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# Chapter 1

## **Introduction: throwing psychosocial studies in at the deep end**

### **Transdisciplinarity**

The word ‘psychosocial’ marks a concern with the interface between the psychological and sociological. Interest in the relation between societal processes and subjective experience has blossomed in recent years, no doubt partly in response to the increasingly explicit relevance of the psychological dimension within contemporary societies, and within specific fields such as health, welfare, law, politics, the media, and so on. Such interest is also animated by the recognition on the part of many social scientists that the psychological dimension (often discussed in terms such as ‘subjectivity’, ‘affect’, ‘experience’ and ‘desire’) suffers profound distortion when studied in abstraction from its social, cultural and historical context. Such abstraction is arguably endemic in the circumstances of the received disciplinary organization of research into departments of psychology, sociology, history, politics and so forth, and this is also a charge regularly leveled against mainstream social psychology. Those who have responded to these structural and intellectual challenges have often adopted a critical and challenging orientation to existing disciplines and an eagerness to develop modes of thought and practice that can move across and between disciplinary boundaries, and that can ‘think’ so called psychic and social dimensions ‘together’.

Three notable responses have gathered force in the last decade or so. These include:

- a) the striking rise – particularly in the health sphere – of technical interventions, and scientific approaches/methodologies self-identifying as psycho-social or even bio-psycho-social (Keene, 2001; Stephens, 2008; Gonzalez et al, 2014);

- b) the continued development of critical psychology, particularly amongst theoretically informed social psychologists (Cromby et al, 2013; Slaney et al, 2015; Parker, 2015); and
- c) the emergence of the field of research and teaching known as psychosocial studies (Frosh, 2015; Hollway, 2015; Woodward, 2015; Adams, 2016).

Each of these developments has been amply discussed elsewhere, and so I will not repeat those discussions here. Also, each of these responses makes an important contribution that should be continued. The purpose of this book, however, is different. The main business of the book will be to contribute to the development of a transdisciplinary way of thinking about, and working on, psychosocial phenomena as processes. This is because, in my view, the existing responses have not gone far enough in moving across and beyond existing disciplinary modes of practice. In these days of widespread university restructuring, however, transdisciplinarity, risks become a mere slogan, and this must be avoided.

The concept of transdisciplinarity is actually part of a theoretical and practical effort to move beyond the limitations of disciplines. For this reason it is typically contrasted with *disciplinarity* (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2007). Disciplines are cultural formations that function as agencies for the production, dissemination and application of *specialist* knowledge. I have defined transdisciplinarity as ‘a concept that has been used in efforts to describe integrative activity, reflection and practice that addresses, crosses and goes through and beyond the limits of established disciplinary borders, in order to address complex problems that escape conventional definition and intervention’ (Stenner, 2014, p. 1989). The concept emerged in the 1970s as part of the global ambitions of general structuralism and general systems theory. The term transdisciplinarity was first used by Piaget (1972) as part of structuralism, and by Jantsch (1972) as part of systems theory.

It seems to me that the word system says in Greek pretty much what the word structure says in Latin: both say something like: a patterned arrangement of elements. Both movements stressed the centrality of relations (as opposed to distinct entities), not just to the specific systems dealt with by specific disciplines, but *generally* to the universe as such conceived qua structured system of structured systems. Hence what

made general structuralism and general systems theory ‘transdisciplinary’ was this *ontological* recognition given to relationality (it is the *patterned arrangement* of elements that is decisive). Structuralism and systems theory fell out of favour from the 1980s onwards as post-structural arguments gathered force to challenge their static tendencies and to rethink patterned arrangements as temporal flows in the flux of constant change. This development can now be understood as an *ontological* recognition given, not just to relationality, but to *process*. Process here does not just mean regular change through time. Process is not to be understood as the antithesis of content, for instance, but as the *emergence of novelty*: the transformation of patterned arrangements and, we might say, the emergence of new patterned arrangements. Not just change by adding new elements to an existing pattern, but a change *of* pattern or ‘pattern shift’ (Greco & Stenner, 2017). Now, the growing consensus (amongst those few who do not simply ignore theory) is of some form of relational process ontology (Brown & Stenner, 2009). This book develops and illustrates this relational process ontology of the psychosocial, drawing inspiration from a range of process thinkers including Bergson, Whitehead, Mead, Harrison, Langer, Schutz and Deleuze.

In the early 1990s, interest in transdisciplinarity was re-ignited along ‘relational process’ lines in a broadly post-structuralist form by Funtowicz & Ravetz (1993), Mittelstrass (1993), Curt (1994) and Gibbons et al (1994) and since then it has been fruitfully developed by a range of thinkers, but notably Klein et al (2001), Moran (2002), Nicolescu (2002), Strathern (2004), Kessel & Rosenfield (2008), Barry et al (2008), Motzkau (2009) and Stenner (2015). Between the hypothetical extremes of disciplinarity (with its well organised and recognised ‘patterned arrangement’) and transdisciplinarity (with its patterned arrangement in process of liminal transformation), further distinctions are typically made between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary (cf. Nicolescu, 2002). Following this tradition, Stenner & Taylor (2008) define *multidisciplinarity* as approaching a problem in a coordinated fashion from various discipline-based vantage points, reserving the term *interdisciplinarity* for collaborations involving the transfer of concepts and/or methods from one discipline to another. An example of multidisciplinary would be a team of experts who divide their labour into the sociological, psychological and biological aspects of drug addiction. An example of interdisciplinary (which involves changes induced by transactions at the borders between disciplines) would

be the budding of cognitive neuroscience when new medical brain-imaging methods were incorporated into psychology from medicine (Stenner, 2014, p. 1998).

Paradoxically enough, there is now enough literature on transdisciplinarity for a new disciplinary field of transdisciplinarity studies. This book, however, *is not* a discussion about what transdisciplinarity is, but an effort to show what it does: to show transdisciplinary thought in process, as it were. Having provided this essential background, I will therefore keep discussion of transdisciplinarity to a bare minimum. It is worth observing, however, that the three responses with which this Chapter began are, for the most part, *not* transdisciplinary in the sense I have articulated. The first (and in terms of outputs, the largest) of the three responses to the ‘psycho / social’ division noted above operates in a multi-disciplinary manner. For the most part, this huge and growing body of research remains within the sphere of mainstream scientific and social scientific research practice in so far as it aims to deliver facts using scientific methods. We might call it the ‘psychosocial factors and variables approach’ because it tends to continue the practice of seeking causal variables explanatory of health (and other) outcomes, or, when formal experiment is not possible, correlating factors. The psychological and the social are construed as variables that can be operationalised and put to use in more or less standard scientific designs to address well-defined practice and policy relevant questions. The novelty is the effort to bring sociological and psychological variables into play with other predominantly biological variables that are relevant to health and wellbeing (although this approach extends to other fields like welfare, education and justice). This research can yield interesting and also practically relevant findings. It is well-suited to the current evidence-based policy machinery and to the current organisation of university research around publically accountable research outputs with quantifiable impact and demonstrable cash-value. It is less well equipped, however, to grasp the socially constructed aspects of its variables, the subjective dimensions of the experiences involved, or the political dimensions of power/knowledge that are becoming so obvious today. Each of these pressing issues is a blind spot for this research tradition, which is unable to reflexively observe the ways in which its own practice is part of the empirical field it studies<sup>1</sup>. The approach I pursue in this book *is not* psychosocial in this multi-disciplinary sense.

