

**The Demands of Liminality:  
Community, Communitas, and Reflexivity**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research. It contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Richard Beavitt

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## **Abstract**

An enduring aspect of any notion of community is a sense of being connected to others. It is the experience of *communitas* - in that sense of the word employed by Buber and later developed by Victor Turner - that brings a particular emphasis and persistence to this aspect of 'belonging' associated with community. The disparity between the hopeful ideas placed around community and the often much more chaotic and conflict ridden experience of actually being with others, suggests that *communitas* needs our consideration. This is particularly so if our involvement with community is to be driven not by a sense of nostalgia or utopian desire, but instead by intention to develop some agency amidst the gradients of power that surround and run through it.

*Communitas* presents us with a particularly unfettered form of relationship, but one that occurs primarily in liminal environments. Commonly, liminal space is considered to be a moment in time between one state and another, a condition of 'betwixt and between'. However, this observation avoids acknowledging that the function of liminal space is to provide participants with a reflexive environment, one removed from the normal parameters of social structures. Such a reflexive space, consciously entered and exited, can provide both community members and the community itself with the opportunity to more creatively engage with the world and its own contradictions and conflicts.

Being able to move across the threshold into, and out of, liminal space, places considerable demands on those involved. My argument in this thesis, that liminality and *communitas* are integral to the functioning of community, leads to the proposal that negotiating the transition in and out of liminal environments requires community members to exercise a degree of individual reflective practice. Schön's concept of reflection-in-

action is proposed as a suitable meta-skill for operating in this way. Reflection-in-action bears an affinity with the sense of flow engendered by *communitas*; it also implies a readiness both to reframe questions and respond in an improvisational manner. These two gestures are required in order to meet the demands of liminality.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Being involved in community is both rewarding and demanding. Despite any image of unity that the rhetoric of community attempts to create, the actual experience of being and working with others challenges us to be ourselves and yet move beyond our own self interest. Community also presents us with the constancy of change and a realisation that all environments are to varying degrees indeterminate; there are always factors that we either fail to comprehend or which refuse simple boundaries of classification. This thesis considers one aspect of how we might prepare ourselves to engage with the idea of community.

A sense of belonging, of being connected in some way to others, is always part of our experience of community. This may arise due to a variety of factors - ties of family and kin, being part of a still practised cultural tradition, an association with place, a circumstance of events, shared goals, or acting together to satisfy a particular demand. Amidst all these forms of relationship there will be moments which provide an emotional, affective sense of connection, one which exists outside of any of the other reasons for being together.

Such moments have been described as exhibiting *communitas*. *Communitas* ‘occurs through the readiness of people - perhaps from necessity - to rid themselves of the concern for status and dependence on structures, and see their fellows as they are’(Turner 2012, 1); it is a moment when ‘no system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*’ (Buber 1953, 11). Community has this experience of *communitas* at its heart; it is implicated in the moments when the symbol of community is alluded to and (re)created by a group of people. *Communitas* is by its very nature ephemeral, elusive. It is not something which can be simply produced on demand.

The experience of *communitas* is involved in that part of the symbol of community that is an expression of unity. Inevitably this leads to the creation of a border, a line that marks 'us' from 'them'. It can also lead to the assumption that a unity of beliefs is held amongst individuals within the border. Both expressions of unity can become problematic and in the end may potentially legitimise acts of violence and exclusion. However, *communitas* is not community. *Communitas* is a relationship that allows us to see each other and our place in the world unencumbered by our history.

As such it is frequently associated with the essentially reflexive environment of liminality. Liminality is one response to the indeterminacy of the world; its function is to create an environment where meaning can be investigated, renewed, or new understandings fashioned. This is a place where difference can be examined, held and seen in a new light. The combination of *communitas* and liminality encourages responses which are improvisatory in nature, committed to the present but not totally divorced from what has been learnt before.

Modernity has eschewed this type of response in favour of those based in more rational estimations of the world. This has its basis in Enlightenment thought and has led to responses to indeterminacy that are rule based, assume that important variables can be measured and seek pre-ordained outcomes. Such responses become inoperable when indeterminacy presents a set of conditions that are complex beyond the ability of rules, measurement, and hoped for outcomes to describe them.

Community frequently presents just such a set of conditions as well as being the very place where *communitas* is likely to be found. How can those of us steeped in the 'knowing' of a rationalist culture learn to operate in such liminal spaces? How can we move usefully from this way of framing the world that assumes that complexity can be contained? This thesis proposes that the acquisition of skills based in a reflective practice,

leads to an increased ability to respond to the reflexive demands of liminality. This prepares us for the possibility of an improvisatory act; one that challenges us to question, in the moment, what we already know, to not retreat from what we do not yet know, and to be courageous enough to trust our own creativity in the face of these two facts.

***Thesis Structure:***

In the first chapter of this thesis I investigate the representation of *communitas* as it has appeared in our modern conceptions of community. This involves a brief consideration of the etymology of community and a reappraisal of the familiar and persistent dichotomy of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. Within the sociology of community there have been other instances where the affective relationship of *communitas* has been noted but differently named. This leads to a consideration of Durkheim's *collective effervescence* and Schmalenbach's notion of the *Bund*.

The second part of the first chapter considers how the sense of belonging and connection experienced in *communitas* are part of the *symbol* of community. Cohen's (1985) work is an important starting point for any consideration of community as a symbol. I refer to his earlier ideas on boundary, as well as his later revision to these ideas, to argue that the resilience of a community requires some form of symbolic work by its members. The chapter concludes with a reference to Brent's (2004) argument that although community may function as a symbol of unrealisable desire, it remains a useful *illusion* around which we may organise ourselves.

The second chapter of the thesis explores the nature of *communitas* and liminality in more detail, with particular attention given to the influence provided by the work of Victor Turner. Turner's original work dealt with a community's management of conflict. To describe conflict in a way which was not constrained by a view that saw every aspect of

a society as part of a persistent, essentially unchanging structure, Turner invented a new term; *social drama*. This concept is revisited to provide a context for Turner's thought on liminality.

I follow Turner's suggestion that liminality has a function and is a form of ritual activity. This ritual activity is characterised by both *communitas* and an emphasis upon reflexivity, of the kind that echoes the symbolic activity that I have discussed earlier in chapter one. I detail Turner's arrival at a modern form of liminality, which he called the *liminoid*. Turner noted that the individual experience of *communitas* in *liminoid* events bore striking similarities to Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow; this latter concept I am taking to be a description of skilful engagement with a task. It is this observation that allows me to connect all my prior discussion on establishing the presence, nature and function of *communitas* to the question that I want to address in this thesis: *How does an individual respond constructively to the demands that liminality and communitas places upon him or her?*

In the final chapter I answer this question by proposing that Schön's (1983; 1987) discussion on the nature of reflective practice provides important indications as to how one may deal with situations characterised by indeterminacy, of which liminal space is one example. The normalisation of Schön's notion of reflective practice tended to turn it into a technology of its own. This tendency has removed the subtlety that I am reading into his core notion of reflection-in-action, which has characteristics that intimately link it with the ideas of flow and reflexivity that I have already established as distinctive to *communitas* and liminality.

I provide a synopsis of Schön's argument concerning the limits that 'technical rationality' imposes upon skilful practice. I explore the conclusions that his earlier work with Argyris on 'theories of action' provide on the importance of a reflexive attitude. I

consider that these conclusions are implicit in Schön's main statement on reflective practice and need to be considered if a more nuanced understanding of reflection-in-action is to be arrived at. Given this reading of reflection-in-action I state why I consider it an apt skill with which to meet the demands of liminality; it also provides me with some potential responses to the more typical critiques that Schön's work on reflective practice has attracted.

## CHAPTER 1: *Communitas* or Community?

...what sort of phenomenon *is* community. What ‘something’ is it that does not appear to have a concrete existence, but which nevertheless has important effects on people’s lives, an idea that disappoints as it does not live up to its promise, but an idea which still has such a strong purchase on people’s thoughts and actions.

(Brent 2004, 216)

Community is frequently considered to have avoided any attempts to define it in a generalised way (Bauman 2001; Cohen 1985; Delanty 2003; Day 2006). It remains, however, an idea that continues to hold our attention, an idea which, as Brent indicates above, ‘has important effects on people’s lives’. Whether we recognise ourselves as part of a community or not, few would regard the opportunity to ‘belong’ with immediate distaste. Bauman recognises that this primary response is because the word community has a ‘feel’, such that it ‘... is always a good thing ... a “warm” place, a cosy and comfortable place’(2001, 1).

Whilst the reality of community includes more than this affective response to an idea, this response would appear to be key to what keeps us returning to attempts to make community happen. I am proposing that the ‘embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations’(Amit 2002, 16) which constitute the experience of community, include moments of *communitas*. It is these moments of *communitas* which regenerate the symbology of community, in that they invite us to move, if only temporarily, away from what divides us towards an appreciation of our shared humanity.

This first section of Chapter 1 reviews how sociology has recognised this affective aspect of community. Since Tonnies’ notion of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, sociology has often viewed community from a structural perspective, one that has frequently seen community in a dichotomous relationship with society. This approach to community has

been overlaid with a historical perspective, suggesting that community was something only available in a preindustrial era. However, there has also been a recognition that it is the emotional bond between community members that distinguishes community from other forms of sociation.

The second section of this chapter considers community from a cultural perspective, where the creation of meaning, by both individuals and the group, is the focus of enquiry. It is the affective aspect of human relations that creates, beyond the usual constraints of sociality - that ability to 'get along together' despite differences that may arise between people (Shields 1992, 106) - the possibility for shared meaning making. Moving beyond these constraints to experience others in ways which encourage a shared and authentic process of meaning making is a persistent gesture that I suggest lies at the heart of our 'desire for community'(Brent 2004).

Specifically, it is the wanting to belong, to be connected to others, that provides the thread that runs through this chapter. I am proposing that it is our experience of *communitas*, that form of human relationship which is 'direct, egalitarian, spontaneous and based on choice rather than social similarity'(Kamau 2002, 24), that is the source of this desire to belong. *Communitas* is not exclusive to community per se, but rather is associated with any cultural activity where we come together with others to create and explore meaning. The intensity of the experience of *communitas* both allows and encourages us to invest in such activity.

### ***Communitas: The Etymological Root of Community***

In this thesis I emphasise that *communitas* describes a *particular* form of human relationship. Normally, the word is used to make a distinction between the general relationships considered to exist in community and those differently based relationships

that form society. *Communitas* is involved in the etymology of community. This indicates how the *symbol* of community can become confused with the *experience* of *communitas*, ignoring the role that the relationship of *communitas* plays in the functioning of community. Esposito's philosophical discussion of the link between *communitas* and community proposes that *communitas* is in the first instance concerned with what is common, what 'belongs to more than one' (2010, 3).

Esposito's etymological reading is that *munus* indicates how *communitas* has within it the implication of an obligation to enter into a relationship founded upon reciprocal gift giving. This obligation, according to Esposito, is the something in common that makes for community; an obligation to give, without, at the same time, holding an expectation of anything in return. This gesture is also portrayed as the creation of a debt for the receiver of the gift, even to the point of putting oneself at the mercy of others. Esposito's argument implies the loss of the normal modern socialised self, one which comes near to the reading of *communitas* and liminality that I discuss later in this thesis, where the individual 'take[s] leave of himself, to alter himself.' (2010, 7)

This form of relationship bears an affinity with the idea of a gift economy proposed by Marcel Mauss (Mauss 2002). In significant difference from other forms of economy, gift economies suggests that the real value in an exchange is not upon the accruing of gain – material or otherwise – but instead those qualities of reciprocal relationship which both support and are developed *through* the exchange. Of course, this form of reciprocity is not without its dangers and can hence be vulnerable to abuse.

It is precisely this observation that Esposito suggests the whole modern project rests upon. (2010, 28). If we are capable of sharing an obligation to give, we are also capable of taking away, even to the point of removing somebody else's life. This Hobbesian view of human nature leads to different demands being emphasised around social relationships in



modernity, demands that are framed in the form of rational contracts. A relationship driven by contracts places limits upon the obligatory reciprocity of community; we are then 'immunised' (Esposito 2010, 6) to any dangers inherent in its broader, more open exchange.

This is a subtle and complex reading of the etymological link that community has with *communitas*. It gives a beginning to the argument of this thesis that shows how the idea of community refers to a form of relationship which is outside the supposed rational norms of society. We commonly take society to be a series of relationships founded upon our meetings with others; others who we do not know and with whom we may be unwise to enter into immediate levels of mutual reciprocity. On the other hand, community often summons an idea of a way of being with others that differs from this, one that both escapes the rationalisms of contract and yet *at the same time* remains safe.

### ***Belonging:***

Two of the most typical indicators of a traditional understanding of community have been:

- a) a stable association with place combined with
- b) the possibility of frequent face to face contact.

In late modernity these identifiers of community would no longer seem to be as present as once imagined. As Cohen suggests, although there may be something shared by members of a group, the people involved may not necessarily see themselves as 'a community' nor may that involvement imply a multilayered, complex connection between the individuals. It is more likely that 'people are associated with each other now only for limited purposes or in limited respects.'(2002, 167-168). The affective element of this process creates a sense of belonging and attachment that encourages us to attempt

community, something that while ‘not always comfortable ... is rarely trivial’(Amit 2002, 17).

Delanty (2003, 4) identifies belonging as the potential unifying theme that runs through all of the various forms and perspectives on community that he considers. Similarly, Ife considers the element of belonging as an important aspect of our understanding of community membership:

With membership goes a *feeling of belonging*, and this seems to be an important part of the construction of community. Often when people talk about the need for community they will cite the importance of this feeling of belonging; of a place where one is recognised and included. (italics added 2010, 11)

But, as Brent’s quote at the beginning of this chapter shows, ‘belonging’ is not enough to ameliorate the tensions and disappointments of community, nor is it sufficient to make it function. Belonging to a community offers us the promise of a safe haven from the threats and uncertainties of modernity. Bauman (2001, 4-5) recognises this dynamic and aptly describes community as an economy that has freedom and security as its main forms of currency.

