-to-power behind them. The pretence of a discursive rationally grounded normativity covers over the lack of any such foundations (1998).

The auto-biographical /auto- ethnographic case, presented in this article, entails the intensification of affect, at the cost of the dissolution of identity. What Klossowski makes clear is that we can only connect to direct affective existence by disengaging from thinking and experiencing, in rational predetermined patterns. The maximum intensification of affect comes at a cost to pre-assumed categories of identity. To return to Weick, Kostera and Szokolczai, now informed by the case and Klossowski's thought, we reaffirm: Weick has set out to preserve the

assumptions and systems of rationality at all costs; Kostera dedicates herself to simulacra creation whereby real contact with affect is effectuated but order is sacrificed to authenticity; and Szokolczai describes the dilemmas that occur when symbolization cannot be trusted and has become ineffective and the simulacra at hand are incommunicable and aphasic.

Meaning creation is a liminal process which we mostly only consciously encounter when and if it breaks down. For Klossowski, the priority is to experience the intensity of affects, because there is no 'master signifier' that can guarantee the rational code of order. We must embrace our experiences of affect – i.e. our 'phantasms' as they lead to the simulacra that make identity possible. The 'I' in the case has his phantasm of a place (St Sat.) culminating in a simulacrum of 'camaraderie' and 'friendship', which when shattered creates the new simulacra of *unheimisch* being. Klossowski teaches us that direct human affective existence cannot directly reach ideation and that the passage from the one to the other dimension is fraught and complex. Too often ideation or symbolization are allowed to dominate whereby life itself is sacrificed to rationalization. Bodily affect is the source to aliveness; we must not lose it.

Klossowski consistently enough did not limit himself to text creation or the encoding of ideation, but drew and painted in order to be closer to affect and its simulacra. Art works attempt to experience and work through the liminal (Stenner, 2017). Their 'flesh' is ocular but not per se linear or semiotic; art works can have a strong phenomenal relatedness to the observed and observer. We follow Klossowski's model and turn to making a visual intervention (Figures 3 and 4).

The artist's commentary:

When I paint, I enter a liminal space. I may start with an experience, observation or theme; but when I am actually painting, I abandon myself to the art-space and its processes. Otherwise, I error in producing an 'illustration', which is 'literary' and not sufficiently 'painterly'. For me, 'painterly' entails discovery, exploration and (re-)definition; the visualisation has an existence of its own. It is this independence and self-sufficiency of the art work that distinguishes it from mass-produced consumer goods. The painting 'lives'. In a successful painting, the viewer can sense the engagement, passion, feeling, affect and investigation. Fundamental qualities of affect go into making the painting and these can be felt when looking at it. Art comes from the liminal and it conveys liminality to those who engage genuinely in looking at it. For me, the liminal phase to art making is crucial. Visioning, as radical relationality and as an existential equality of affectivity, is an ethical starting point for understanding art as



*Figure 3.* Terrence Letiche, *Hand in Fire*, 2022.

shared accountability. Intra-related mutuality between seeing, being seen, and making something to be seen, is essential in art-work. Affect, engagement and response-ability are not to be partitioned. Liminality is a space of endeavour wherein I paint, and as I paint, I exclude no one; I engage in a zone of relatedness that attempts connectedness, awareness and acknowledgement, as broad and generous as is possible.

### **Commentary and Closure**

Acknowledging with Klossowski affect versus conceptualisation, simulacra versus rationality, does not mean we choose for dualism. To explore the relatedness rather than the separation of these dimensions we turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. When Merleau-Ponty was writing *L'œil et l'esprit* (1964), he was spending a few months in Southern France not far from St Sat. Was it the place that gave him his insights? Merleau-Ponty claimed



*Figure 4. Terrence Letiche, Fire Hill, 2022.*

that the painter puts us in the presence of what science lacks: an immediate relationship to the world and to space (Flynn et. al, 2009). We are always already immersed in the flesh of the world, from our body and in a place where the world and ourselves converge. The painter feels and draws on the relationships in a language of colours. The gestures animated by the painter's body say something other than the words and formulas of science.

When Weick (1993) comments on the famous Mann Gulsh fire disaster, the sudden sighting of the flames created according to his text, a 'cosmology episode' characterised by the sudden loss of meaning. This seems to reflect only part of experience and misses precisely the significance of liminality. Painting does not convey some single meaning; the colours on the canvas resonate with affects of experience. It is not only the mountainside that caught fire, threatening the village, it is the flesh of a world that burned. Such an episode is not only experienced with one's mind; it is experienced in one's flesh, with the uncanny affects of liminality. The flesh of the world entered an episode of

uncertainty and transformation; a pulsion towards something new and unknown.