The second development is the consolidation and elaboration of a critical and discursive psychology which presents itself as an alternative to mainstream experimental social psychology. It has been much more effective at grappling with the issues of power/knowledge and reflexivity that escape the ‘factors and variables’ approach. Critical and discursive psychology is important because it maintains engagement with the long tradition of thinking about the relation between society, culture and psychology within social psychology. The weakness of critical psychology is that it is recurrently either pulled back in centripetal fashion towards the disciplinary mainstream (where discourse analysis has become established as simply one more method in the arsenal of social psychological research methods) or otherwise is centrifugally expelled from psychology, where it risks floundering in a post-disciplinary no-man’s land. Although my own background is within critical psychology, the approach I pursue in this book *is not* psychosocial in this predominantly discursive sense. I suggest (in Chapter 6) that the transdisciplinary ambitions of critical discursive social psychology fall short to the extent that they remain caught up within the purely social and cultural sciences and studies (Maiers, 2001, Brown, 1995).

The third development, psychosocial studies, has for the most part (but not exclusively) operated in an inter-disciplinary manner. It has taken existing concepts from psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theory, and has applied them to questions of a broadly sociological nature. Again, this has yielded fruitful and fascinating results, but the results are limited by the reach enabled by concepts and techniques drawn from the discipline (or disciplines) of psychoanalysis. This raises the problem of the disciplinary status of psychoanalysis as a science on its own terms, let alone as a body of knowledge that can be applied to social science subject matter for which it was neither designed nor intended. Often this issue is overplayed, but it continues to haunt even those who see the profound value of psychoanalysis. In calling psychoanalytic psychosocial studies ‘interdisciplinary’ I am not ignoring the fact that the concept of transdisciplinarity is sometimes used by psychosocial scholars. In a recent volume containing the work of psychoanalytically inspired social theorists, for instance, Stephen Frosh (2015, p.1) writes that the book is about ‘bringing together issues that might appear in other disciplinary sites (for instance sociology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, political theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, literary theory)

and rethinking them from the perspective of a psychosocial approach that subverts the distinction between them'. He mentions three reasons for describing the book as transdisciplinary: first that it is a 'meeting ground for other disciplines'; second that it is 'anti-disciplinary' in that it seeks to 'provoke or undermine' these other disciplines; and third that it is nomadic in the sense of 'searching for a systematically critical approach towards the psychosocial subject who belongs everywhere but also, in relation to existing disciplines, can be found nowhere at all'. These certainly are moves in a transdisciplinary direction. But this is rare, and even here more detailed work needs to be done if we are to avoid the romanticism of mere freedom from discipline. Transdisciplinarity means more than merely being 'free to roam', as if our preferred theories were like some rogue male elephant 'inserting itself like a foreign entity within an otherwise homogenous field' (Baraitser, 2015, quoted by Frosh, 2015, p. 3).

### **The paradox of the psychosocial**

Any 'thinking together' of the psychological and the social must confront a paradox which Johanna Motzkau (2009) has called *the paradox of the psychosocial*. In her research on the history of the concept of suggestibility within psychology she found a paradoxical tension. On the one hand, suggestibility was viewed by early psychologists like William McDougal as an irrational expression of manipulability. Suggestible minds accept propositions from others as true despite lack of evidence. Instead of living in the real world, suggestible people 'fabulate' things that do not exist, and what they tell us cannot be trusted. They get lost in their own imaginings, and are too influenced by what other people say, do, and want. But on the other hand, these same psychologists could see that a capacity for suggestibility was something to be celebrated as the fundamental characteristic of human mentality and human nature. Our suggestibility is what makes learning, affection, socialization and social cohesion possible at all. As with the comparable theme of imitation (see Blackman, 2008), the suggestible self is inherently a social self that takes its cue from another, and yet it is only through such socialization that something like an 'individual', capable of rationally checking the evidence supporting the propositions s/he entertains, can ever emerge. The paradox is expressed in the fact that a child, for example, might be

praised for being sensitively open to learning, for identifying with a teacher, for modeling herself on a parent, and yet, in another context (a court of law, perhaps), their testimony might be condemned as a function of this very impressionability. Brian, whose life is charted by Monty Python (1979), grapples with the paradox when he shouts to the gathering crowd ‘you’re all individuals!’, ‘you’re all different!’, to which the crowd respond in unison: ‘yes, we’re all individuals, we’re all different’, except for one voice which alone pipes up: ‘I’m not’.

Motzkau found that the paradox of the psychosocial extends to the knowledge practices of those same psychologists, infecting their own truth claims with unreliability (see also Brown et al, 2005). For Charcot (1887), suggestibility was a symptom of hysteria which he used in his practice of hypnosis to treat patients, but this methodology was notoriously difficult to control. Freud abandoned suggestion as a therapeutic technique just one year after celebrating it in the publication of *Aetiology of hysteria* (1896). He now deemed it impure and this was associated with his renunciation of his previous seduction theory (see Chertok & Stengers, 1992). In effect, Freud no longer felt that his theory was factual, but that it was the result of his own suggestibility to the suggestions his patients had made about their own childhood sexual victimization. He now felt that these experiences of his patients in turn may not have been real, but may have been the fabricated product of suggestibility. In this way, suggestibility acts like an infection which unravels any claims to truthful description as it spreads. Freud, under the influence of what turned out to be mere suggestions from Charcot, allowed the suggestions of his allegedly suggestible patients to disarm his rational faculties and render him suggestible. Things were not improved when psychologists responded by insisting upon the use of rigorous objective scientific experimentation to study suggestibility. Clark Hull (1933, p.403), for example, abandoned his research programme into suggestibility after a careful and subtle analysis of its limits, and issued the warning that: ‘to enter seriously on a program of investigation in this field is a little like tempting fate; it is almost to court scientific disaster. Small wonder that orthodox scientists have usually avoided the subject!’ Those who ignored this warning have fared no better. The following example from Motzkau (2009, p.11) is worth quoting in full:

A study by Erdmann (2001) provides a good example for the ambiguity emerging around suggestibility. Taking its cue directly from the high profile miscarriages of justice, this study aimed to examine whether it was possible to implant entirely fictitious memories, ‘false events’, into children by repeatedly interviewing them about such false events in a suggestive manner. 67 primary school children were submitted to 4 interviews, each time prompting them to report four specific events from their past. Two of the prompts referred to true events, but the other two prompts hinted at ‘false events’ that had been invented specifically by researchers and parents for each child. While successfully demonstrating that in a final fifth interview an impressive 58% of the children delivered detailed accounts of false events, the experiment also produced a peculiar side effect: With some children the narratives of false events had grown so detailed, that the researchers suspected the ‘false memory’ cues might have elicited true memories of real events. To clarify the researchers sought confirmation from the parents. Remarkably, even though parents had initially assisted inventing these ‘false events’, when confronted with their children’s narratives some parents now said they also remembered the events, and others were unable to disconfirm, leaving the matter unresolved. Either these narratives did refer to true memories (possibly ‘recovered’), or the accounts of ‘false memories’ had been enriched with an unknown amount of details from real events, or, after all, parents and researchers had fallen suggestible to the result of their own suggestions, now believing that the ‘false events’, they had implanted, truly were memories of real events.