What one gains in security by being a member of a community one loses in the freedom to be an individual, since being a community member inevitably requires a level of conformity to shared norms. In practice such norms are rarely as adaptable to our individuality as we imagine them to be. Our unwillingness to be present to any conflict that subsequently arises leads us towards perceived freedoms ‘outside’ community, those which in late modernity are managed, no matter how tenuously, by contract and rationality. Later, the uncertainties presented by our new ‘freedoms’ begin to make us dream of community once again, and so it goes...

The second chapter of this thesis explores how *communitas* is implicated in attempting to resolve conflict in community, but for now it is enough to note this unresolvable dilemma between security and freedom (Bauman 2001, 5). In this earlier part of the chapter I have introduced the idea of *communitas*, the continued presence of belonging as part of our conceptions of community, and marked the tension between freedom and security. This latter reflects the familiar dichotomy of *gemeinschaft*/community and *gesellschaft*/society.

### ***Community and Society: An Enduring Dichotomy***

The notion that community and society are connected by a sense of historical progression is a persistent one. This leads to a somewhat romanticised assessment of community that frames it as either something lost, or recoverable, or as some utopia towards which we can aspire (Delanty 2003, 19-20). It has also underpinned a set of aligned oppositional categories; rural/urban, village/metropolis, affective/rational based relationships, to the point that community is considered intrinsically good whereas society represents some form of decay.

Tönnies' "*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*" (2002, orig.edition 1887) is often quoted as the starting point for this antithesis between community and society. However, Tönnies' work had a more psychological basis, its 'principle objective ... the description and explanation of the ways human wills enter into relationships of mutual affirmation.' (Luschen and Stone 1977, 18). He proposed two forms of will, each representing 'an inherent whole which unites in itself a multiplicity of feelings, instincts and desires' (Tönnies 2002, 103); natural will is 'an innate, unified, motivating force' whereas rational will 'emerges from an experience and is produced by deliberation' (Luschen and Stone 1977, 23).

Tönnies argued that natural will creates a pattern of relationships which are ‘*premised upon* and foster “consensus” ... a reciprocal, binding sentiment... which constitutes ... the peculiar will of a *Gemeinschaft*’ (Tönnies in Luschen and Stone 1977, 19 italics added). He contended that this form of relationship occurs in various settings but is more likely found in smaller, localised groupings of people that are bound together through ties of kinship and tradition. These parameters provide the group with a pre-existing set of arrangements and understandings which are accepted as known. Thus, for Tönnies, community or *gemeinschaft*, the product of natural will, is a social arrangement conceived as ‘real and organic’(Delanty 2003, 32).

In contrast rational will leads to an arrangement which is ‘imaginary and mechanical’(Tönnies 2002, 33). There is no ‘a priori and necessarily existing unity ... [where] no actions ... performed by the individual, take place on behalf of those united with him’(Tönnies 2002, 65). This sphere of relationships has no inherent reciprocity, it is not one characterised by the kind of gift exchange alluded to in the earlier discussion of *communitas*. This is Tönnies’ *gesellschaft* or society, an existence made of purely instrumental relationships bounded in rational, contractual exchange.

Tönnies did not intend these polarities be representations of actual, empirical forms of human association; they were more akin to Weber’s notion of ideal types (Nisbet 1994, 76). Nor was Tönnies setting out to create a dichotomy; he considered that the two forms of will, and their eventual expression in actions and social structures, would always occur together in some proportion or another. This perspective has a dialectical character where the relationship between the two is ‘dynamic and fluctuating’(Day 2006, 5). However, Tönnies was unable to exclude a bias in his text that captured a growing romantic sentiment; one that wanted a ‘return to an earlier stage in the development of societies

where life was simpler and appeared to possess all those desirable qualities that are missed in the present'(Elias 1974, xi)

There are several implications from this perspective that, for the purpose of my thesis, I want to draw attention to. Firstly, Tonnies' inability to avoid identifying community as not only a product of a particular 'natural will' but also with empirical notions from his own experience, has almost indelibly connected community to structural images of a small, localised group of people who represent a 'traditional' way of life, and who are blessed with both an innate mutual understanding and a continuous involvement in benevolent, reciprocal action.

Secondly, his opening statement regarding an intent to only consider 'relationships of mutual affirmation' ignores the inevitable presence of conflict which is part and parcel of any human group. Thus the notion of community often (mis)read from his work is ridden through with an emotional sense of unity and harmony. This is a potent vision which continues to nourish the sense of loss that attaches itself to community, as well as influencing any versions of community we may now attempt. These two influential ideas about community are important to identify because a prevailing sense of both innate mutual understanding and harmony in relationship are very similar to the *experience* of *communitas*. As I explore later in chapter two, this is problematic because *communitas* is a process not a structure; an ephemeral condition of human relationship, not a permanent one. *Communitas* is not community.

A century after Tonnies, the romanticised notion that community somehow represents a safe, secure haven from the demands of later modernity, and that it is a relatively harmonious undertaking, continues to have some considerable currency. It is used rhetorically almost everywhere to sell everything from new housing projects to neo-

liberal government health policy. What we are being invited to invest in believing is a *feeling* of community, not its complex reality.

### ***Schmalenbach: Bund/Communion***

Schmalenbach (1977, orig. 1922) wrote a response to Tönnies which focused on differentiating any given conditions for community - be that family, place, tradition - from its affective emotional elements: reciprocity, a sense of emotional connection, a shared 'understood' unity. Although he was sympathetic to Tönnies' overall approach and contribution, in the final analysis he recognised Tönnies' romantic bias with regard to community as a 'thought born of sentiment'(Luschen and Stone 1977, 25). His proposal was that there is a separate form of sociation, the *Bund*, which has as its basis the 'emotional experiences' (Schmalenbach 1977, 83) of its members.

Schmalenbach states that a community includes a combination of two factors that ensure it differs markedly from that of a *Bund*, or communion. Firstly in community there will be a shared recognition of some set of 'natural, objective conditions'(Schmalenbach 1977, 74); these have already been noted but extend beyond family, locality, custom (in the sense of a shared tradition) to include in Schmalenbach's view 'all social operating conditions or facts'(75). This echoes Cohen's observation that people may now come together for a limited set of reasons and purposes, and in that moment can be regarded as a community.

Secondly, Schmalenbach says that there is an unconscious awareness of the fact that you *are* a member of a community. An individual is involved in a structure of sociation - a 'form (realized in innumerable different ways) in which individuals grow together into a unity and within which their interests are realized (Simmel in Deflem 2003, 70). However the *basis* for this is not a feeling. As Schmalenbach indicates:

As little as the community owes its psychic reality or even its basis to feelings of whatever kind, its members will experience feelings, especially feelings related to community, such as tender affection for their fellows or for the community as such, joy in the knowledge that they belong, or pride. *But the community owes neither its reality nor its basis to these feelings.* (1977, 83 italics added)

Communion, by contrast, does arise out of the emotional connection arising between individuals. It is:

an elective form of sociation, in which the main characteristics are that it is small scale, spatially proximate and maintained through the affectual solidarity its members have for one another in pursuit of a particular set of shared beliefs...provid[ing] a sense of fusion ... a wholly conscious phenomena derived from mutual sentiment and feeling... [that is] inherently unstable... (Hetherington 1994, 2 - 9)

Schmalenbach considered that his category of communion should be added to Tönnies' dialectic of community and society, but not in a linear historical fashion; more that each represented a form of sociation that could transform into one of the others. This provides a 'more cyclical view of change than a unilinear one' (Hetherington 1994, 8).

Schmalenbach's essay is prescient in describing the conditions of postmodernity, what he calls the 'late period' (Schmalenbach 1977, 122). The conscious, elective decision to join with others in a group, a process involved in forming our identity, connects the idea of the *Bund* with more contemporary forms of group activity. Hetherington notes a common thread between the 'intense experience of *communitas*' and Maffesoli's notion that the basis of social solidarity in post-modernity may be found in new affectively orientated groupings. Durkheim similarly recognised affective forms of experience as being a significant influence on social structure and this thesis now addresses this aspect of Durkheim's thinking.

### ***Durkheim: Collective Effervescence***

Durkheim's two forms of mechanical and organic solidarity stand in a loose equivalence with *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* respectively. However, he considered that these two forms of sociation could exist side by side. Durkheim criticised Tönnies for failing to recognise the 'very real forms of community that came with modernity' (Delanty 2003, 37). Durkheim's view on the historical movement from 'community' to modern 'society' is not one of decay; he is interested in answering the question of how we are to find new forms of sociation amidst modernity that are neither based on bonds of tradition nor only contained by contract. He believed that new ways of remaking of community were necessary for the well being of modern society (Nisbet 1994, 85). For Durkheim, communal ways of being together tempered and informed our response to the logics of individualism and rationality.

Collective conscience was the name he gave to 'society's shared values and moral beliefs whose existence ... makes social life possible'(Van Krieken 2006, 391). Aligned with this notion was that of collective representations, which were the various cultural forms that a society uses to make 'real' its collective conscience - myths, art, song, stories, and which would now include other forms of media: TV, film, theatre, books. He thought that one of the places that such representations were created was during what he called moments of collective effervescence. Collective effervescence is closely connected to Durkheim's investigation of the role of ritual in communal life, something shared by Turner's concept of liminality.

Seligman provides an interesting reframing of ritual in (post)modernity, one which sees it as:

...an action that is repeated, that, in the correct times or circumstances, is done again and again. In that it is repeated it is also formalized. While different rituals are open to different



degrees of interpretation, none is totally open-ended...Most participants in rituals do so without a *deep* understanding of their meaning. (italic added 2010, 9)

Seligman uses common gestures of greeting and courteous verbal exchange as examples of ritual. This could include the shared actions a group performs to begin a meeting, celebrate a successful venture, or to come together on a regular basis. This understanding also includes more obvious ritual moments around birth, death and the remembering of significant events in a group's history.

In an article that draws attention to the similarities between Durkheim's collective effervescence and Turner's *communitas*, Olaveson states that Durkheim 'referred to a broad range of phenomena' when considering collective effervescence (2001, 100) but typically it is a situation where:

The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. (Olaveson 2001, 99)

This describes a heightened affective relationship between group members akin to the earlier description of the Bund in this thesis. Although Durkheim focussed on more overt forms of ritual involved with explorations of the sacred as a setting for collective effervescence, he also envisaged it to include other forms of group activity, where 'the incidence, intensity and scope of collective effervescence varies according to the relationships and activities characteristic of [the]social group[s]'(Shilling C. and Mellor 1998, 197).

There are two characteristics of collective effervescence which are important to this thesis. Firstly, Durkheim considered that collective effervescence described those moments of affectual connection that were 'the birth of the social force' (Shilling 1997). This resonates with my later exploration of Turner's perspective on liminality, which he

considered to be the ‘experiential matrix’ (1980, 158) of human social activity. Collective effervescence has ‘the potential to substitute the world immediately available to our perceptions for another, moral world in which people can interact on the basis of shared understandings’ (Durkheim in Shilling 2008, 215).

This description of collective effervescence is important because it allows a distinction to be made between liminality and *communitas*. This will be explored in more detail in chapter two but for now it is sufficient to point out that liminality is one thing and *communitas* another. A liminal ‘world’ may substitute itself for that more frequently inhabited. Individuals in this new ‘world’ may relate to one in ways that Turner and Buber have called *communitas*, but the ‘moral’ order this creates may have little immediate transferability to the ‘real’ world that has been momentarily left and to which the liminal participants must inevitably return.

It must be noted that this ‘moral world’ is not implicitly a benign one. Collective effervescence can just as easily take the form of a Nazi mass rally of the Second World War as it can be part of what led more recently to the reinvigoration of democracy marked by the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in Europe (Shilling 2008, 223 - 224). This ambivalent function of liminality is often not considered and yet it encapsulates the problem of ‘community’ well; the social world outside of the close affinities found in liminal spaces requires a much more complex understanding of the truly ‘moral’ effects of our actions. This marks the difference between affective relationships based on states of ‘*communitas*’ with those more multilayered relationships in ‘community’.

The second aspect of collective effervescence is its involvement in the creation of symbolic representations of a group’s purpose and meaning. This is, as Olaveson points out, a recognition of its ‘*inherently creative nature*’(original italics 2001, 101). Humans’ ability to use symbols to communicate meaning to each other is what sets us apart from

other creatures (Shilling 1997, 198). It is the involvement of *communitas* in both the creation of the *symbol of community* and also its role as part of what constitutes the potential *reflexive* function of liminal space that I want to draw attention to, as well as differentiate, in this thesis.

This first section of chapter one has reviewed a dominant theme within sociology of an historicised dichotomy between community and society. It has located this dichotomy in a common interpretation of Tönnies' classic work "Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft" A reappraisal of Tönnies suggests a slightly different interpretation, one that sees *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* as two forms of sociation that coexist. This perspective creates the possibility of understanding community and society as having an interdependent relationship.

Schmalenbach and Durkheim identified affective based group relationships as forms of sociation distinct from ideas of either community or society. I consider that their respective notions of *bund*/communion and 'collective effervescence' are describing something very similar to the experience of *communitas* and liminality. Tönnies' continually influential dichotomy has subsumed the affective basis for communion/collective effervescence within his bias for 'traditional' ideas of community. This has made problematic differentiating the *experience* of *communitas* from the *structure* of community.

### ***Borders and Symbols: Cohen***

...they do not talk about it but they do imagine it and refer to it as something outside their selves. It is something on which they look, supposing it to be the same thing on which other people similar to themselves look, and generally are untroubled by the suspicion that they may all be seeing different things. (Cohen 2000, 165)

The earlier section of this chapter has considered community from the perspective of social structure, and how the notion of *communitas* has appeared amidst this view. Another way of appreciating the role of *communitas* is to make a different enquiry into the nature of community; to see it as ‘symbolically constructed, a system of values, norms and moral codes which provides a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members’ (Hamilton 1985, 9). This focus now is on the *process* of making meaning by the group.

Cohen’s text “*The Symbolic Construction of Community*” (1985) has been similar to Tonnies’ in the degree of influence it has held. His book centred not on the definition, but on the *use* of the word community; something which he considered to indicate that members of a community

- a) have something in common with each other, which
  - b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other ... groups
- (Cohen 1985, 12).