St Sat for the 'I' persona was the 'flesh of the world' of inter-relatedness. The flesh concept is identified by Merleau-Ponty with the example of the hands: when the right-hand grasps and feels the left-hand, the right-hand is the phenomenal 'subject' and the left-hand is the 'object' (Dillon, 1988). But at the next moment, the left-hand can be perceived as being grasped by the right-hand, and the 'subject' / 'object' relationship reversed (1968). Merleau-Ponty's principle of 'flesh' entails the continual reversibility of identity. Embodied subjectivity is 'both/and'; it is phenomenal as well as mindful. We see here acceptance of the Klossowski's oppositions between affect and text, and phantasm and simulacra, coming together in activity. In Merleau-Ponty there is a radical acceptance of the reversibility of positions, identities and aspects.

What in the case was violently and suddenly shaken, even devoured by the fire, was what made St Sat for the 'I' persona into a living interface of feeling and being felt. This is in line with van Gennepe's and Turner's liminality; where liminality affects all participants, as well as the place itself; with no return possible to a previous state of being. Experiencing the fire as an example of the 'flesh of the world' brings the *sarx* of relatedness and circumstance to the fore; adding to the experience of 'place'.

When liminality is converted into consciousness or defined in terms of creative awareness, it loses its radical sharing of relatedness, circumstance and being-to-Others. In Turner and van Gennepe, liminality entails crossing of boundaries of self and other, of see-er and seen. Contrastingly, liminality as 'Selfness' leads to the absence of the flesh. The me and not-me cease to be equidistance to circumstance and consciousness. Flesh is ambiguous: divergent and co-given; it is separation-in-relation. A certain being was destroyed by the incarceration. A simulacrum of relatedness was replaced by one of panic and unease; the relatedness never recovered. Separation was made evident; it had to be seen and it was impossible later to un-see it. The right and left hands of comparisons and differences, similarities and continuities, separated. The separation was not instant; but the 'St Sat' simulacra no longer worked as a social 'container'. 'St Sat' had represented shared circumstances or flesh.

The liminal is not really about child-like wonder, adult play or creative action; it is relational intertwining and chiasm (Letiche, 2009). Chiasm is relatedness where the 'I' sees the 'Other' knowing that the 'Other' sees the 'I'; and where affects of relational awareness succeed in

producing lived simulacra. Liminality is all about relatedness as actual; that is, flesh of the world (Evans & Lawler, 2000).

The fire did not just bring a simulacrum of embodiment into liminality; it disjointed Self and Other, simulacra and rationality, affect and phantasm. It dramatically changed site and sight, which became uncanny, uncertain and uneasy. Affect was transformed (see Beyes & Steyaert, 2013). This is the uncanny that in visual art can be made manifest. The written text, with its fairly strict rationalising grammar(s) is performatively less able to handle liminality. After the fire, the site was no longer liveable as it had been. The familiar had become foreign. Old rituals stopped; the persons continued their lives without what had linked them. Liminality brought the end to a habitat and to a shared simulacrum; it was a sudden expulsion into another and disturbing elsewhere.

At the end of the liminal, with stages delineated by Turner (1980) of breach, crisis and redress, the process ends with reintegration. But there is the alternative of the *socios* (L) breaking apart. The relatedness of the 'flesh of world' can crumbled. If the left hand and the right hand go their own way, coordination is lost. The fire burned the flesh and expelled the 'I' to the other side of the limen; to an elsewhere where place and world disjointed.

However attractive the middle phase of liminality of creativity, change and imagination may seem; it is not clear that it can be made socially sustainable. Granted, too much of our intellectual culture is repressive, rationalistic and scientific. Business and organisation studies, in particular, lionise rationalisation, the denial of affect and emotion, and prunk with protocols of accountability. Indeed, bodily alienation hates 'soft' ideas and feelings. The call to encourage a more embodied, lived, and fantasy-rich approach, is an appropriate reaction to what is wrong. But it is 'a logical reaction' and that is paradoxical. Emphasis is just too much on the consciousness of affect; and Klossowski makes it clear that contact with affect entails phantasma and simulacra.

Liminality as understood by van Gennep and Turner contains a crucial insight. Processes of change and development, including increased sensitivity to imaginative awareness, are very important; but they need grounding in the complexity of the chiasm or duality of the 'flesh of the world'. It is far too typical of the modern society, that the St Sat simulacra was crushed by the incarceration. The 'flesh of the world' entails real, basic, bodily relatedness, and living existence. It is the mirroring of Self and Other as the left and right hands of existence, in its variability and complexity. Is the take-away, that 'St Sat' failed; or is it that it happened at all, even if only briefly?

**Notes**

1. Corresponding author h.letiche@uvh.nl.
2. Dutch for the eeriness of being unsettled from not being able to feel at home; term is explained further along in the text.
3. The authorial 'I' in this text is a product of auto-ethnographic research informed by all three authors.

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