Motzkau (2009, p.173) elegantly sums up the paradox of the psychosocial in its two aspects:

The first is expressed in the question: ‘how do we “know”, how can we trust our knowledge, or indeed memory, while continuously having to express and perform this knowing and thus re-assessing its origin and value in relation to ourselves and others?’

The second is expressed in the question: ‘how can we relate while also being separate?’

In articulating this account Motzkau draws upon my own studies of the paradoxical emergence and nature of psychology, both as a subject matter (Stenner, 2004), and as a discipline (Stenner & Taylor, 2008, Brown & Stenner, 2009). Stenner & Taylor (2008, p.418) described the emergence of psychology alongside the social sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and pointed out how ‘psychic’ and ‘social’ came to be institutionally cleaved apart by being lodged within separate specialisms (sociology, economics, etc. dealing with social relations and structures in abstraction from questions of psychology, and psychology dealing with the ‘internal’ processes of individuals abstracted from their concrete historical and social milieu). Each thus deals with a fiction, but any awareness of this hole-in-the-heart of each discipline can be made good by pointing to the other discipline whose role it is to supply the missing piece (the *folie à deux* of sociology and psychology). This cleavage is paradoxical since the social issues that these disciplines were largely designed to address centred around the problem of *securing the viability of the social order through the regulation of the wellbeing of welfare subjects*. Within this nexus of social problems the ‘psychological’ and the ‘social’ are evidently inextricably mixed. The ‘grounding paradox’ is thus that these disciplines ‘came into being as a result of this *relation* between “society” and “subject”, but in functionally specializing each on just one side of this relation, they served to obscure the very relation that called them into being’. Disciplines, in short, emerged as distinct in order to manage problems which arose from their inseparability.

Dealing with the ‘how do we “know” aspect, Brown and Stenner (2009, p.18) described the *foundational paradox* of psychology in terms of the fact that psychology’s subject matter (the psychological) is precisely the ‘lack’ whose ‘exclusion constitutes the unity of scientific truth’. If the power of modern natural science lay in its ability to exclude the ‘inner’ or mentality from consideration, and to observe things purely from the outside, then a paradox is confronted by those who wish to study subjectivity objectively. This paradox was managed (and in fact mismanaged) by practically excluding questions of subjectivity and experience from the remit of psychology (much as Hull discarded suggestibility). Early in the 20<sup>th</sup>

Century, the concern with experience that had been central to founders like Dilthey, Brentano, Fechner and William James was chased out in favour of a fully objective subject matter (behaviour) to be studied only with experimental techniques modelled on natural science. This was superseded after the second world war by a cognitivism - modelled on the newly viable digital computer with its data and programmes - that was no less objectivist and experimental. This in turn was challenged at the end of the twentieth century as a result of technologies that gave new life to neuroscience, no less objective.

These points are not just entertaining intellectual mind games. The point in both cases is that real phenomena – in this case real institutionally located, materially organised, tangibly describable academic disciplines - *emerge* into concreteness in response to, and in the face of, their paradoxes. As suggested above, the various ‘paradigm shifts’ through which psychology as a discipline has mutated, for instance, are real emergent responses to its foundational paradox. As I am using it (inspired by the ‘pragmatic paradoxes’ of Watzlawick, et al, 1967), paradox is not a mere logical conundrum but a practical circumstance in which it becomes impossible to ‘go on’ because one is faced with (at least) two internally coherent and yet mutually contradictory alternatives, each presenting itself as an injunction. Paradox thus poses a challenge concerning ‘how to go on’, and for this reason it is associated with the paralysis of process: with processes getting ‘stuck’ and grinding to a halt. But life, as they say, ‘must go on’. This means that, precisely because of the obstacle it presents to ‘going on’, paradox is also associated with a theme at the core of this book, namely, *emergence: the creative invention of new ways of going on* (see Greco & Stenner, 2017 and Motzkau & Clinch, 2017). Could it be that the emergence of novelty or ‘pattern shift’ is always associated with some form of *de-paradoxification*?

The examples of the paradox of the psychosocial described above concern the socio-cultural question of the emergence and the mutations of psychology considered as a discipline, but I stated that the same principles might also apply to its subject matter (and to much more since the principles are, indeed, ‘transdisciplinary’). Take the evolutionary emergence of basic forms of consciousness, for example. To understand this, I suggest that it is equally necessary to attend to spaces of transformation in which ‘de-paradoxifying’ solutions are invented to negotiate ‘evolutionary problems

of system perpetuation that can be grasped as paradoxes' (Stenner, 2005). From this perspective, the paradox that consciousness resolved might be summed up by the question: how can an organism know what is unknowable? Up to a point in their evolutionary history, organisms could function adequately (survive and thrive) purely on the basis of 'knowledge' that had been encoded in advance into their genome. Problems of reproduction, of nutrition, and other vital issues for maintaining equilibrium could be solved automatically, as it were. Since the blood 'knows' how to clot and the digestive system 'knows' how to process food, the organism does not require a conscious 'report' which reflects this 'knowledge' back to itself. But:

'a conscious report like an experience of pain or hunger is precisely required when such genetically wired-in information is unable to solve a vital problem... This situation occurs whenever the 'knowledge' requirements of the organism cannot be preempted. Where is the food? Where and when will I be hurt? In such cases a paradox ensues. It can be expressed as follows: information *must* be wired-in that *cannot* be wired-in. I must know what I cannot know' (Stenner, 2005, p. 67).

Organisms that have faced this kind of paradox have 'deparadoxified' it through the evolution of the amazing capacity of sending themselves a conscious 'report'. The report is sent in the form of what Tomkins (1963) called a drive signal which is consciously 'received' – as a feeling of pain, hunger, thirst, etc - by that same organism (thanks to the recruitment of suitably developed brain processes). This signal, as it were, 'beats on the door' of the emergent system of consciousness until the organism 'is goaded into some activity which will meet the body's needs' (Tomkins, 1963, p. 31). Such a paradox becomes actual (and presses its demand) only when an organism becomes sufficiently complex and mobile that the old ('hard-wired') method will no longer suffice. A second example is the emergence of symbolic communication, whose grounding paradox is the necessity to 'share what cannot be shared' (Stenner, 2005, p. 70). Communication, following insights from Luhmann (1995), is a solution to the paradox of the impossibility of individual consciousnesses ever directly experiencing one another. Despite the fundamental isomorphism of the brains of different human beings, we can never *directly* feel one another's pain or experience one another's joy. The operations of my subjective life,

being dependent upon neural processes, have no way of connecting directly with the operations of other conscious beings. Consciousness is first of all and last of all *mine*. Symbolic expression allows us to share what cannot be shared (once what is 'mine' is transformed into shared symbols). In proposing that consciousness de-paradoxifies organic life and that communication in turn de-paradoxifies consciousness, I am pointing to real forms of process which, although we take them for granted, at a certain point *emerged as novelties* through a paradoxical space of transformation.