This apparently simple observation led him to emphasise the role of a boundary in any understanding of community. Groups recognise ‘sameness’ within the boundary but also ‘difference’ beyond it. Although Cohen’s original discussion of boundary goes beyond the topic of this thesis, (and in addition has received later revision by him (2000, 146; 2002)) the recognition of a boundary around a shared sense of belonging, which must then necessarily be involved in some way with the exclusion of others, remains important. That such a boundary may not have a material reality but be found instead only in the minds of group members implies that any boundary is in large part formed symbolically (Cohen 1985, 12 - 13).

In addition to the concept of symbolic boundary formation, Cohen explored how the symbolic nature of the *word* ‘community’ creates a categorical boundary that allows it

to be marked out from other forms of sociation. Cohen points out that the word/symbol 'community' shares with other words such as '... justice, goodness... love, peace' the difficulty of achieving a precise meaning (1985, 15) but suggests that it is in just such imprecision that the power and durability of community as a symbol lies. Under these conditions the symbolic nature of community is one that we can all share but to which we can also attribute our own, different meanings.

This inherent ambiguity in the symbol of community means that any sense of belonging or boundary formation involved in our experience of community will be a shifting and contested project amongst its members. In this way the nature of the *symbol*, 'community', encourages and demands its continual reproduction by community members. It is this process of making meaning, and resolving contested meaning, in which I think *communitas* plays a part.

### ***Communitas and Symbolic Activity:***

Despite Cohen's revision of the relative importance of boundary formation in the creation of a sense of community, some of his earlier observations on boundary are still useful. One aspect of community already noted is its association with the idea of unity. Cohen suggests that such unity is in fact 'a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may *vary* considerably amongst its members' (1985, 20 italics added). Thus the boundary is not one that should indicate homogeneity but instead a container of difference(s). One of the functions of *communitas* and liminality is to permit these different meanings to be (re)negotiated in ways that allow the shared symbol of community to remain viable.

I consider this to be an essential revision of the symbol of community, one that contains a perspective often lost amidst more popular and rhetorical uses of the word. The

definition of the symbolic boundary becomes more subtle at this point. Seen from the outside, its 'public face' portrays a relatively simple description of a unified whole. However, from the inside, its 'private face' reflects back to its members all the varieties of meaning derived from their experience of life together in that community. Cohen's (1985, 74 - 77) argument is that it is a community's ability to continually work with the symbols that create this internal view of their boundary which keeps its culture resilient.

The various demands that a community faces in adapting to change, arising from either external forces or internal differences, necessarily involves individuals being able to 'resolve the contradictions between their beliefs and actuality'(Cohen 1985, 92). He goes on to note that at this juncture it is ritual that provides a mechanism for resolution. Seligman proposes that one of the functions of ritual is to create a subjunctive moment, '... a shared 'could be' (or sometimes a 'what if )...' (2010, 11). Such moments allow us to share and explore, symbolically, both contradictions and conflict as well as to generate possible solutions to them. *Communitas* is involved in creating a temporary affinity with others that is the ground for such ritual explorations. However, once again, the experience of *communitas* is *not* community.

Cohen reads Turner's *communitas* as the 'stripping away of all those social impedimenta which would otherwise divide and distinguish' members of a group (Cohen 1985, 55). However, Cohen also considers that this levelling process implies that all members involved in ritual space leave it with identical meanings of the process. My understanding, following Turner, is that the affinity created by *communitas enables* the process of individuals' involvement in redefining the community's symbols, rather than limiting the meanings that they each take away from such a process.

This is much more akin to Cohen's own illustration of the Whalsay 'spree' (1985, 94 - 96). The 'spree' is a party that moves from house to house and happens throughout the

year following major communal events; individuals make a journey both literally through their community and metaphorically, as 'auld' stories are retold and embroidered. This is clearly part of the ritual process being described by Turner since individuals are taken 'beyond the social confines of their day to day lives'(Cohen 1985, 96). Cohen considered it an example of how a continuity of ritual form accommodates a change in the nature of a community.

In Whalsay a cultural shift brought about by external economic pressure had left old structures and roles very much altered. This meant that individuals had to develop new understandings of their role in the community. It would seem to me that *communitas* and liminality function here not to create homogeneity of understanding but to allow new, different meanings to be accommodated alongside each other in the face of changed circumstances.

Cohen's approach looks inward at communities, not outwards towards other elements of society, in order 'to get closer to what he regards as the fundamental human experiences at the heart of community, and the way in which they take on meaning for those concerned'(Day 2006, 158). His interest is in how particular communities create their own sense of belonging, not in identifying generalities about communities per se. Cohen's focus upon symbolic activity, the reworking of individual meanings in shared ritual events, is the first point I take from his work in support of my thesis.

Cohen's later revision to his argument extended the involvement of symbolic processes with notions of boundary to also include a focus on a community's 'core meaning, institution, occupation, and/or activity'(Gray 2002, 41). The second point I take from Cohen is that while a boundary may signify wholeness and unity it will at the same time contain different meanings held by individual members. This perspective argues against simplistic notions of community harmony and homogeneity. Combined, these two

ideas from Cohen suggest that it is symbolic activity that makes a community resilient; it allows differences to be woven together within a shared sense of belonging.

In the preceding parts of this chapter I have covered some of the complexity surrounding community. Firstly, I viewed it as a structural entity in some kind of relationship with the broader idea of society, unravelled a misplaced dichotomy between the two, and at the same time identified some prior recognition of other forms of group relationship that are affectively based. Secondly, I viewed the process of community not primarily as a structural entity but more as something which was fundamentally a symbolic construction in the minds of community members. Essentially this demonstrated that community is a ‘highly active construction ... [achieved] in endlessly creative ways’(Day 2006, 159). *Communitas* plays its part in this process as an enabling condition for different meanings to be managed, examined and reflected upon in ritual space.

### ***Community as a Useful Illusion:***

Brent proposes, given the complexity surrounding community, that we approach it similarly to the way Foucault considered power. He suggested that we not worry about the problem of its ‘central spirit’, but instead look at ‘where it installs itself and produces its real effects’ (Foucault in Brent 2004, 220). *Communitas* is one of the real effects of community. It is involved in the creation of what Brent calls the illusion of community (Brent 2009, 205). The intense affective relationship of *communitas* influences our symbolic idea of community, and also enables the possibilities for creative response to change and conflict that can occur in liminal, ritual spaces.

Brent indicates that a common argument for community being an illusion is that it represents a retreat from the realities of the world. It is a form of sociation that is too ‘static’ to be viable amidst the ‘fluid’ realities of post modernity, within which



globalization and individualization play no small part, functioning as ‘totalizing forces that undermine all other forms of social organization.’(2004, 214 - 216). One response to casting community as a negative illusion is that it then acts as ‘destructive gemeinschaft’, an emotionally based relationship which can never lead to broader social action, one which has no real intention to engage with the world (Sennett 1976, 239).

Sennett’s criticisms are aimed at emotionally based associations with a ‘very low level of interaction between its members’(1976, 238). He contends that this leads to a particularly unbalanced version of Cohen’s observation on the importance of symbolic boundary formation, where the lack of any real relationship between community members focuses the symbolic activity upon definitions of the ‘other’ i.e.: who belongs and who does not. Sennett is describing a situation where individuals buy into the illusion of community without being involved in any real symbolic work with each other. When this latter work is led instead by the agendas of the state it can lead to the horrors of genocide, sectarian violence and witch-hunts, that have been the calling card of imagined national ‘communities’ throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Brent (2004, 214) does not avoid the presence of conflict or the divisions arising out of boundary construction in community. Nor does he discount this activity as part of what is done to provide a sense of belonging for community members. However, he does also remind us that this is not a reason to treat the idea of community as a mere *delusion*; people *do* still come together amidst the difficulties presented to them and identify this process as community:

Community is the continually reproduced desire to overcome the adversity of social life, and it is community as desire rather than community as social object which commands engagement. This desire manifests itself in a number of contradictory ways, and leads to no unified form of relationships or direction of social action. (Brent 2004, 221)

Thus, rather than the illusion of community being negative, he argues that it has an important role to play in motivating us to meet this ‘desire’ for accord, mutuality and cohesive action. Pursuing the illusion of community is akin to the kind of symbolic activity that I am proposing. For Brent this action of myth making and storytelling about ourselves, which ‘with all its creative energy, is a major part of social construction’ is equally as valid or ‘real’ as actions arising out of an instrumental rationality (2004, 216).

He also notes that those moments of community action arising from the pursuit of the illusion of community occur ‘around intense moments of excitement and mobilization...[and the] amount of energy and emotion this action involves can only be sustained for short periods of time’(2004, 220). This description bears a strong resemblance to the instances of liminality and *communitas* noted earlier in this thesis. What I am adding to Brent’s observations concerning the illusion – the symbol – of community is that the experience of *communitas* nourishes the illusion.

The remembered affective intensity of *communitas* that arises from moments of shared activity later supports the illusion that we can, despite our difference and difficulties, act together in a mutually supportive way. I am alluding here to the broad interpretation of ritual that I introduced earlier, and by implication the notion of any shared activity having a symbolic component. In this way an overt example would be a ‘vision planning’ meeting, but the kind of activity I have in mind could equally be a community celebration, a regular weekend ‘weed eradication’ get together, or an ongoing involvement in an oral history project. As Brent notes, ‘The idea of a pre-existing community is only an illusory (if useful) foundation *for their actions*. It is through action that a community (new, changed, temporary) is created’ (2004, 220 italics added).

This perspective challenges the notion of community as an organic entity that just somehow is *there* in some particular time and place. This powerful *symbol* of community

does not bear out in reality; there is nothing ‘natural’ about community, nothing preordained or static. Community is contested, contains difference, and is required to adapt and change to the environment in which it finds itself. Thus the ‘illusion’ only functions if it is continually altered, tempered and reviewed in the light of experience. Otherwise, as Day remarks, ‘approaching community as if it is only symbolic or ‘imagined’ risks losing sight of the objective grounding of meanings in actual social relations’ (2006, 179).

### ***Chapter Summary:***

The desire for community arises out of the needs of the people involved, but they are all in that moment, in some way, responding to a symbolic notion of community. This first chapter suggests that the experience of *communitas* occurs in processes of sociation, and that it is then involved in the (re)creation of this symbol of ‘community’. It is this process of discovering shared meaning that is ‘natural’; while *communitas* facilitates us in this endeavour the affective state it represents is not in itself community. *Communitas* helps us to sustain the tension that arises around our differences for long enough that we can share in a collective imagining of a future different from the present.

The challenge is to make this imaginative act real in ways which allow us to respect and value our differences rather than risk demonising each other because of them. Bauman’s proposition that *if* there is to be any community of individuals in post-modernity then it must be one ‘woven together from sharing and mutual care’ (2001, 150) resonates with Brent’s summing up of the implications of pursuing any illusion of community:

Community’s main import is the way it affects the relationships and lives of the people taking part, and the relationships they have with other people and social forces. Community may lack tangible substance, but it possesses a gravitational pull, a magnetic existence that creates real effects – at its best, social relationships of mutual care and responsibility (2004, 221).

## CHAPTER 2: Liminality: Reflexivity and Communitas

Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates, models, or paradigms which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality ... [as well as] man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than (mere cognitive) classifications, since they incite men to action as well as thought. (Turner 1982b, 52)

The premise of the previous chapter, that the experience of belonging is central to our notion of community, moves community from a structural object to something created through relationships that arise out of shared cultural activity. This chapter explores in more detail one aspect of that relationship - communitas. Additionally, it examines the part communitas plays in facilitating the reflexive function of those liminal spaces that are part of community life. Communitas and reflexivity are two considerations that are central to Victor Turner's notion of liminality, and an exposition of his ideas shape the main body of this chapter.

Turner created the notion of a 'social drama' to describe the process of conflict arising in a community and the ensuing search for a possible resolution. He came to see, paradoxically, that the sense of unity generated by communitas occurred during the redressive stage of a social drama. His early research identified ritual as a necessary part of this stage. In this context, the aim of ritual is to bring about a shift in individual or social consciousness, required if the resolution of conflict is to be obtained. He argued that there was a dialectic between such liminal, reflexive environments and the more structured moments of group life. In this way ritual activity was a creative environment, one that could keep the group's culture resilient and responsive to any demands it may face.

The latter part of this chapter opens up a connection between the experience of communitas and that of 'flow' states as described by Csikszentmihalyi. Turner himself

noted this possible connection, but for the purposes of this thesis my interest is somewhat different in that my final chapter addresses the question, “How might one negotiate the demands of liminality?” My answer has to do with the nature of skill and improvisation, and my identification of the alignment between flow and *communitas* provides a link between Turner’s ideas and the more practical considerations that I consider in the final chapter.

The first section of this chapter provides a background to Turner’s reappraisal of his earlier structuralist views, which led to what he called a *processual* approach. A processual analysis made room for a dialectic between, on the one hand, activity characterised by *communitas* and liminality, and on the other, activity seen as having the ‘jural-political character of (social) structure’ (Turner 1982b, 47).

### ***A Processual Perspective: Culture & Structure***

Turner’s (1957) doctoral thesis focussed on how conflict arose and was managed in Ndembu society. Initially he approached his data with the idea that it would, on closer examination, reveal an underlying social system that remained largely constant. This was the prevailing structuralist view, originating in Durkheim, held in the anthropology department during Turner’s time at Manchester. Turner described structuralism as, ‘the notion of a superorganic arrangement of parts or positions that continues, with modifications more or less gradual, with time’ (1979, 126). He found himself increasingly at odds with the role assigned to conflict within this structuralist perspective; Ndembu cultural activity occurring around conflict was not only functioning to maintain social structure.

Turner came to understand that the conflict and change he witnessed were not always, as he puts it, ‘*immanent* in the structure of Ndembu society’. It was the structuralist

metaphor of a natural, organic, 'given', social system that Turner was finding inadequate to describe his experience. Turner began to frame change not only as a result of a cyclical or repetitive structure revealing itself over time, but something equally as likely to result from the persistent interactions between people. As he says, 'I then began to perceive a form in the social process of time. This form was essentially *dramatic*. My metaphor and model here was an human aesthetic form, a product of *culture* not of nature' (1974, 32).