Returning to Motzkau's paradox of the psychosocial, from my perspective, its second aspect can be expressed in the following generic way: we both must and cannot separate the psychological from the social because they both are and are not separable. On the one side, it is clear that our psychological functioning – our experience, our subjectivity - *is* social. This has been practically axiomatic for most social psychologists since G. H. Mead's (1932/1980) demonstration of the social origins of the self based on Cooley's arguments for the 'looking glass self'. Think of Freud's (1922) powerful statement at the beginning of *Group Psychology*. All psychology, he asserts, is social to the extent that in 'the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent.' For Freud, this makes any distinction between Individual Psychology and Social Psychology rather arbitrary and problematic. The psychological and the social are part of a seamless and immanent unity. We are born into a pre-existing social world as social beings and that is how we die. We cannot be separate from others, especially when alone.

And yet - to turn to the other side - between ourselves and others lies a gulf we can never quite bridge. If I am to feel your pain, the pain of my intimate partner - let alone the suffering of the tens of thousands of people living right now in war-torn disaster zones throughout the world - I must empathise, or make an imaginative leap. This leap is the source of illusion, but it is also the means by which we expand our powers to affect and be affected by the world. Since our nervous systems are not connected, it is the easiest thing in the world for me to fail to even notice your pain, and even if I do notice, plenty of people are capable of extracting great enjoyment from the pain of others. Faced with suffering from global inequalities to local traumas, we prefer to get on with the much more personally important task of watching the latest episode from

our favourite TV series. In this sense - which William James (1900/2009) referred to as a 'certain blindness in human beings' - we cannot but be separate from others. No matter how much I experience the other out there as my model, my helper, my opponent, that other remains a part of my mental life. From this side of the paradox, the problem is that I am stuck with and within the limits of my own experience, limited to whatever I can grasp from my own perspective. My friends and rivals are a figment of my lack of imagination (Greco, 2017). So, our psychological experience *is* social, and yet, at the same time, and despite the impossibility of not communicating, we can never quite communicate. We must always struggle to get beyond ourselves, as it were, and to experience ourselves as a genuine part of the bigger picture to which we already, in a certain sense, belong (if only we knew it).

We both must and do separate the psychic from the social, but also we cannot and ought not to separate them. Thinkers within psychosocial studies have had a lengthy and heated debate over the seemingly minor and insoluble question of whether or not there should be a hyphen in the word psycho-social. For some, the hyphen expresses the difference at play between the two terms, whilst others argue that removing the hyphen better expresses the unity. For me, this debate is symptomatic of the paradox of the psychosocial. If we fail to recognise this paradox, we are paralysed by it. It sweeps us up and we end up going round in circles, as if we were swimming in a whirlpool, always being drawn back to this unanswerable question. But in the approach I am proposing, we don't need to think of the paradox of the psychosocial as a purely logical conundrum of dry theoretical interest, or as a reason for despairing of the very possibility of psychosocial studies and social psychology. We can approach it more empirically and ask more concretely: where and when do we encounter something like the paradox of the psychosocial? That is to say, where and when do we encounter something like a paradoxical and volatile space/time in which the distinction between psychic and social or inner and outer dissolves and transforms from the clarity of an either / or into the indistinction of a both / and combined with a neither / nor? And further, how do we either resolve it, or fail to resolve it and remain paralysed?

## **The liminal**

The answer this book offers to my question about where and when we encounter, and where and when we resolve, the paradox of the psychosocial is that we encounter it in liminal experiences, or to put it slightly differently, experiences of liminality. Liminal experiences are experiences that happen during occasions of significant transition, passage or disruption. These are experiences that Deleuze & Guattari (1980) might refer to as *becomings*. This book aims to put such experiences squarely on the agenda of psychosocial studies, social psychology and any other field which deals with the psycho/social interface. We experience liminality when the forms of process (socio-psycho-organico-physical) that usually sustain, enable and compose our lives are, for some reason, disrupted, interrupted, transformed or suspended. Although the distinction is never so clear in reality, an analytic distinction is here being drawn between experience during stable, predictable and normative times, on the one hand, and liminal occasions, on the other (Turner, 1967 calls the stable side of the distinction ‘structure’, and the liminal side ‘anti-structure’). To bring out the processual aspect of Turner’s concept of ‘structure’ (which can easily be misunderstood as ‘structuralist’), the ‘stable’ side of this distinction is pursued at length in Chapter 5 using Schutz’s concept of ‘everyday life’ with its emphasis on predictable practices and pragmatic routines. A structure will thus be redefined as a *form of process*. The ‘liminal’ side of the distinction I divide into *spontaneous* liminal experiences (which are events that befall us or that *happen to us*) and *devised* or *fabulated* liminal experiences (which are performative events which we ‘do to ourselves’ in the sense that we artfully contrive the liminal experience). This latter distinction builds upon and modifies Turner’s (1982) distinction between ‘staged’ and ‘unstaged’ liminality (see especially Szakolczai, 2009). I will return to this second distinction in the following section.

The best-known examples of liminal experiences of transition or passage are the *rites de passage* first identified by van Gennep (1909/1960) in his classic anthropological text (discussed in Chapter 2 and then in further detail in Chapter 5). Most people are familiar with the idea of rites of passage, such as those from childhood to adulthood, from pregnancy to childbirth, from single status to married status and so on. Van Gennep showed that these tend to begin with rites of separation and end with rites of incorporation whereby a new status is ritualistically adopted. But between these two

phases we find a liminal phase concerned purely with transition or passage. If the occasion is an initiation into adulthood, in the liminal phase the passengers are neither adults nor children but are immersed in a paradoxical logic that is *both* ‘both / and’ and ‘neither / nor’ (Kofoed & Stenner, 2017) - a logic of the ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1967). In addition to this both ‘both / and’ / and ‘neither / nor’ logic, liminal occasions tend to be highly affective in nature because they are *formative* moments of great significance: leaps into the unknown. However, if we are likely to encounter the paradox of the psychosocial during liminal experiences, then this is also because these occasions have a double function. On the one hand, they are precisely about *undoing* the ties that bind a given person into a given social position and form of social process (during the ‘pre-liminal’ rites of separation) and, on the other hand, they are about binding new connections between that person and the social position and form of social process they are in process of joining (during the ‘post-liminal’ rites of incorporation). The liminal phase of this process is an occasion during which the expectations and rules which normally lend structure and predictability to the practices of daily social life are temporarily suspended. This suspension of social order is usually temporary in that it facilitates the possibility of transition to a different form of order. Liminal occasions are thus a little like those railway rotunda where trains can be redirected into new directions, or perhaps, to use a biological metaphor, a little like stem cells that have the potential to become any sort of cell, but are – for a moment – existing in a state of as-yet-unactualized potentiality. For those who like games, liminal occasions are like the joker in a pack of cards, or like a blank domino: they have the potential to take on any value depending upon circumstances. To use one more metaphor, liminal occasions are moments during which solid psychosocial structures melt down into liquids, the better to be reformed into a new pattern.

Although rites of passage are, as it were, the home territory of liminal experience (this is where the concept of the liminal originated), this book explores the idea that liminal experiences go far beyond ritual contexts, and have much broader, transdisciplinary, applicability (Stenner & Moreno, 2013; Stenner, 2015, 2016, 2017; Stenner, Greco & Motzkau, 2017). In fact, most scholars and scientists who are sensitive to experience and who think in a processual manner will have crafted a concept that is in some ways functionally equivalent to liminality. Examples are given throughout the book,

including Deleuze (Chapter 2), Langer (Chapter 3), James (Chapter 4), Schutz (Chapter 5) and Whitehead (Chapter 6). Here I will provide two further examples of comparable concepts and modes of thought, one from Winnicott and one from Mead. These are designed to illustrate the point that liminality (or its equivalent) is not simply about experience which is somehow marginal, but, crucially, about *emergence* in the sense of the *becoming* of new processes, forms, structures, patterns, experiences and entities that were previously not present.

#### *D. W. Winnicott: liminal transition to selfhood*

I discuss Winnicott here because he deals with the becoming of the very distinction between self and world and self and other. This forces us to confront the crucial fact that we cannot start with ‘the self’ but must explain its emergence. The ‘self’ is not first of all the subject of experience but the *effect* or *result* of experience. It is what the process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1985) calls a ‘superject’. This of course raises one of our paradoxes. How can what is not yet a self become a self? And yet, paradoxical though it seems, this miracle of the emergence of a self is something each of us had to go through and something that is gone through every day by millions of infants. It is also not a once-and-for-all event, but a process, and it is a process that some of us may revisit (in a new way of course) even as adults. Winnicott shows us, or at least gives us profound insights into, how the self emerges from a liminal zone of indistinction.

First, in his famous article on transitional phenomena and objects, Winnicott (1953) argues that our usual statement of human nature is inadequate. This usual statement is based on an outer and an inner perspective. The first, and most obvious, statement is in terms of interpersonal relationships. These relationships can be observed from the outside: this person, for example, is born into this family in this town in this country, they have these friends, these colleagues and they engage in these activities, etc. etc. This observation is from the perspective of a fully formed, clear and rational external observer. But also, a statement can be made from, as it were, the internal perspective of this person themselves. Winnicott emphasises that this ‘internal’ statement can only be made to the extent that the person has ‘reached the stage of being a unit with a

limiting membrane and an outside and an inside, it can be said that there is an *inner reality* to that individual, an inner world that can be rich or poor and that can be at peace or in a state of war' (Winnicott, 1953, p.3). It is important to Winnicott that the 'inside' perspective (the experience from the point of view of the one having it) is understood to be an achievement and not a given. You might observe that these two statements (the outer and the inner) are at play in the paradox of the psychosocial. This is because the objective statement in terms of interpersonal relationships can at times be contrasted with the internal statement from the perspective of a given person (recall the idea that there is 'a certain blindness' whereby we can easily fail to appreciate factors in our life that are perfectly evident to an external observer). I may, for example, fail to grasp, from my internal perspective the social relations I am actually part of when judged from an external perspective. In fact, during liminal circumstances, that inner/outer distinction is quite likely to falter and break down.

Because Winnicott finds this double statement (outer and inner perspectives) inadequate, however, he adds a third perspective, and this is the crucial one: 'the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore' (p.3). This third part he describes as an 'intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute'. He describes it as a *resting-place*. It is both inner and outer, and yet it is also neither inner nor outer. It is a zone in which the usual requirements and demands for a clear separation of 'inner' and 'outer' are temporarily suspended: 'It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott, 1953, p.3). It is an 'intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived' (p.4). This, it seems to me, is a classic description of liminality.

Of course Winnicott articulated this theory for a specific purpose. He wanted to understand the role of what he called 'transitional objects' in infant development. Like many before him, Winnicott had observed that very often in the life of an infant (usually between 4 and 12 months old), some entity – perhaps a bundle of wool, the corner of a blanket, or even a word or a mannerism – becomes vitally important to them, such that they become anxious, or cannot sleep, without this 'transitional object'. For Winnicott the interesting question here is the process through which an

infant comes to grasp that an object can exist ‘outside’ herself, as it were. He posits a transition from thumb-sucking fist-in-mouth, breast-in-mouth activities, on the one hand, to an attachment to a teddy or some other object recognised to be ‘outside’, on the other (note that the teddy is *not* the transition object, as is commonly [mis]understood, but the terminus of a transition that begins with the thumb). Winnicott speculates that at first, for example, the infant does not experience itself as separate from its caregiver, but will come to do so through a transitional process. The transitional object facilitates and enables this passage through which the infant comes to distinguish itself as ‘me’ from an object which is ‘not-me’.

Understood in this way, the significance of the object being the corner of the blanket or the bundle of wool (or some such) is that it is *indeterminate* as to being internal to the infant or an external object. It is neither thumb nor teddy bear. From the perspective of the infant it is familiar and handy like a thumb (the blanket might find its way into the mouth along with the thumb), and yet holds the potential to be uncannily alien. It is betwixt and between the thumb (internal) and the teddy bear (external): neither and both self and other. Because of these features, the transitional object serves to occasion the infant’s very first ‘not-me’ experience: it ushers into being the first *possession*. This, for Winnicott, explains the enduring affection the child will feel for it: it ‘goes on being important’ (Winnicott, 1953, p. 5). The tiny infant may even invent a basic word for it. The transitional object is a basic *symbol*, but it would be wrong to say that it symbolizes, let’s say, the breast. Equally important to its symbolism (for the infant) is *that it is not the breast*. For the infant, the transitional object is a symbol for itself as an external actuality no longer confusable with the breast-in-mouth indiscriminate unity (Chapter 3 develops the important topic of symbolism in more detail). It is obviously not the object itself (the bit of wool for instance) that is a transitional object. For us adults – who, to the extent that we are not ourselves in a liminal situation, see all this from an outside perspective - it is a bit of wool. It is a transitional object only if it functions as such for *that* infant at *that* time. It is a transitional object, in short, only when assembled as part of Winnicott’s third, intermediate zone of experience. This third zone is not just evidently liminal, it even has the quality of a proto-rite of passage, supervised by the caregiver who (it is hoped) does not challenge but lovingly facilitates and mediates the transition like a master or mistress of ceremonies. Winnicott invokes initiation

himself when he writes that in infancy ‘this intermediate area is necessary for the initiation of a relationship between the child and the world’ (Winnicott, 1953, p. 7). We might think of this as a proto-rite-of-passage: the first of many transformations that presuppose and build upon its success, or at least its adequacy.