Turner credits the Polish expatriate sociologist Florian Znaniecki with providing him with the distinction between the 'natural' and 'cultural' systems that he was now drawing. He summarises this aspect of Znaniecki's work in this way:

Natural systems ... are objectively given and exist independently of the experience of men. Cultural systems, on the contrary, depend not only for their meaning but also for their existence upon the participation of conscious, volitional human agents and upon men's continuing and potentially changing relations with one another (Turner 1974, 32).

Turner attempts to capture the relationship between culture and structure by describing society as essentially a 'flow'. Humans can only make sense of this 'flow' retrospectively, when the outcomes of myriad interactions based upon a similar broad array of meanings become clear. This is structure; something constructed *atemporally*, out of time. Attempts to impose this structure onto the flow of time, at a later *temporal* moment, can only be 'tentative'. Tentative, since in society seen as a flow of human interactions, 'there are always alternative goals and alternative means of attaining them' (Turner 1974, 37). This is another way of describing *indeterminacy*, something I return to later in this, and the following, chapter.

Turner was compelled to create a new term - *social drama* - to more accurately describe this interaction between culture and structure as he saw it working around moments of conflict. Social drama was designed to 'transgress the static framework of

classical structuralism to reveal “social structure in action” (Deflem 1991, 4). Turner came to see that an integral part of any social drama was ritual, and that liminality is an essential characteristic of ritual directed at meaning making. It is in this realm that (re)creation of meaning comes to the fore and it is here that *communitas* occurs.

### ***Social Drama: The Process of Conflict***

Turner introduced his doctoral thesis as ‘an analysis of structural form... interwoven with detailed situations of crisis’ (1957, xvii). He states how the concept of social drama is used throughout the book as his ‘principal unit of description’ to ‘look beneath the surface of social regularities into the hidden contradictions and conflicts in the social system’ (1957, xvii). Social drama proved an enduring model for Turner (1974, 1976, 1980) and as he later argued, he considered it to be, ‘...a well-nigh universal processual form and [one that] represents a perpetual challenge to all aspirations to perfection in social and political organisation’ (1980, 152)

Social dramas have four stages.

#### a) The Breach

This is marked by a public action or gesture which transgresses a norm-governed relationship between persons or groups. It is ‘signalized by the public, overt breach or deliberate non-fulfillment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties’ (Turner 1974, 38).

#### b) Crisis

In the period of time after the initial breach there is an escalation of the events. It is ‘one of those turning points or moments of danger and suspense, when the true state of affairs is revealed’ (Turner 1974, 38). What also becomes apparent is not only the degree of pre-existing conflict or factional split but also the ‘less

plastic, more durable, but nevertheless gradually changing basic social structure, made up of relations which are constant and consistent' (Turner 1957, 91).

c) Redress

In order to slow the development of crisis and its effects, a range of measures are brought into play by prominent members of the group. Turner suggests that this may take various forms depending upon the context and the actors involved, 'personal advice and informal arbitration... formal juridical and legal machinery...the performance of public ritual' (1957, 96).

Turner considers that whatever measures are invoked, they result in 'an increase in what one might call social or plural *reflexivity*, the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand and then act on itself' (1980, 156). This element of reflexivity is central to my thesis, both in regard to the nature of liminality and what may be considered useful action in this realm.

d) Reintegration/Recognition of schism

The final stage of the social drama is the reintegration of the group, albeit potentially in a different form. Alternatively there may be a recognition that this situation is something beyond immediate repair, in which case it is likely that there will be 'a legitimisation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties (Turner 1976, 109).

In his invention of the term social drama Turner moves away from the classic concerns of structure; his emphasis is now upon the *process* of events as having a causal effect. This way of framing the process of human interactions during conflict has at its centre the redressive stage, a moment capable of generating new ideas. In turn these ideas



indicate actions capable of eliciting change in the norms of social structure. Turner considered social drama to be:

the experiential matrix from which many genres of cultural performance, beginning with redressive ritual and juridical procedures and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated... it is our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed (1980, 158).

There would appear to be few documented examples of community process which explicitly describe activity in this way, aside from those which focus on the ritual activity of indigenous cultures. One study which does look at this in a modern context is Lewis' (1980) description of the involvement of ritual in attempts to regenerate a small Israeli town (pop. 3500), which he calls 'Sharonia'.

#### ***An Example: Yonaida***

Lewis describes Sharonia as a population who lived against a 'backdrop of scepticism, mistrust and political tension' (1980, 192 - 194). This state of affairs had developed as a result of people having no real say in determining access to state government resources, whilst being largely dependent upon them. As a consequence, a publically funded proposal for a community centre, intended to be a focus for after school activities for children, was met with a negative reaction. The conflict that had arisen between the inhabitants of Sharonia and the representatives of distant government bodies corresponds to the first two stages of a social drama. The internalisation of this conflict by the locals was demonstrated by their atypical lack of enthusiasm for engaging in a public response to Israel's national Independence Day celebrations.

In consequence, a day-long cultural event, 'Yonaida', (Lewis 1980, 195), was proposed for the Independence Day celebrations of the year in which the research took place. Its purpose was to revitalise a sense of community and connect this sentiment to the proposal for the new community centre. A whole new set of relationships and

conversations were initiated around the demands that arose to set Yonaida up; this was the first step in a series of cultural activities that eventuated in a successful twenty four hour event:

Following the concert, two hundred young adults and teenagers participated in a bonfire where food was cooked and served and songs were sung until half past three in the morning. *Nearly all of the activists associated with the ad hoc committee joined in this event. More than at any other moment, a group feeling pervaded this occasion...* ... From noon until three o'clock, over five hundred persons of all ages participated in the carnival and sport activities ... In the late afternoon, two hundred persons watched the football match between local teams. This was followed by a short, rather chaotic awards ceremony. The "Yoniada" had run its course (Lewis 1980, 196 italics added).

The success of this event challenged the negative perceptions of what was possible in connection with publically funded projects in Sharonia. This shift in the *symbolic* understanding of the community by its members eventually lead to the mobilisation required to turn the community centre into a reality. The experience of the activists, as noted in the description of Yoniada above, was one of *communitas*. Their experience led to 'the creation of social frameworks through activation and mobilization of human sentiment and purpose' (Lewis 1980, 198).

Lewis makes clear that although there were other structural factors involved, they would not have come into play without the shift in group consciousness shaped by the ritual event. In this way the Yonaida functioned as the public ritual of the redressive stage of Turner's social drama. The sense of belonging described by Lewis is the *communitas* to which this thesis refers, and without it there would have been no continuing intent to grapple with the problems surrounding the development of the community centre. This brief review of a community case study describes the influence of public ritual in the reimagining of a community's idea of itself.

I have used this earlier section of the chapter to describe how Turner argued for the importance of cultural activity as a mechanism through which a social group deals with conflict. The constraints of his doctoral thesis led Turner to state that ‘ritual is the social mechanism by which the group is purged of the anarchic and disruptive impulses which threaten its crucial norms and values’(1957, 124). His thinking however had already moved beyond this structuralist view; his creation of social drama and the emphasis on a processual analysis were attempts to articulate this.

### ***Liminality: Van Gennep & Rites of Passage***

Turner observed that in instances where a shared disquiet with structural constraints occurred, ritual created the opportunity to measure the ideals of the group against the nature of concrete divisions that had arisen in the group’s structure. When the nature of the breach was not so much an issue of norm transgression as one brought about by shared disquiet over a ‘structural contradiction’ then rituals, rather than legal rules, were more likely to be used (1957, 330).

It was at this point that his processual approach departed company from the usual dictum of structuralism. Turner saw that social structures may be reviewed and potentially *changed* through this use of ritual. This new perspective on culture, that it was not merely a palliative to conflict but an agent of change to structure, remained a durable part of Turner’s thought. It was Turner’s encounter with Arnold van Gennep’s work *Les Rites des Passages* (1960), which encouraged Turner to pursue this new understanding of how ritual may contain a different purpose than being, “a set of mechanisms for promoting group solidarity, as, in fact, a ‘sort of all purpose social glue’”(Turner 1982a, 82).

Van Gennep’s work identified a common purpose to ritual amongst a broad, cross cultural examination. He saw that all the rituals considered in his analysis were ‘rites of

passage'. They marked the transition of an individual, or group of individuals, from one social situation to another, and were applicable to 'every change of place, state, social position, and age'(van Gennep quoted in Turner 1979, 94). Van Gennep originally intended 'seasonal changes for an entire society'(Turner 1982a, 24) to be considered as a rite of passage. This larger sense of what a rite of passage may be, allowed Turner to adapt another of van Gennep's observations into his own understanding of group ritual events.

Van Gennep recognised that the overall transitional process of a rite of passage had the same tripartite form over time. The first stage is separation, where the actors move away from their connection with the norms of social structure or culture. The next, threshold or liminal (Latin: *limen*) stage, is hence marked by ambiguity; at this moment the actors are no longer defined by what has gone before, yet are unable to clearly assign themselves to what is to come, since at this moment it remains unknown. In the final stage, reaggregation or reincorporation, the actors return to some form of social structure where they are 'expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards'(Turner 1979, 95).

In itself, a social drama may thus be considered as a rite of passage for the group. The first two phases of crisis and separation indicate a movement away from the apparent harmony of social life, the redressive stage equates to the liminal centre of van Gennep's model, and the last re-integrative stage is the moment when structural norms are re-established. The first and last stages of this tripartite form have a more intimate connection with social structure since, as Turner indicates, 'they detach ritual subjects from their old places in society and return them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, to new places'(Turner 1977b, 36).

The middle liminal section however, is something quite different altogether; it is in this realm that the transformations to which Turner and van Gennep allude take place.

Liminality is typically cast as ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner 1987); a moment - a liminal space - located temporally between two other situations that more clearly reflect and embody the norms of a group. While this is true, it tells us little of the *function* of liminality. Turner repeatedly reminds us that activity within a liminal space is essentially creative, a realm concerned with the re-investigation and re-creation of meaning.

Liminality has certain qualities that are designed to encourage such activity. The following table provides a comparative list of the characteristics of liminal and non-liminal space which can help us understand what these qualities are.

<u><b>Liminal</b></u>	<u><b>Non-Liminal</b></u>
Communitas	Structure
Equality	Inequality
Anonymity	Systems of nomenclature
Absence of rank	Distinctions of rank
Absence of status (property)	Status (property)
Silence	Speech
Sacredness	Secularity
Unselfishness	Selfishness
Total obedience	Obedience only to a superior rank
Sacred instruction	Technical knowledge

(Turner 1979, 106)

Turner considered liminal space functioned to break down an individual’s normal sense of his/her connection with the world and emphasise instead a combination ‘... of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship’ (Turner 1979, 96). This altered sense of relationship, which Turner called *communitas*, is one of the two transformative elements of liminality, the other is *reflexivity*.

### ***Reflexivity:***

Reflexivity is key to the creative function of liminal space. Those in liminal space are temporarily exempt from the usual strictures of their social roles, in effect they ‘evade ordinary cognitive classification’ (Turner 1977b, 37). They are encouraged to move away from familiar roles as well as to look at them afresh. What is different about this particular moment of reflexivity is that there is no compunction to draw conclusions upon any observations; in fact there is a very different emphasis - where the holding, not the resolution, of paradox, is sought.

This is a development upon the notion of liminal space as being ‘betwixt and between’ two structural social states; this is now a situation where the perspective of ‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’ is the new norm. Turner describes this as ‘the essence of liminality... [found] in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the ‘uninteresting’ constructions of common sense’ (Turner 1977a, 68). This indicates the creation of a subjunctive - as opposed to an indicative - sphere, ‘ the creation of an order *as if* it were truly the case’(Seligman et al. 2008, 20).

Turner indicates throughout his work how this reflexive environment involves permission to ‘play’ with cultural material, almost as a compensatory gesture toward the temporary absence of structure. Symbols, ideas, and stories which hold core meanings about the group’s culture and its place in the world, are presented, examined, and then reassembled in new ways; ‘in liminality people ‘play’ with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarise them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements’ (Turner 1982b, 27).

In the redressive stage of social drama, this move into the subjunctive allows for a reappraisal of the conditions that first led to the conflict. Away from the usual rhythms and

rules of society this space encourages both reflective and reflexive activity within the group; meaning can be rediscovered - or discovered anew - rather than imposed. Turner sees this as an opportunity for the group to 'take stock of their current situation: the nature and strength of their social ties, the power of their symbols, the effectiveness of their legal and moral controls, the sacredness of their religious traditions' (1986, 40).

The reflexive function of liminality can also occur in more mundane settings than highly charged public rituals such as Yoniada. Andrew Turner (no relation) describes the beginnings of a community project in East London - The Kingsmead Kabin - which demonstrates this reflexive function of liminality occurring around the ritual of regular meetings over a cup of tea (Turner 2007). The 'Kabin' was a shopfront whose front room was redesigned to create a sense of 'welcome and hospitality' and to function as an 'informal social space for a range of interactions' (Turner 2007, 2). This was then a potential liminal space, removed from the normal run of life, where people could meet each other differently. As one of the participants noted:

"We would just sit around and talk and think about the things we should've done and not done, dream dreams, and we would go for one minute big vision stuff, the next minute I was thinking 'bloody hell', you know, we've got to find more paint to do this" (Turner 2007, 8).

Turner's case study chronicles the demise of this process as the people involved at the Kabin, in adapting to external agendas and measures, no longer enjoyed the possibility of this kind of liminal interaction. Without it the participants felt once again removed from the making of their own story, the whole emphasis upon 'building bottom-up collaborative responses to concerns defined by tenants' became diluted (Turner 2007, 13). If reflexivity is key to the creative function of liminality, then *communitas* is essential in creating an environment in which this can occur.

### ***Communitas:***

The distinctions between liminal and non-liminal space presented above draw attention to the idea of ‘a generalised social bond that has ceased to be, and has simultaneously yet to be, fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties’ (Turner 1979, 96). Turner saw this bond, which he called *communitas*, as ‘essentially an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals’ (1982a, 45). *Communitas* is a relationship where individuals see each other outside of any usual social indicators to do with hierarchy, class, role expectation, age or the like; ‘just ordinary people after all’ (Turner 2012, 4).