Furthermore, Winnicott (1953, p.4) describes this third, intermediate zone with its suspension of the usual demands as ‘the substance of illusion’. To understand why we must recognise that Winnicott’s ‘third area’ is not simply created *by* the infant, although the infant contributes a great deal. We might just as well say that it is a social space/time created *for* the infant by the caregiver, and in this sense it is a mixture of a spontaneous experience and a devised experience. But it is created in such a way that the infant is given what Winnicott calls ‘the illusion’ that they are in control of the business of satisfying their own desires: ‘The mother's [sic] adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create’. This is what he means by describing it as a ‘resting place’ and ‘an area that is not challenged’. The paradox of the psychosocial is maximally alive here since it is genuinely unclear (and *made* unclear) whether self comes from other or other from self. The ‘unchallenging’ nature of the zone is the product of a tacit agreement that this kind of question *will not be asked* and hence this kind of problem will *be suspended*:

The transitional object and the transitional phenomena start each human being off with what will always be important for them. i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged. *Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: “Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?” The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated’* (Winnicott, 1953, p.17, emphasis in original)

Hence although the third zone is the substance of illusion, far from dismissing illusion, Winnicott sees in it something fundamental to human subjectivity and, importantly, to human culture. First, it is fundamental to social being. Winnicott hints, not just that it is possible to share with others a certain ‘respect’ for this *illusory*

*experience*, but, more emphatically, that collecting together as a group around such experience is the ‘natural root of grouping among human beings’ (Winnicott, 1953, p.4). As we shall see in Chapter 2 and pursue in greater depth in Chapter 5, a certain liminal process of fabulation is indeed core to the religious experiences and expressions that have served – for better or worse – throughout history as a principle for the collection of human collectives (and hence concern the emergence of new principles of collectivity). Second, Winnicott’s liminal zone is fundamental to the creativity at play in the arts and the work of the creative intellect. The intermediate zone does not just constitute ‘the greater part of the infant’s experience’, but is retained throughout life ‘in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work’ (Winnicott, 1953, p.19). This book will pursue the liminal origins of these spheres of art, religion, imagination and creative thought, and make the case that they should not just be core to psychosocial research, but should be given more value and care within our societies.

### *G.H. Mead: sociality as liminal passage*

The second thinker to consider in this light is G.H. Mead (1932/1980), whose work I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Mead is well known for his social theory of self, but his process philosophy of emergence remains almost unnoticed, despite underpinning his social psychology. As part of that process theory he defines sociality in a distinctively original way as the capacity of being several things at once. This definition is directly tied to his concept of emergence, or what he calls the emergent event. An emergent event, at the moment of its emergence, is inherently unpredictable: it is that which is qualitatively different from its past. Life, for example, is qualitatively distinct from physical processes, and yet it emerged from them. Consciousness is qualitatively distinct from the organic processes of life from which it in turn emerges. But more mundanely, when a new idea arises for a person, this may qualitatively change the pattern and manner of their thinking and give them a whole new perspective of life. Or when a new cultural form emerges (as when writing was invented, or when something like a theatre was conceived and enacted), this has transformative effects throughout the society, and within the psychology of each of its

members. The emergent, for Mead, is not just ontologically real, it is the very seat of reality, since the emergent defines the locus of present existence. Any past, and any future, can only be the past and future *of* an emergent present. Building on these components, it is Mead's concept of sociality that can be considered a functional equivalent to liminality. Decades before Victor Turner (1967) famously used the phrase 'betwixt and between' to characterize liminality, Mead emphatically defines sociality as a phase betwixt and between a reality (an 'ordered universe') that is 'no longer', and a new reality in process of emergence that is 'not yet':

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

Here, Mead identifies sociality itself with a phase of adjustment during a *passage* from a system that is now in the past, to a system in process of formation. The passage is instigated by the advent of an emergent event. Mead stresses the 'reality' both of the 'emergent event' and of the subsequent 'phase of adjustment' betwixt and between the old system and the new. In emphasizing sociality-as-passage, he draws our attention precisely to the event of transformation *as it is happening* and that means *before the new order has settled*. When the phase of adjustment is completed, and the new system has 'come to terms' with the emergent event, then we are no longer dealing with sociality as Mead here defines it. We are dealing instead with a much more familiar definition of sociality that we might call sociality-as-system as distinct from sociality-as-passage. Sociality-as-system is basically the idea that the nature of a given entity is determined by the nature of other entities belonging *within* the same system. It is limited to just one level of reality. It necessarily ignores the process of emergence itself. Mead's statement that 'sociality is the capacity of being several things at once' (Mead, 1932/1980, p.49) thus relates to the situation in which a

novel event must exist for a time in a liminal condition when it is simultaneously part of the old order from which it emerged, and the new order heralded by its advent. The key to this dimension of sociality is temporal, because an entity can be in two divergent systems only in passage.

It is on this basis Mead build's his famous account of the social emergence of self as the distinctive characteristic of human sociality. As he puts it: 'The self by its reflexive form announces itself as a conscious organism which is what it is only so far as it can pass from its own system into those of others, and can thus, in passing, occupy both its own system and that into which it is passing' (Mead, 1932/1980, p. 83). This 'betwixt and between' status of passage makes the self inherently paradoxical. It means, to quote Mead again, that we 'must be others if we are to be ourselves' (p. 194). By definition, then, the human self cannot be shut up in its own world or isolated within an instant of time. It must belong, not just to a systemic sociality, but to a liminal sociality-of-passage between at least two different social systems. Here we can recognize Mead's (1932/1980, p. 83) famous discovery that the self emerges only when an 'individual finds itself taking the attitude of another while still occupying its own'. It is precisely this capacity for role-taking that allows individuals to participate in the social process common to the collective. The on-going reality and form of social worlds depends upon the perspective taking of social actors. The finely differentiated social structure of a society can 'get into' each individual only 'in so far as he can take the parts of others while he is taking his own part' (p. 87). Self and society thus presuppose each other because the meaningful social acts that compose the activities of a complex human collective could not be coordinated but for the emergence of human selves.

### **Liminal affective technologies**

I have sketched the paradox of the psychosocial and related it to liminal experience, and I have introduced a broadened concept of the liminal that places emphasis on questions of transformation and emergence. I can now return to the two forms of liminal experience distinguished above (spontaneous and devised), and summarise how they are put to work in this book. First, spontaneous liminal experience is

basically experience in the face of transformations that *happen* to us and that throw us, as it were, into an unpredictable, ambivalent and volatile situation and condition. I have stressed that this is an analytical distinction and recognise that, in practice, things never quite just ‘happen’, and psychosocial order perhaps never completely collapses. What is profoundly transformative for one person might be routine daily-life of another. But the point remains that individuals and whole communities can find themselves thrust into the chaos of circumstances in which the usual order of things is disturbed, ruptured, shocked or destroyed, and these events can vary from collectively experienced floods, earthquakes and riots to more local phenomena like divorces, job-losses and significant deaths. Such are the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. These are experiences in the true sense of the word: they are things we must *go through*. They are also things that mark and transform us: we are different when we come out the ‘other side’.

The rituals of *rites de passage* provide a good example of experiences of liminality that are devised or artfully created. We might say that these rituals ceremonialise important events of passage in the life of a community and the individuals that compose it. But their function is not just decorative, because the various activities that compose a ritual serve also to *generate* emotional experience conducive to passage. The activities composing a ritual can vary enormously, but obvious examples include dressing up, wearing masks, dancing, consuming alcohol (and other drugs), playing and listening to music, public speaking, practices designed to humiliate or exalt, physical tests, sexual practices, etc. etc. These activities share the common aim of stimulating those participating into experiences that are somewhat out-of-the-ordinary. The rituals are thus also something we *go through*, and the idea is that rites of passage prepare us for the new phase in our life about to arrive. Rituals can thus be thought of as a kind of technology for producing *moving* experiences that are conducive of psychosocial transformation. I call them ‘liminal affective technologies’. But rites of passage are just one amongst many liminal affective technologies. The thesis I develop in this book is that, at core, the various art forms (including theatre, painting, poetry, music and so forth) can also be considered as liminal affective technologies, and that they share important features with ritual (as do the sports and games, although this side of the argument remains to be fully developed). Ritual can be considered as the primordial liminal affective technology in the sense that it forms

an original matrix from which the others eventually split off and individuate. From the perspective I articulate, each of these culture forms is core to human psychology, since they are about its transformation.

The true value of this distinction between spontaneous and devised liminal occasions, however, is the productivity of the *contrast* it permits: the betwixt and between. The thesis thus extends to the proposition that the devised liminal experience engendered through liminal affective technologies helps us to navigate and manage spontaneous liminality (and perhaps to bring a little of its spontaneity into our daily lives). The spontaneous liminal experiences cry out, as it were, for symbolic expression, precisely because they challenge and transform the taken-for-granted order of daily life, with its exquisitely synchronised but barely noticed network of mutual perspective taking. Spontaneous liminal experiences are *de facto* important and hence *significant*, but they shatter the existing forms of symbolism which were adequate for the past but fail in the face of the newly emergent. New symbolism must be invented where old symbolism fails, and it is my thesis that the liminal affective technologies help us to create that symbolism and to drag it into emergence from the very edge of semantic availability.

Finally, it is important to recognise the relationship between, on the one hand, the liminal experiences that we gather from these portals that puncture and punctuate the cultural crust and, on the other, the world of daily life itself. For every position there is a transition and for every station a relation. To be concerned with process and liminality is to insist that the transitions, borders, gaps, voids, fissures, and movements between states, positions, systems and disciplines are not *nothing* but are crucial zones or space/times in which new forms are created and experimented with: the quick of culture. Between the liminal and the ordinary there is an incessant weaving of the fabric of a living, psychosocial culture. If the reader will permit the distinction, perhaps the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ of the psychosocial are like the pulse of a heart which combines a diastolic expansion with a systolic contraction. The diastolic expansion is the moment of experience, through which the gift of the past flows in, and the systolic contraction is the moment of expression, in which – transformed and objectified in the crucible of subjective aim – that gift is transmitted to future

experience. We are connected one to another, and each to the universe, through this *pulse* of experience.

## **Process thought**

Since process thought is key to the transdisciplinary approach of this book, a brief introduction to it is required (see also Riffert & Weber, 2003). Its premise is that psychosocial existence is not made of ‘stuff’ like building blocks, but of happenings and events in which the many elements that compose our lives are temporarily drawn together. Process thought may well have long roots dating back to Heraclitus, but it acquired new significance during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Thinkers like Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, despite lapses into materialism, introduced an inherent temporal dimension to our understanding of natural and socio-cultural processes when they showed how species and societies alike evolve and transform as part of a dynamic nexus of relational forces. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, their insights and style of thought directly influenced Peirce, James, Bergson and Nietzsche to ‘take time seriously’, to borrow a phrase from G. H. Mead (1932/1980). Each of these figures felt themselves to be on the edge of a conceptual revolution which profoundly challenged the old settlements of Descartes, Locke and Kant, and which re-ignited non-dualistic systems that had been long suppressed (like that of Spinoza). These old settlements had presupposed a Newtonian ontology of irreducible mass particles arranged mechanistically in an essentially unchanging absolute space.

Whitehead’s magnum opus *Process and Reality* (1929/1985) constitutes a key event in the history of process thought because he synthesized and systematized the emergent developments summarised above into a coherent philosophy consistent with new developments in quantum and relativity physics. This gives his thought a rare breadth and potency, and explains his influence across practically all disciplines. But, although his ideas are core to this book, process thought does not begin or end with Whitehead, who was modestly aware of the limitations of his own work as a perspective in the making. *Process and Reality* is an unwieldy mixture of the arcane and the ultra-modern (its old-style metaphysics bristles with neologisms and mathematicisms), and it is, above all, difficult to read. After an initial flowering of

success, the decades after Whitehead's death in 1947 saw a decisive turn against his grand speculative style in preference for a combination of analytical philosophy and techno-scientific positivism. The generalist baton previously associated with metaphysics was taken up instead by science in the form of general systems theory and structuralism, as briefly discussed above with respect to transdisciplinarity.

## **The structure of the book**

Following this first Chapter which has introduced the main themes of the book, Chapter 2 examines a phenomenon that is largely ignored in contemporary literature: fabulation. Fabulation is closely related to imagination, which in turn is classically distinguished from perception (where we are assumed to perceive a reality that is co-present) and memory (where a reality which did exist has now passed). In contrast to memory and perception, imagination conjures a 'fabulous' reality which need neither exist nor have existed. Fabulation is the name given to this process of invention that is implied within imagination. This chapter makes the case that fabulation involves far more than presenting an inadequate or distorted representation of reality. It re-thinks fabulation as a symbolic means through which human beings gain imaginative access to a world in process of constant construction and reconstruction. Understood as a means of conveying insight into unspoken depths of changing social experience, fabulation is revealed to be crucial to human creativity and hence to the actual emergence of novelty. The first section indicates a number of epoch-making historical transformations based on newly developed symbolic resources for, and of, fabulation. Taking us deep into history, it offers a new psychosocial understanding of the transformative significance of ritual, myth, religion and philosophy. A second section traces the roots of this concept with a critical discussion of Bergson's philosophical construction of fabulation as a 'faculty' which is distinct from intuition and which underpins and gives rise to 'static' morality and religion. A third section – influenced by the work of Ronald Bogue - deals with Deleuze's reformulation of Bergson's static versus dynamic dichotomy, and extracts from this a concept of event which is compatible with liminality theory. The final section shows how a new psychosocial concept of fabulation emerges when these resources are rethought using liminality theory.