Turner considers *communitas* to be an innate capability for humans, one that could arise in ‘the workshop, village, office, lecture room, theatre, almost anywhere’ (1982b, 45). He saw it as a form of human relationship which balances the perspective that human relationships inevitably descend, if social structure is absent, into some form of “Hobbesian ‘war of all against all’” (Turner 1979, 131). *Communitas* cannot be maintained for long and will soon revert to a set of relationships which are determined by some form of structure, even if this is not identical to that which prevailed earlier (Turner 1979, 132). He gives three forms of *communitas* - spontaneous, ideological, and normative.

- a) *Spontaneous* (or existential) *communitas*, is that moment when members of a group feel joined together in some appreciation of their common shared humanity, a relationship when all seems possible. As Turner puts it:

when compatible people - friends, congeners - obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as ‘essentially us’ could sustain its intersubjective illumination (1982a, 48).



- b) *Ideological* *communitas* is an attempt to describe the nature of spontaneous *communitas* using language and ‘cultural elements drawn from the debris of past models’ (Turner 1982a, 48). This can lead to a theoretical basis for a utopia that has the continued presence of *communitas* at its core.
- c) *Normative* *communitas* is an attempt by a group to actually, ‘maintain relationships [of] spontaneous *communitas* on a more or less permanent basis (Turner 1982a, 49). Grimes describes normative *communitas* as the existence of two opposites ‘liminality and the status system’(1995, 153). The resultant tension will always cause the arrival of either a split in the structure of such a group or the effective stifling of *communitas* (Turner 1982a, 50).

This categorisation of *communitas* provided by Turner illustrates the argument of this thesis. The experience of spontaneous *communitas* leads to attempts to both capture it in language and symbol, hence *communitas* becomes involved in the symbology of community. Efforts to make *communitas* the norm of community fail because they misunderstand its role and nature. It is a particular relationship which brings certain permissions to liminal, ritual space. *Communitas* is by this definition ephemeral and not a relationship capable of withstanding the complex demands of community.

### ***Indeterminacy: Structure and Anti-Structure***

Turner coined the term ‘anti-structure’ to describe the combination of liminality and *communitas*, and saw ‘structure’ and ‘anti-structure’ in a dialectic form of relationship (Turner 1979, 97). However, despite his use of the prefix ‘anti’, Turner’s view was of a closed system that moved cyclically between structure and the anti-structure of liminality and *communitas*. In this perspective anti-structure is a ‘plurality of alternatives rather than a reversal or inversion of the antecedent condition’ (Turner 1977a, 75).

Sally Falk Moore's (1975) proposal that *indeterminacy* underlies all social activity is a useful way to comprehend this dialectic. Moore uses indeterminacy to describe how 'counter-activities, discontinuities, variety and complexity'(1975, 219) ensure that any sense of order will only likely be partial and not reflect a consensus shared by all. Like Turner, Moore is attempting to answer the question, 'What happens when a community which idealises communal harmony is faced with internal conflicts and contradictions?'(1975, 210). She proposes that responses to communal conflict have typically centred on two processes, *regularisation* and *situational adjustment*.

Regularisation 'attempts to crystallise and concretise social reality, to make it determinate and firm'(Falk Moore 1975, 234), and as such describes the mechanisms of social structure. However, despite attempts to order social reality in this way there are always discrepancies between what actually happens and what is supposed to happen. Individuals and circumstance are always present to disrupt 'well laid plans'. This latter process is what Moore calls situational adjustment where:

people arrange their immediate situations (and/or express their feelings and conceptions) by exploiting the indeterminacies in the situation, or by generating such indeterminacies, or by reinterpreting or redefining the rules or relationships (1975, 234).

Each of these two gestures, regularisation and situational adjustment, if repeated often enough on their own, turn into the other. Thus a frequent re-writing of the rules becomes something akin to 'situational adjustment', and a new response taken up by enough people often enough, becomes a new attempt at 'regularisation'. Although this process owes something to Turner's structure/ anti-structure dialectic, Moore extends his notion by noting that both regularisation and situational adjustment act in a field of indeterminacy, and that both gestures represent valid operations in that field. As Turner notes, 'Both [regularisation and situational adjustment] should be taken into account

whenever the complex relationships between social life and the continuously renewed web of meanings which is culture are being analysed' (1977a, 64).

There is however a subtle difference between liminality and situational adjustment. While Moore suggests that situational adjustment is something that is discovered or sought by actors for their own ends, Turner considers liminality as functioning to provide benefits for all. Liminal space is a *socially sanctioned* activity and any new meanings that arise within it then potentially 'feed back into the 'central' economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raison d'être*' (Turner 1982b, 28). This distinction points towards the difference in the way that pre- and post- modern societies treat liminal space.

That pre-modern societies recognised the radical nature of liminal space, its inherent threat to structure, was reflected in the literal removal of liminal participants from the ongoing demands of 'quotidian life' as well as the 'ritual interdictions' placed around liminal space (Turner 1977a, 67). Given this combination of sanction and awareness that pre-modern societies brought to ritual liminality, and that Turner considered the regenerative function of liminality to be crucial (1977a, 67) to the social process of *any* group, then how, where, and in what forms, does liminality occur in post-industrial societies? The answer to this involves the redefinition of ritual that I have suggested earlier, which suggests that liminality can then arise under a broader range of conditions.

### ***Ritual Revised:***

Bellah's (2005) commentary on Durkheim's ideas concerning ritual are relevant to this thesis. He notes how modernity's emphasis upon rationality erodes any familiarity or value in ritual. Rationality works primarily in what Rappaport calls low order meaning; this is a focus on information, the process of creating categories. This is only the first of

three levels of meaning that Rappaport attributes to ritual; the second has a focus on metaphor and poetic meaning, the third on ‘radical identification or unification of self with other’(Rappaport in Bellah 2005, 194).

In addition, Bellah proposes that ritual is at ‘the core of any kind of social interaction’(2005, 185). This allows Rappaport’s description of ritual to enter modernity at the level of the day to day. Bellah notes a synthesis of Durkheim and Goffman’s work which defines our simple meeting with each other as ‘an interaction ritual’ which is characterised by

- a) a group of at least two people physically assembled;
- b) who focus attention on the same object or action, and each becomes aware that the other is maintaining this focus;
- c) who share a common mood or emotion (Collins in Bellah 2005, 185).

This definition of ritual describes the kind of activity I am reading from Andrew Turner’s account of the Kabin noted earlier. Language then becomes included within this notion of ritual activity; the ‘gestures’ we make in conversation with each other can lead us into those moments of ‘mutual focus, [and] common sentiment’(Collins in Bellah 2005, 185) that are the substance of *communitas* and liminality.

Creating these types of conversations involves listening as well as speaking, it implies a suspension of judgement and a respect for another’s story. It requires a readiness to be ‘unknowing’, to allow meaning to emerge rather than rushing to fulfil assumptions about each other. An example of this approach is the community arts organisation *Big hART* who recognise that, ‘by placing story at the core of [our] work, participants begin from a position of strength. Everyone has the unique gift of their life experience to share. Big hART projects are based around an exchange, rather than welfare’(Big hART 2012).

Many of the communities that Big hART work with have already attracted a 'label' that has the potential to limit perceptions of what may be possible. Big hART uses art in various guises to enable and encourage participants to challenge this labelling process as a first step in renewing their sense of agency in the world. Using art to tell stories then becomes a multilayered conversation, be it a visual, dramatic, movement based or musical one, that reveals participants both to themselves and to others in new ways. As one young person put it:

After the show people started clapping, they saw 'us' for the first time. They used to see it [skate boarding] as like a criminal sort of thing, and after they seen that [the show], they saw it as more artistic and stuff like that, and more respect for us (Wright 2009, 35).

The kind of activity that Big hART promotes is exactly what Turner saw as the answer to the question of what constituted liminality in modernity, an activity centring on the notion of 'play'. The reflexive nature of liminality is driven by an imperative to *play* with cultural signs and symbols in order that they may either be reinvested with meaning or otherwise new meanings derived from the process. Turner coined this modern form of liminality the *liminoid*.

### ***Postmodern Liminality: The Liminoid***

Turner (1977b, 39-40) suggests that in premodern societies the performance of ritual was an activity in which all participated; this was not a matter of choice, it was a cultural obligation. Even though certain individuals at certain times would have had specific roles, ritual performance amounted to a form of activity which invariably involved everybody. Thus, in pre-modern societies, the construction of liminal space represented a form of *work*, but one that involved elements of play in that reflexive sense I have indicated above.

In postmodernity our involvement with 'play', particularly in the sense of engagement that Turner gives it, will be more usually found away from the regularities of

work. Turner draws attention to this change and makes the following observations (after Dumadazedier) concerning work in modernity.

- a) Society ceases to govern its activities by means of common ritual obligations; some activities, including those of work and leisure, become, at least in theory, *subject to individual choice*.
- b) The work by which a person earns his or her living is “set apart from his other activities; its limits are no longer natural but arbitrary” ... it can easily be separated, both in theory and practice, from his free time. (Turner 1977b, 41)

Turner argues that these conditions mean we are now free to ‘enter, even for some help generate, the symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games, diversions of all kinds’ (Turner 1977b, 42). These ‘worlds’ include literature, music, film, theatre, art, dance, sporting clubs, and other spaces outside of home and work, where different social relationships can be formed. They are all places where the kind of reflexive play on culture that Turner considers fundamental to liminality may occur.

Turner proposed the term *liminoid* to describe this modern form of liminality, not only to indicate it as something ‘akin to the ritually liminal’ but also how it appears in a variety of new forms, each taking only some aspect(s) of pre-modern liminality to work with (1977b, 43). The following table provides a synopsis of the comparisons that Turner made between the liminal and liminoid (Turner 1977b, 44-45; 1982b, 53-54).

<u><b>Liminal</b></u>	<u><b>Liminoid</b></u>
Sacred work - obligatory	Secular activity - optional
Related to sociocultural cycles and rhythms, ...crises, breaks in the natural processes of the group	Continuously generated in places and times of ‘leisure’
Fully integrated into the culture	Occur at the margins and

**(Liminal)**

of the society.

A collective act to develop shared meaning and benefits

Explore reversals and inversions of social structure

**(Liminoid)**

interfaces of main central economic and political processes

Although the liminoid may occur in a collective setting - carnivals, spectacles, sporting events ... they are the products of particular groups and similarly consumed and understood by them

Subversive, offer more radical critiques of social structure

Consideration of the characteristics of liminoid demonstrates its affinity with many of the voluntary, elective practices that we now often call community. Our decision to be involved with others to the degree that we share a sense of belonging, the experience of *communitas*, that we develop recognisable ‘ritual’ activities, is no longer either obligatory or a given, but elective. The case studies that I have alluded to, the ‘Yonaida’, the conversations that led to the Kabin, the community art processes facilitated by Big hART, are all described by Turner’s notion of the liminoid in some way; each begin with a personal choice to become involved.

***Chapter Summary:***

Turner acknowledged that his attempts to extrapolate the liminal into modernity, the creation and identification of the ‘liminoid’, were exploratory (1982b, 55). His constant argument for the importance of liminality as a necessary place for a culture to examine and create a sense of meaning has been criticised from several places. Although I have not chosen to read an understanding of *communitas* as an inevitable movement towards a

homogeneity of meaning, it is possible to take this point of view (see for instance Weber 1995, 530); I have already noted Cohen's alignment with this perspective.

Running alongside this critical view of *communitas* is the idea that Turner's thought implies that liminality is somehow apolitical. As Weber describes it, Turner's enthusiasms for liminality can ignore 'the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story, and from which position' (1995, 532). This discussion is not the focus of this thesis; regardless of the continual presence of power, the *function* of liminality remains. It is an essentially *reflexive activity*, not something that merely indicates a position in time and space between one social station and another.

Turner saw that the activity in liminal space created 'a latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it' (Sutton-Smith quoted in Turner 1982b, 52). In this way, Turner considered that a society which provided itself with 'liminal' spaces, those spaces which encouraged a subjunctive, 'as if', gesture within which 'play' with cultural ideas, symbols and meanings could occur, would develop an improved resilience to unexpected demands; demands that could arise both from within the group or from outside it (1977a, 70).

Post modern liminoid activity is differentiated from pre-modern liminal events by the individual, elective decision to become involved in 'ritual' events and practices; what remains unchanged is the *experience* of *communitas*. Establishing *communitas* as *one* of the elements of community allows a more subtle understanding of what community is and how we may take part in it. It is the latter part of this observation that I address in the following chapter. How might we operate effectively as member of a group during those moments of *communitas*, given that they are likely to be more highly charged than normal? How can we effectively transition in and out of liminoid 'ritual' space?



### ***Communitas and 'Flow':***

Turner provides a possibly fruitful direction of enquiry in this regard with his suggestion that communitas bears some close similarities to what Csikszentmihalyi (1977) calls *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi's initial research concerned the experiences of different groups of people - artists, surgeons, sportspeople - whose motivation for being involved in their chosen pursuit was largely enjoyment in what they did (Bloch 2000). They all exhibited some or all of a set of characteristic responses tabled below:

- a) *The experience of merging action and awareness*
- b) A centering of attention on a smaller range of stimulus, a one-pointedness of mind
- c) *A transcending of ego boundaries; 'intuitions of unity, solidarity, repletion and acceptance' arise*
- d) A sense of control of over one's environment and actions
- e) *An altered sense of time, usually that events are passing quicker than they are*
- f) There are clear goals and immediate feedback, i.e. one tends to know precisely how well one is doing
- g) *If several of these qualities are present then flow becomes autotelic i.e.: it becomes a reward in itself.*

(Turner 1982b, 56 - 58; Bloch 2000, 44 )

Turner recognised a considerable overlap between the characteristics of communitas and those of Csikszentmihalyi's flow, particularly those marked in italics above. The final chapter of this thesis connects the similarities between the experience of communitas and 'flow' with the idea of skilful activity.

## CHAPTER 3: Reflective Practice

Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice that takes fuller account of the competence practitioners sometimes display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness and conflict... Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem-setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as describable and as susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls *outside* the boundaries of technical rationality.

(italics added, Schön 1995, 29)

“Sure, all improvisation is thought out beforehand... but *some* improvisation is thought out only *just* before it happens ...” (Duke Ellington)

Recognising *communitas* for what it is is one thing; learning how to act well in the liminality that arises around it is another. Without the cultural traditions that pre-modern societies used to develop an appropriate awareness around liminality, the liminoid equivalent of modernity presents particular challenges to those involved. It presents us with a view of ourselves and others that stands in stark contrast to the more mundane realities of our everyday lives. To ‘act well’ in this case means managing an appropriate level of self care, one that relies upon a degree of self awareness to mitigate against being *totally* overwhelmed by the experience of liminality.

Moving out of liminal environments without being able to acknowledge that you are doing so, creates an inevitable sense of loss for a world that now seems far removed and yet so memorable. As Myerhoff puts it, ‘To everyone’s consternation ecstasy is gone’(1975, 35). In addition, if liminality is understood to be an environment which intends to bring about effects in the remainder of our lives, then there is a requirement to translate what we have learnt in liminal space back into the ‘real’ world. This can be difficult as the language we use whilst joined in the experience of *communitas* and the

playing with meanings which liminality entails, are both radically different from our usual experience.

Hence a degree of self awareness is crucial to managing the tensions that arise around transitions in and out of liminality as well as developing the ability to manage the shift in a repeated yet personally sustainable way. I am proposing that the reflexive and creative nature of liminal space demands a level of self awareness described by Schön's notion of *reflection-in-action* (Schön 1983). It provides an apt model for several reasons.

- a) Schön recognises that indeterminacy is the predominant reality away from the abstractions of theory; he does not seek a theory (or theories) from which to derive solutions to be applied to real situations. Rather, he is interested in ways of working that can respond to the contingency of a given moment.
- b) That implicit in reflection-in-action are behaviours that support a level of reflexivity, one that he calls *double loop* learning, something which bears a close resemblance to liminality's own reflexivity.
- c) Reflection-in-action has an improvisatory nature, which marries well with the understanding that liminoid events involve a level of creative 'play'.
- d) Reflection-in-action is an engagement with task that bears several of the elements of a 'flow' state, which would make it appropriate for working in situation where *communitas* is present. These elements are
  - i) The ability to respond immediately to feedback, and to alter action accordingly 'in the moment'.
  - ii) Both flow and reflection-in-action depend on a level of prior, tacit, embodied knowledge and, a readiness to extend this in response to new, previously unknown, demands.
  - iii) It is autotelic, in the sense that it provides its own sense of reward.

There are two further points that I wish to emphasise before moving on to examine the relevance of Schön's ideas to my thesis. Firstly, that although his notion of reflective practice was directed at professionals, I am proposing that his observations concerning effective practice apply to *any* individual concerned with their involvement in liminal settings; in particular, because Schön argues that the willingness of an individual to exercise reflexivity around their own skills and behaviour has a direct relationship to the kind of learning environment they will tend to generate. This is an important point to consider for those who find themselves, professionally or otherwise, in leadership or facilitation roles in community or group settings.

Secondly, understanding the nature of reflection-in-action and *communitas* affords the individual the opportunity to discern between the two. Although I am proposing that their similarities mean that reflection-in-action is an appropriate skill for working in moments of *communitas*, they are different. One is a form of relationship, the other a form of action. Being able to keep such a level of discernment in mind helps avoid confusion arising about the meaning that may lie behind a flow experience. Such a gesture represents the kind of self care I have alluded to at the beginning of this section.

I begin this chapter with an exposition of Schön's argument for reflective practice as he presented it in his book "*The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*"(1983). This review of his thought covers his critique of technical rationality, and his proposal for an alternative response to situations of complexity and uncertainty. The next section considers his work with Chris Argyris. I consider that their work together is implicit in much of what Schön later argued, and has to be understood in order to arrive at a better understanding of what Schön meant by reflection-in-action

I am arguing that reflection-in-action is neither a form of professional 'technology' nor an elusive 'gift' that some possess. It is a skill which respects the learning inherent in

experience but which also demands a reflexive intent to be directed at this learning. My review of Schön's thought, and the conclusions which he and Argyris came to concerning effective practice, lead to a proposal that reflection is a composite skill of which reflection-in-action is but a part. This section of the chapter includes a consideration of the practical means by which the skill of reflection-in-action could be acquired.

While it may be possible to indicate what practices lead to the likelihood of 'reflection-in-action', there will always be a redundancy in any attempt to use language to describe *exactly* what it is. This perspective has generated two main lines of criticism at Schön's ideas which I attempt to answer. My response hinges on the recognition that reflection-in-action arises out of reflexivity, relationship and a regard for other forms of 'knowing' than the cognitive.

### **“The Reflective Practitioner”: Other Forms of Knowing**

Donald Schön's (1983) book has proven to be an influential text in the field of reflective practice, and reflection-in-action is the core concept of Schön's book. However, as Bamberger (2000, 12) notes, reflection-in-action is 'also probably the most easily misunderstood aspect of his [Schön's] work', and this has led to an ambiguity as to what it actually is. Generally reflection is understood as being concerned with the realm of learning and thinking (Moon 2004, 80). I consider reflection-in-action to be a particular expression of learning and thinking - the exercise of skilful action.

In "*The Reflective Practitioner*" Schön argues for a radical revision in the manner in which professionals are trained. The fundamental difference of his new 'epistemology of practice' is to place skilful action - artistry - at the beginning of an inquiry into what competent professional practice is, and then to ask how it may be acquired. Whereas theoretical understanding is more typically considered as the necessary foundation for

competence, Schön is proposing that it is the examination of the ‘artistic, intuitive processes’(1983, 49) which certain individuals bring to complex situations that will be a more profitable starting point.

In making this gesture Schön is also recognising that there are forms of both knowledge and knowing involved within a notion of competence, neither of which are best held by the rationalist language that defines professional training. It is this perspective on skilful response that I am using to support the idea that reflection-in-action is applicable by any individual who finds themselves in the complex, indeterminate environments of liminality. In the midst of a committee meeting or communal event we may find ourselves watching another individual exercising ‘artistry’ as they lead us towards, or ask us to discover, a new way through a current impasse, without them necessarily executing what would be termed a *professional* skill.

Although reflection-in-action arose through Schön’s project on professional practice it also addresses a broader question, of how to act skilfully, to respond in ways that integrate thought with action (Argyris and Schön 1974, 3). This question has a long intellectual and philosophical history in Western thought and it is from within this tradition that Schön is writing. However, reflection-in-action is an experience that is embodied, and neither exclusively intellectual nor cognitively pre-planned. Reflection-in-action is a gestalt of action and awareness not guided in the moment by analytical thought, but nevertheless *known*.

### **Technical Rationality and the Crisis within Professional Practice:**

Before I give a synopsis of the argument concerning professional practice that Schön provides (1983; 1987), it is worth noting two aspects of Schön’s own worldview that I consider to be implicit throughout his work. These aspects suggest that, although he

never discusses *communitas* or liminality, he would possibly have understood their import. According to Jeanne Bamberger, a long time associate of Schön's, he held 'an abiding and persistent belief in the permanence of change', and considered that the best responses to such a circumstance would be creative ones that emerge out of a dialogue with the situation at hand, "...'generative processes', of 'coming to see in a new way' " (2000, 9).

Schön's argument begins by identifying the manner through which professional practice is understood, created and executed. He calls this *technical rationality*. Technical rationality is the outcome of positivist philosophy as it has operated in the 'thinking about the professions and the institutional relations of research, education and practice' (Schön 1983, 21). Positivist science demands requirements 'for completeness and precision, for observing causal relations under conditions of control, for maintaining distance as an important safeguard of objectivity, and a focus on means rather than ends' (Reason and Bradbury 2006, 132).

Whilst acknowledging the important role that the professions play in the functioning of society (1983, 3-4), Schön observed that professional practice was proving incapable of responding to the kind of 'wicked' problems generated by post-modern society where, 'there are no 'solutions' in the sense of definitive or objective answers' (Pedler and Trehan 2008, 203) . The Kabin project I referred to above is a case in point; as the emphasis moved increasingly towards professional concerns around 'outcome based' criteria and subsequent interventions based on these, the ability of the project to continue to meet the complex demands of the community faltered, and the project eventually lost relevance (Turner 2007, 13 - 14).

Schön considered this failure of the professions to effectively deal with complexity to be a crisis, one that contained two dilemmas. Schön applied a metaphor to the first dilemma, where the maintenance of scientific rigor is only really possible whilst

addressing problems standing on the ‘high, hard ground’ of theory, safely away from the ‘swampy lowlands’, where the messes and complexities of social and other professional problems are real and relevant (1983, 42). For those practitioners who choose to resolve this dilemma by opting for relevance over rigor there arises a second dilemma.

This subsequent dilemma takes the form of ‘abandonment or alienation’. This refers to the experience of practitioners who find that, far from alleviating social ills, solutions founded in scientific research potentially ‘exacerbate social problems’ (Schön 1992, 120). Practitioners then feel not only abandoned by the workings of academic research, but when they do attempt to apply theoretical knowledge they inevitably become alienated from their own learning and experience in the field, something that results in ‘engendering a loss of their sense of competence and control’ (Schön 1992, 120).

Schön’s world view regarding the constancy of change recognises where modernity has landed us; a world that regularly presents us with situations of ‘complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict’ (Schön 1983, 39). Technical rationality proposes that techniques derived from theoretical science will be sufficient to meet the demands of such situations. Schön states that the crisis running through professional practice, where ‘instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique’ (1983, 21) continually fails to provide workable solutions, would indicate otherwise.

It is worth noting that Schön’s proposal of a radically alternative route to competency in professional practice, one that begins with an inquiry into the ‘artistry’ that certain practitioners demonstrate, does not mean that he is advocating an end to the advantages that rational, science based inquiry can bring. Kinshella makes the following point:

Schön’s position is not a dichotomous one... he is not discarding research-based professional knowledge but challenging inflated views of its practical significance. ...



Schön reveals the significance of practitioner experience and the indeterminate contexts of practice as a counterbalance to, not a substitute for, science and technique, and in this way moves towards overcoming dualistic thinking as it pertains to professional knowledge (2007b, 111).

Schön himself saw technical rationality as part of the field of professional practice, appropriate for those contexts where ‘routine application of existing rules and procedures’ (1987, 35) was sufficient. More generally Schön considered technical rationality as being usefully mediated by elements of artistry; ‘problem framing, implementation and improvisation’ (1987, 13).

### **Problem Framing & Improvisation:**

For Schön, technical rationality reveals its limits through its emphasis upon problem *solving*. This predominant concern ignores a preliminary step, that of clearly identifying the nature of the problem in the first place. Schön calls this latter sensibility problem *setting*, and defines it as ‘a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them’ (1983, 40). In ‘unique and unstable’ environments (Schön 1983, 41) problems will not arrive ready-made, they are more likely to be subject to levels of variation and uncertainty.

Rather than attempting to contain the environment within a pre-existing theory and associated solutions, Schön’s alternative proposal begins with an intention to interact with the environment containing the problem. Decisions are now made about contributing factors as well as possible outcomes, but based in context not theory. This approach acknowledges that some factors may as yet be unknown and that unexpected outcomes may occur. In this much more fluid perspective Schön holds that it is through a ‘non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may [then] organise and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of organising them’ (1983, 41).

It is Schön's labelling of this new response as 'non-technical' that signals his intent to argue for a very different epistemology of practice from one that 'involves trying to establish fixed ways of working, [and having] established 'right answers' for how to proceed' (Thompson and Thompson 2008, 14). He is indicating an initial gesture of coming into relationship with a situation, of *not* arriving with a set of assumptions or readymade answers. This is an intent to act in a improvisatory way with the situation at hand.

The notion of improvisation brings with it the idea of performance. Whilst this usually infers dramatic action in the sense of a theatrical play, Farmer (2005, 4) indicates how our human proclivity for performance is innate. What she means by this is that through performance individuals 'go a little beyond themselves' in order to learn. The child, for instance, acts 'as if' a speaker of a language, even though this is not yet fully the case. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi similarly describe flow as occurring when 'perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, stretch (neither overmatching or underutilising) existing skills' (2005, 90).

This sense of being able to move into a realm which is just beyond what you know is the essence of improvisatory performance. Two elements necessary for such a 'performance' to occur are

- a) an environment that supports improvisation as a way of working, and
- b) an intention on the part of the individual to work in this way.

I have already argued that liminality is just such an environment. The attitude that an individual is required to bring is illustrated in Farmer's (2005) discussion of her work within a community fractured by violence and distrust. She presents several examples of how her actions fostered 'stages' upon which community members could act out new roles, relationships and ways of thinking. She considered all the 'actors' in this community as :

primarily performers who are constantly creating performance spaces (or environments) upon which ensembles (groups, teams, communities) create the millions of improvised scenes (and some scripted ones) of our everyday lives (Farmer 2005, 5).

It is clear from her description that she held an intention to create conversational opportunities, new leadership roles, and possible new ways of working amongst community members. It was Farmer's improvisatory approach, in *not* working towards *predicted* outcomes, which helped facilitate the many meetings, conversations and relationships which brought about change. I now want to review earlier work of Schön's which makes clear how an individual's intention can affect the environment in which they work, to either contribute to the creative possibilities of liminality or not.

### **'Theories-in-Use': The Beginnings of Schön's Reflective Practice**

From the early 1970's onwards Schön began a research project with Chris Argyris (Schön 1987, 259) which explored how professionals could improve the effectiveness of their own practice by considering the nature and results of their behaviour in simulated practice situations. Importantly for the purposes of this thesis their conclusions indicate that any reflective practice that professionals engage in is at its most useful as a reflexive process. In addition, Schön and Argyris's work argues that the attitude an individual brings to the framing of a problem will either create a context which supports learning and reflective practice, or not.