Chapter 3 builds directly upon the concept of fabulation crafted in Chapter 2. Its strange title is a reference to one of Aesop's fables known as *The dog and his reflection*. The dog in the fable loses its food, but this loss gives it food for thought. A fable, as the word implies, is quite literally the product of fabulation. The chapter uses Aesop's fable as the basis from which to unfold a theoretical account of transformative experience as the crucible for the emergence of novelty. The shocked *uh oh!* that accompanies the loss of the dog's food is the basis for a creative *ah ha!* as the dog enjoys a novel flash of insight by way of this experience of micro-liminality. The chapter grasps this process through a notion of deep symbolism whereby insight is granted into previously unthought depths of felt experience. Resources for this account are found in the work of Susanne Langer (especially her definition of the art object as a perceptible form expressive of feeling, and her distinction between discursive and presentational symbolism), combined with A.N. Whitehead's theory of symbolic reference. From the perspective developed, the fable-qua-art-object can itself be construed as a presentational symbol expressing the feeling of this insight. The fable (which can thereby be construed as a liminal affective technology) affords its readers a devised liminal experience. But that fabulated experience is 'doubled' by the spontaneous liminal experience which haunts it: a *this is not* experience.

Chapter 4 follows Chapter 3 in being structured around the contemplation of an art object from which a number of theoretical distinctions, and indeed the makings of an ontology, are unfurled. In this case the art object is René Magritte's well-known painting called *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. The stable visible form of the painting captures felt insights for a theory of experience richer than that typically considered by social scientists. Usually (outside of psychology and neuroscience) experience is treated in a rather one-dimensional way that is informed by a long-standing bifurcation of nature into a physical world of pure meaningless matter and a mental world of pure matterless meaning. On this assumption, experience is falsely equated with the *conscious* experience of adult humans, and the more primordial modes of experience at large throughout nature are ignored. This black and white picture in which object and subject of experience are cleaved apart gives rise to a *shallow empiricism* which grossly distorts our knowledge. The chapter starts with Foucault's discussion of Magritte's work, from which he extracts his famous distinction between

the seeable and the sayable. Building on this, Magritte's painting is approached as if it were a prism through which the white light of experience can be artificially dispersed into a colour spectrum. Drawing upon the process philosophies of William James and A.N. Whitehead, the spectrum of experience shows up through this prism as four emergent and self-organizing layers or dimensions, each in turn abstracted from the process of its more concrete predecessor. Just as the colour spectrum is mixed in ordinary vision, so in actual experience these layers or dimensions form an inseparable unity. Analytically, however, we can distinguish the dimensions of Power (affect), Image (percept), Proposition (concept) and Enunciation (discourse). The onto-epistemology which follows is called *deep empiricism*.

Chapter 5 examines Alfred Schutz's thought-provoking concept of 'shock experiences'. Schutz is famous as a phenomenological social scientist, but his direct engagement with process thought is less well-known. Drawing upon William James, Schutz distinguishes a number of 'worlds' (including the worlds of dream, play, theatre, painting, humour, religion, etc.) from the world of 'everyday life'. He considers the transition from daily life to each of these worlds to be a shocking experience and in so doing he strangely exaggerates the shock whilst ignoring actual experiences of shock. The main point of the Chapter is that Schutz's multiple worlds can be illuminated by liminality theory. To this end, I provide a detailed analysis of Arnold van Gennep's concept of the liminal. The liminal is tightly connected to the sacred, but to grasp this it is necessary to deconstruct the purified concept of the sacred proposed in the influential tradition of Robertson Smith, and to grasp the sacred experientially as an inherently ambiguous and ambivalent *wavering between worlds*, i.e. as a way of making sense of experiences of liminality. This volatile 'double-worldness' in turn sheds new light on the nature of dream, play, theatre, painting, religion and so on as liminal worlds-between-worlds, and it draws attention to ritual and the arts as liminal affective technologies for fabulating and navigating liminal experience 'betwixt and between' worlds. This allows us to understand culture as a dynamic mixture between the devised liminal experiences typical of Schutz's 'worlds' and spontaneous liminal experiences including actual shocks. Together these contribute a sense of *importance* (the extra-ordinary) to be woven into the *matter of fact* of ordinary practice.

Chapter 6 constitutes an intervention into the so-called ‘affective turn’ that has influenced many within the humanities, the social sciences and beyond. It centres upon a critique of the affect / emotion distinction upon which this turn ‘turns’. The argument is not that one should not draw such a distinction, but that it has been drawn in so many divergent ways that confusion reigns. The Chapter begins with a discussion of Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’, which is used to explicate one key inspiration for a turn to affect: a distinction between ineffable moments and movements, and clearly distinct structures and institutions (‘event’ and ‘structure’). Through his ‘structures of feeling’ concept, I propose that Williams was feeling for a way to theorize the emergence of novel cultural forms when they are on the liminal brink of discursive symbolism, and hence before they have become fully explicit and consciously articulable. The affective turn is itself understandable in this way as a cultural emergence at the edge of semantic availability. In part, the affect/emotion distinction expresses this difference between forming (affect) and formed (emotion) forms. But the affect/emotion distinction also plays out in terms of a difference between an ontological account of feeling (applicable, via Spinoza and Whitehead, to the entirety of nature) and an anthropological account (in which ontological ‘affect’ takes the distinctively anthropological form of ‘emotion’ with its penumbra of vaguely felt atmospheres). In fact, the Chapter notes six other comparable distinctions at play in the literature, and urges caution. Through these arguments, the turn to affect is re-constructed as the cultural emergence – still in process - of a coherent species of transdisciplinary *process thought*. This mode of thought and feeling will be inspired by an ontological concept of affect / feeling as vector of transition, and yet it will be capable of acknowledging both the continuity of ontological affect, and the differences specific to human emotions. In this spirit, the last section deals with a neglected but crucial aspect of human affectivity: liminal affectivity, with its combination of devised and spontaneous aspects.

Chapter 7 concludes the book in 6 main sections. The first section provides a summary of the transdisciplinary approach provided by the book and discusses how it relates to the contemporary situation of knowledge fragmentation, particularly within the ‘anthropological’ domain (understood broadly, in Max Scheler’s sense). The second section articulates how the approach offers a view of human life as liminal in the sense of being constituted by boundaries which are then transcended (this is

related to Simmel's notion of life as transcendence). The third section makes explicit the paradoxical nature of this viewpoint, but summarises the generative aspects of paradox. The fourth and largest section makes explicit a concept of ontological liminality which has informed the approach, and sketches how Whitehead, Mead and Simmel each contribute to this through their rethinking of time. Drawing on the work of William Sewell, the fifth section illustrates how ontological liminality plays out in the anthropological example of the French Revolution. A final section draws together the threads by clarifying the ethos of transdisciplinary theorization informing the book.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Such reflexive self-observation is core to any transdisciplinary practice. As systems theory began to grapple with emergence / process issues, for instance, it developed a 'second order' approach modeled on second order cybernetics (a cybernetics of cybernetics which recognizes that the objects observed as systems are themselves observers). The concern with 'reflexivity' was a similar development amidst social science during the same period. Brown & Stenner (2009), to give a third example, refer to their approach as a psychology of the second order, and one aspect of this is that it is a psychology that seeks also to observe the influence psychological knowledge has upon psychological experience (viewed as an inextricable part of culture).

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