Schön and Argyris constructed a model for how professionals operate, one which was both 'a theory of competent interpersonal practice and a practicum in the acquisition of its skills' (Schön 1987, 255). They proposed that individuals create 'theories-of-action' to get what they want and that these have two representations; an 'espoused theory-of-action', that which we say we do, and a 'theory-in-use', that which we actually do. Schön and Argyris indicate that an individual's theory-in-use consists of 'assumptions, action

strategies, and governing variables' which constitute a [personal] 'sociology, and anthropology, engineering science, a physics of everyday life' (1974, 7-8).

Theories-in-use are examples of tacit knowledge, where 'we know more than we can tell and more than our behaviour consistently shows' (Argyris and Schön 1974, 10). Tacit knowledge, and the exercise of it in the service of skill, is an aspect of Schön's thinking which I later explore when I consider reflection-in-action in more detail. Schön and Argyris's concluded that any lack of congruence between an individual's espoused theory-of-action and their actual theory-in-use has implications for that person's effectiveness as a practitioner.

Schön and Argyris suggest that effectiveness can be improved if the individual is prepared to make the tacit nature of their theory-in-use explicit. This is a reflective *and* reflexive act, in that it involves both a review of the consequences of an actor's actions and an examination of what led them to act in this way. Schön's work with Argyris is an important antecedent to his later exposition of reflective practice. It indicates that *reflexivity* is an implicit component of Schön's argument and needs to be considered for a full appreciation of what leads to the skill of reflection-in-action.

Schön and Argyris contend that an individual's readiness to be reflexive about the ideas that underlay his/her own actions, to explore their own tacit knowledge, prepares them to be usefully involved in group processes that pose a similar question of the group. It is this perspective that places Schön's reflection-in-action as a skill suitable for those who live and work in indeterminate situations, and where the group has chosen to initially frame a problem through a shared examination of what seems important, relevant, and of value.

## **Single and Double Loop Learning: Types I /II ‘Theories of Use’**

Schön and Argyris note how the potential ‘formation or modification of a theory-in-use is itself a learning process’ (1974, 18). This learning can take one of two forms and each broadly corresponds to a different behavioural intent. The distinction between these two forms of learning - which Schön identifies as either single or double loop learning - concerns the manner in which each responds to change; particularly through the role that ‘governing variables’ take in this process. ‘Governing variables’ are those factors which provide limits to an individual’s actions as well as a focus to the theories that underlie them.

From the perspective of individual behaviour, ‘governing variables’ are those aspects of a worldview and sense of self which individuals maintain within certain limits via their ‘theory-of-use’. Hence, theories-of-use are a means to exercise homeostasis over behaviour such that it is congruent with a person’s worldview. In this context Schön suggests governing variables may be categories such as, ‘energy expended, anxiety, [or] time spent with others (1974, 15). When my ‘governing variables’ move outside what my theory-in-use has placed as acceptable limits, and this is likely to occur ‘especially in situations of difficulty or stress’ (Schön 1987, 256), then I have to adjust some aspect of my theory-in-use.

If I am reluctant to accept a shift in the range of variation of the governing variable, then I must design a new action strategy that allows it to return to within the limits normally imposed by my theory of use. In this way my theory-in-use stays largely the same. This is what Schön and Argyris call single loop learning, when ‘new action strategies are used in the service of the same governing variables ... there is a change in action but not in the governing variables’ (Argyris et al. 1985, 86).

Double loop learning, on the other hand, occurs when I am prepared to reconsider the actual validity of a governing variable, up to the point that I no longer include it in my theory-in-use. This form of learning has more far reaching effects on my whole theory-in-use, causing me to question my assumptions and the action strategies I employ. As Ledwith and Springett note, this generates questions such as, ‘...why are we doing this in this way and what are the assumptions implicit in it?’ (2010, 156). Schön and Argyris provide the following illustration:

In the context of theories-of-use, a person engages in single loop learning, for example, when they [he] learn[s] new techniques for suppressing conflict. They [he] engages in double loop learning when they [he] learn[s] to be concerned with the surfacing and resolution of conflict rather than its suppression (1974, 19).

In this example the governing variable could have been, for instance, anxiety about experiencing conflict. Single loop learning will result when new ways of suppressing conflict are sought in order to lower levels of anxiety back to acceptable limits. In this instance the shift in the governing variable, anxiety, changes back to its original level but the reason(s) for its cause in the first place, conflict, remains present. Conversely, double loop learning would result if the anxiety about experiencing conflict could be questioned. This may then lead to an understanding of the causes of the conflict and hence a different form of resolution. Figure 1 provides a simplified version of this thinking.

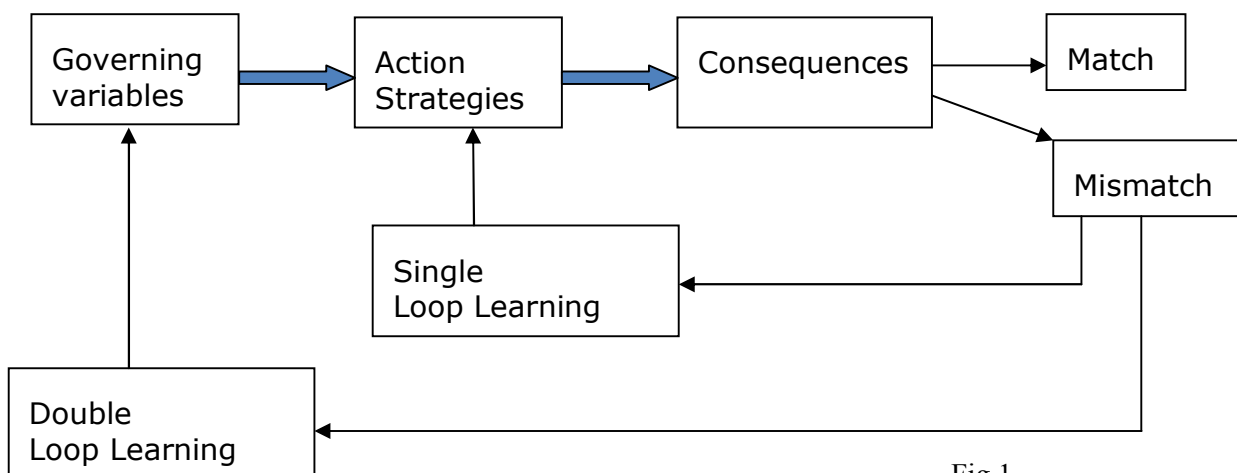


Fig 1

Farmer's case study also provides an example of double loop learning. Amidst a culture of violence, driven by an economy centred on drug use and procurement, Farmer wanted to create new forms of dialogue between all groups in a housing project. One of the tacit, unwritten rules of this community was that gang members and drug users were not entitled to any voice in discussions. Farmer challenged this 'theory in use' and consequently:

The "usual suspects" were unable to stifle every new thought; there was an extended dialogue occurring between management and tenants. The staff of the project and the workers began to act in joint activities, and young people were brought into a process in the community (Farmer 2005, 10).

This change in a 'cultural' theory-in-use contributed towards a solution for the housing project. At more individual level, Farmer makes clear that taking part in these conversations was not easy for any of the parties involved. Their shared commitment was to reduce the level of violence, but beyond this nothing else was a given.

This was a moment of improvisation for all, each person was being asked to consider their own theory-of-use in an effort to 'perform differently. The new performance was developmental. Participants learned that it was possible to do something new even with all the distrust, fear, and antagonism' (Farmer 2005, 8). Farmer's role was to help create the spaces - liminal spaces - for these reflexive conversations to occur; her readiness to approach this task in an improvisatory way was an important part of her approach.

Following on from their research Schön and Argyris suggested that there are two general behavioural models of theories-in-use, Type I and Type II, that individuals tend to employ (their respective characteristics are set out in Appendix 1 and 2). While a full discussion of Type I and Type II theories-in-use is beyond the scope of this thesis a review of the characteristics of Type II theories-in-use tabled in appendix 2 indicates two important points.

- a) A congruence exists between the experience of *communitas* and the kinds of behaviours and actions generated by Type II theories-in-use.
- b) Type II theories-of-use allow for the reflexivity of double loop learning, which mirrors the reflexive intent of liminality.

Thus, not only do Schön and Argyris deem that the effectiveness of an individual's professional practice increases the more they demonstrate a commitment to Type II responses, but for the purposes of this thesis this commitment would also appear to prepare an individual for the experience of *communitas* and the demands of liminality. A Type II theory-of-use develops an ability to respond to change that moves beyond the application of any pre-existing template; it demands an ability to be creative in that sense of generating new patterns - governing variables - from old.

### **Knowing-in-Action & Reflection-in-Action:**

Schön observed that the skilful responses that certain professionals used to meet the demands of indeterminate environments were in the first instance tacit. These actions, described by peers as expressing “ ‘wisdom’, talent’, ‘intuition’, or ‘artistry’,” (1987, 13), worked effectively in ways that those constrained by the limits of technical rationality did not. Schön uses the term ‘knowing-in-action’ to refer to this form of tacit knowledge, shown in ‘our spontaneous, skilful execution of [a] performance; [which] we are characteristically unable to make ... verbally explicit’ (1987, 25). Theories-in-use are examples of tacit knowledge. Whilst knowing-in-action is similarly an expression of tacit knowledge, Schön's interest here is somewhat different.

Knowing-in-action is the skilful expression of an individual's interaction with the environment. There is an element of flow to such moments, dependent upon a series of prior responses that have worked in previous situations, and which are now operating



without conscious thought. Under normal circumstances knowing-in-action occurs in a stable, known environment and is a display of competency with familiar material. This is a ‘knowing’ only realised in the process of doing, and as such is formed from understandings not exclusively cognitive but embodied.

However, Schön recognised that working in indeterminate environments required something more than the continual unconscious execution of knowing-in-action. This new element is the improvisatory gesture (1987, 30) that interacts with an environment to generate *new* forms of action. The indeterminacy of the situation means that something unexpected has happened, something, as Schön puts it, that ‘gets our attention’ (1987, 28). Schön proposes that artistry is the outcome of a reflective act in those moments when knowing-in-action meets, or accidentally generates, such a ‘surprise’. He calls this reflective act, the core competency of artistry, reflection-in-action:

an ephemeral episode of inquiry that arises momentarily in the midst of a flow of action and then disappears, giving way to some new event, leaving in its wake, perhaps, a more stable view of the situation (Schön 1992, 125)

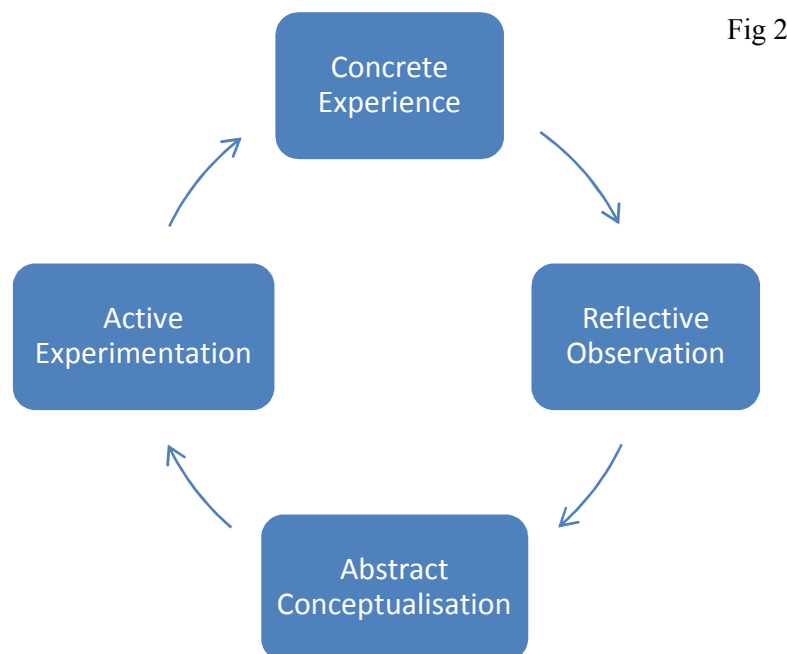
The momentary disturbance to the flow of knowing-in-action generates a critical function that is directed at both inner and outer worlds, asking questions such as, “‘What is this?’ and at the same time ‘How have I been thinking about that?’” (Schön 1987, 28). This reflective act differs from the work with theories-of-use in several ways. Firstly, reflection-in-action is happening in real time, and as such it influences the immediate course of action; it thus contains a willingness to experiment in the moment in ways that can restructure ‘strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems’ (Schön 1987, 28).

Secondly, there is no immediate attempt to extract cognitive meaning; it is the altered course of action, adapting to the change in environment, which is the focus of attention. This departure from any familiar, tacit sense of knowing-in-action is necessarily

guided by many kinds of ‘knowing’; the ‘felt’ sense of an activity, intuitive responses, an awareness and sensitivity to the emotional state of both ourselves and others. Lastly reflection-in-action is a private experience. To reflect in this way is to be not necessarily dependant on the observations of others; essentially we trust our own perceptions to guide our actions.

### **Reflective Practice: A Composite**

Schön distinguishes between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action is the process Schön and Argyris were advocating with regard to theories-of-use. This is reflection after the event and is an attempt to describe what happened, and to then extract cognitive meaning from this description. This is the more normal sense of reflection, as encountered in Kolb’s learning cycle (Illeris 2007, 54) (Fig 2) and later variants upon it.



Hence, the element of time is an important distinction between reflection-**on**-action and reflection-**in**-action. Reflection-in-action would appear to be a much more rapid

movement between experience, reflection, and experimentation; one that does not include the distancing from the moment that conceptualisation inevitably brings.

Thus Schön's notion of reflective professional practice is a composite of three elements.

- a) Knowing-in-action: the tacit, embodied 'know how' that has been acquired through the repeated exercise of a set of skills, combined with a familiarity with the environment in which they normally operate.
- b) Reflection-on-action: a retrospective 'look' at what has happened that includes an attempt to construct some (essentially) cognitive meaning about events.
- c) Reflection-in-action: an in the moment reappraisal of my action, caused by an occurrence that challenges the normal function of my tacit knowing-in-action, which leads to a new improvisatory action.

### **A Reflective Practicum:**

Having established that it was the improvisatory aspect of practice that allowed certain individuals to respond to indeterminacy, in ways that were bound neither by the limits of technical rationality nor an overreliance on tacit, 'automatic' knowledge, Schön directed his attention to how one might acquire this skill of reflection-in-action. "*The Reflective Practitioner*" explores how a mentoring relationship between a 'skilled' practitioner and an 'apprentice' provides a way for this to happen. Of more interest to my discussion in this thesis is Schön's work with groups.

In his second book on reflective practice, Schön (1987, 255 - 302) reviews the fifteen year history of the experiential workshops on theories-of-action that he ran with Argyris. Participants took part in an intensive exercise of examining their professional behaviour with an aim to making their theories-of-use more conscious. Initially this was

through a retrospective look at interactions they had each been involved in. This focussed on a comparison between what they actually said/did and what their internal thought and intent had been.

This was a public process, where the 'stories' of each practitioner were first shared and then feedback provided. Gradually this led into a role playing exercise where participants were encouraged to change the nature of their response; the intent was to move individuals towards type II theories-of-use. A key point in Schön's description of this particular workshop was the reflexivity he brought to his *own* process. He makes clear that the readiness to observe and question his own interactions, assumptions, and actions within the group was critical to whether or not the participants were able to change towards type II theories-of-use.

### **Critical Responses to Schön's Ideas on Reflective Practice:**

One of the problems with Schön's discussion of reflective practice, and reflection-in-action in particular, is that he is speaking through a rationalist language about a process that is embodied, intuitive and located in a particular place and time around a particular individual. This difficulty has led to several critical responses to Schön's work that need to be considered before any reappraisal of its core concept of reflection-in action is complete. These critiques are broadly held by the following two categories:

- a) that there is a lack of reflexivity in the idea of reflective professional practice, one that lacks sensitivity to issues of power, gender and culture.
- b) that there is a false valuing of experiential knowledge and learning in Schön's concept of reflective practice.

## **Reflexivity:**

Reflexive and reflective are two words that are often seen as operating in the same domain. However, although they are both concerned with the act of 'seeing', reflexive is a particular term within the general idea of reflection. Reflection suggests an intention to consider something; a reflexive intent directs this intention back onto your own actions. It is Schön's emphasis on the practical actions of individuals which can imply that the reflexive component of reflective practice only considers what you *do* in the world. In this way his notion of reflective practice can be understood as ignoring those aspects of one's worldview which inform one's actions and consequent appreciation of their effects.

This questioning of what makes up our worldview is commonly understood as a being part of an approach based in critical theory. Reflexivity in this way means:

combining the ability to reflect inwards towards oneself as an inquirer and towards the understanding that is the result of that ...; and then outward to the cultural, social, historical, linguistic, political and other forces that shape the context of the inquiry (Ledwith and Springett 2010, 157).

The reading I give above of Schön's earlier work with Argyris implies a commitment to some form of reflexivity as a component of effective practice. Whether or not this results in the kind of inquiry that critical theory demands is not clear. On the other hand Schön's implicit demand for such reflexivity does not exclude this possibility.

I have already emphasised Schön's observation that the attitude a person brings to a situation is a critical influence on the nature of the learning environment that then develops. Schön considers that any readiness to be reflexive reveals an individual's 'attitude toward the reality with which they deal[s]' (1983, 163). In an earlier comment Schön indicates how an effective theory-of-practice needs to avoid any hermetic, self-justifying worldview:

The theory [of-practice] should not be self-sealing. It should permit detection of and response to its own inconsistencies, ineffectiveness, and ultimately to its degree of obsolescence (Argyris and Schön 1974, 157).

Such a readiness to question one's assumptions and approach generates an attitude of inquiry that is later mirrored in one's engagement with the world. Such an attitude seems to me to be the essence of the stance of critical theory that operates in the way that Ledwith and Springett have indicated. In addition, Schön suggests the basis for artistry is a 'conversation with' (1983, 151) a situation, not only a theoretical argument. This conversation is one that requires the person to appreciate the worldview of all the actors present, including their own.

### **Kinds of 'Knowing':**

A conversation such as this also includes the practitioner's own 'listening' to their inner experience, their felt, intuitive response to a situation. It is this kind of knowing, 'implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict' (Schön 1983, 49) that Schön considers the essence of competency and skilful action.

Much criticism of reflection is in how it places itself between the knowing present within experience and the subsequent construction of meaning. The assumption is that, as Michelson says, 'Experience, whether pre-rational or ideologically overdetermined, is seen as insufficient in its own terms.' Michelson's observation is that the relationship between reflection and experience is a hierarchical one where 'experience [is] treated as the raw material for learning and reflection as a highly cognitive process in which learning actually takes place' (1996, 438 - 439).

Michelson's critique is directed, similarly to Schön's, towards post-enlightenment positivist thinking. However, her concern is to demonstrate how the separation of mind and

body, the legitimising of meaning through cognitive reflection, has aligned itself with power relations associated with class, race and gender. In his own texts Schön is not explicit about any of these issues. He is not, for instance, reflexive in his writing about what he is doing as a writer in a way that would indicate how his text may be inscribed with implicit meanings (Usher et al. 1997, 149).

Michelson is also raising another critique, one shared by others concerning reflective practice, that ‘some commentators still inherently endorse reflection as a skill or competence that can be learnt through instrumental reasoning’ (Ixer 1999, 521). Thus it is possible, despite his own critique of positivist thought, to read Schön as creating a new measurable technology - called reflective practice - that can be applied to professional activity to make it competent. Usher et al indicate that whether or not Schön intended to be read in this way, the point is that he is; his texts have become ‘canonical’ and suffer only a ‘paucity of critiques’ (1997, 143).

Whilst this may be true, I am reading Schön’s ‘canon’ as open to other interpretations (see also Kinsella (2007a) and Jordi (2011) for more recent, alternative appreciations). Definitely, Schön does place a primary value on the knowledge present in the experience of an individual and also indicates how he considers subsequent attempts to describe this are inevitably flawed:

When a practitioner displays artistry, [his] intuitive knowing is always richer in information than any description of it. Further, the internal strategy of representation, embodied in the practitioner’s feel for artistic performance, is frequently incongruent with the strategies used to construct external descriptions of it (Schön 1983, 276).

### **Relationship:**

Schön makes clear that it is the readiness of the practitioner to enter into conversation with the elements of a situation that creates, and in a sense demands, the

possibility of a creative response. The recognition of a conversation rather than a monologue, like the readiness for reflexivity and valuing of experiential forms of knowing, makes way for the kinds of activity and learning described by Lave:

In other words, individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community (with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules, and patterns of relationship), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, languages, and images), and the moment's activity (its purposes, norms, and practical challenges). Knowledge emerges as a result of these elements interacting. Thus, knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing (Lave quoted in Fenwick 2000, 253).

I think it is the awareness brought to the matter of relationship, both with self and others, seen as a fundamental part of Schön's reflective practice, which demonstrates that his ideas are not necessarily bounded by the two forms of critique presented. Reflection in this way is a shared, 'reciprocal' activity (Schön 1987, 302).

### **Chapter Summary:**

The improvisatory artistry of reflection-in-action cannot exist on its own. It can only function from within a pre-existing body of knowing-in-action. More importantly the creative, in the moment, decision making that reflection-in-action represents, can only occur from a place of authenticity that itself arises through the repeated process of reflection-on-action. Such authenticity requires the self-confidence gained from the gradual, experiential acquisition of the tacit skills expressed in knowledge-in-action. It is the failure to view reflection-in-action as in necessary relationship with the other two elements of Schön's model of reflective practice that leads to potential confusion about what it is.

While it may not be possible from a reading of Schön to determine the *exact* nature of reflection-in-action, it is possible to read 'clues' about the intentions it attempts to satisfy (as well as those it does not), and under what conditions it occurs. Erlandson and



Beach (2008, 416) attend to some of the ambiguity and confusion in Schön's text by describing it as containing two lines of reasoning which have different outcomes. One casts reflection-in-action as 'an abstraction, a complex reasoning of human embodiment and action', the other sees it as 'something of its own, beyond or behind that action, a thing in itself.'

The first of these generates a theoretical perspective that attracts the broad areas of critique outlined. The other, however, treats reflection-in-action as something that happens as a result of a certain set of conditions and which produces certain effects. This seems to me to be the most useful way to deal with the difficulties inherent in discussing the artful practice that reflection-in-action represents. It is as if all that can be said about moments of reflection-in-action are that they arise through entering into a conversation with a situation, combined with a readiness to improvise with what may present itself; this latter skill is dependant on prior reflection on the content and nature of one's typical responses.

This model of reflective practice presents itself as suitable to assist in meeting the demands of liminality in the following ways.

- a) Reflection-in-action represents a level of 'in the moment' engagement that is akin to states of both flow and *communitas*.
- b) That it depends on prior and subsequent processes of reflection-**on**-action means that reflection-**in**-action never becomes only a tacit, and in that sense, unknown skill; hence there is a level of discernment possible between the experience of *communitas* and the activity of reflection-in-action. This both helps the individual from being overwhelmed by the experience of liminality and can help in later attempts at translating the experience back into the non-liminal space of 'everyday' life.

- c) Reflection-in-action arises out of an essentially individual reflexive practice, which prepares the person for the reflexive demands of liminality. The intent to be reflexive creates a worldview that assists in generating the reciprocity of *communitas* and sustains the creative nature of liminal space.

## CONCLUSION:

...we need to give primary attention to the processes of integration that reflective practices make possible when people are able to listen to themselves, or be listened to, or share in a collective - processes that allow for the organic emergence of conscious meaning (Jordi 2011, 185).

I have presented an argument that affective forms of sociation are central to our understanding of community. Other commentators have noted this either as *Bund*, *collective effervescence*, or *communitas*. Each of these describes similar forms of human relationship in which individuals' primary response to others is as fellow human beings. This powerful sense of unity is involved in that part of the symbol of community which sees it as a harmonious undertaking in which mutual regard and assistance predominate. While *communitas*, being an ephemeral event, is not community, it is involved in sustaining any illusion of community to which we usefully direct ourselves.

Turner saw that *communitas* was contained by liminality and crucial to its function. Liminality is an essentially reflexive environment where those involved are given permission to question, examine, and play with cultural ideas and values. Hence it is a creative moment capable of generating new ways of seeing and acting in the world. This is a necessary step for a culture to continually be able to adapt to change. However, crossing the thresholds of liminality has always placed demands on those moving in and out of it.

This thesis centres on the following question: 'If the intense experience of liminality remains part of community, in whatever form this latter takes in modernity, then how are we to respond to the demands that it places upon us?' My observations concerning the nature of liminality have led me to propose that

individuals entering liminal space need some proficiency in a reflective practice. This will raise their ability to contribute to liminality's reflexive function as well as assist in making sense of their own experience in such a charged and altered environment.

Jordi's (2011) reappraisal of reflective practice argues for an integration of mind and body. This implies a refusal to continue with the hierarchies of meaning inherent in the positivism of technical rationality. At the same time, it does not ignore the role that thinking plays in all human activity, even amidst the awareness and knowing that exists outside of cognition. I think Schön's proposals for reflective practice can be understood as leading to just such an integration.

Schön's model of reflective practice is based on reflexivity. As such it is not only cognitive but is prepared to recognise the knowing inherent in tacit, embodied understanding and to treat this as valid in itself. This perspective leads to the possibility of reflection-in-action; moments of unplanned, improvisatory and skilful action that are apt in ways that could not be planned. Such authentic responses are part of what is required to meet the demands of liminality.

(Appendix 1)

**Table 1. Type I Theory-in-Use**

<b>Governing Variables</b>	<b>Action Strategies</b>	<b>Behavioural Consequences</b>	<b>Learning consequences</b>	<b>Professional Effectiveness</b>
1. Define goals and try to achieve them around my perceptions	Design and manage the environment unilaterally (be persuasive, appeal to larger goals).	Actor seen as defensive, inconsistent, incongruent, competitive, controlling, fearful of being vulnerable, manipulative, withholding of feelings, overly concerned about self and others or under-concerned about others	Self sealing, 'un-testable' processes	Decreased over the long term  (adapted from Argyris and Schön 1974; Schön 1987)
2. Maximise winning and minimise losing	Own and control the task (claim ownership of the task, be guardian of its definition and execution)	Defensive interpersonal and group relationship (dependence on actor, few cooperative actions)	Single-loop learning	
3. Minimise generating or expressing negative feelings	Unilaterally protect yourself (speak with inferred categories, offer no directly observable behaviour, ignore impact on others and any incongruity between rhetoric and behaviour; account for incongruity with blaming, stereotyping, suppressing feelings, intellectualising)	Defensive norms (mistrust, lack of risk-taking, external commitment, emphasis on diplomacy, power-centered competition and rivalry)	Infrequent public testing of espoused theories and theories-in-use.  Frequent testing of theories privately	
4. Be rational and minimise emotionality	Unilaterally protect others from being hurt (withhold information, create rules to censor information/behaviour, hold private meetings)	Low freedom of choice, internal commitment and risk taking		

(Appendix 2)

**Table 2. Type II Theory-in-Use**

<b>Governing Variables</b>	<b>Action Strategies</b>	<b>Behavioural Consequences</b>	<b>Learning consequences</b>	<b>Professional Effectiveness</b>
1. Valid Information	Design situations or environments where participants can be initiators and can experience high personal causation (psychological success, confirmation, essentiality.)	Actor experienced as minimally defensive (facilitator, collaborator, choice creator)	Testable processes	High authenticity and freedom of choice
2. Free and informed choice	Task is controlled jointly	Minimally defensive interpersonal relations and group dynamics	Double-loop learning	Effectiveness of problem solving and decision making - especially for difficult problems
3. Internal commitment to the choice and constant monitoring of its implementation	Protection of self is a joint enterprise (bilateral protection) and orientated toward growth  (speak in directly observable categories, seek to reduce blindness about own inconsistency and incongruity).	Learning orientated norms (trust, individuality, open confrontation on difficult issues)	Frequent public testing of espoused theories and theories-in-use	(adapted from Argyris and Schön 1974; Schön 1987)

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