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**Permanent (trickster) liminality:  
The reasons of the heart and of the mind  
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by

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## Liminality: An Introduction

[totalitarianism is] when one arrives, from one desire to another, to a general and permanent mobilisation in the service of nothingness (*néant*)

René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque*

For if the intrusion of the real has disconcerted and incommoded the poetic, that is a mere bagatelle compared to the damage which the poetic would inflict if it ever succeeded in intruding upon the real.

W.H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror: A commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest*

I presume that most people are fairly familiar with the concept, but perhaps it is worthwhile to start with a short overview.

The term 'liminality', developed by anthropologists and for long being marginal even to that discipline, is increasingly used in all areas of the social sciences, on its way to become a master concept. However, in my view it is still far from having reached its full potential, while it is often used in a too limited sense. The term should be considered as being at par in significance and scope with such words like 'institution', 'structure' or 'system' – words which cannot be considered as concepts, as their range of application is practically unlimited. Indeed, in my view it is through 'liminality' that they finally could gain their limitation, and thus proper meaning. I do not suggest at all that liminality should eliminate and replace them – an intention that comes close to defining the 'postmodern' or 'poststructuralist' agenda. Quite on the contrary, it could help to revalorise them by checking their pretence for universality, and thus rendering them again meaningful in a more precise sense.

In my reading the conceptual history of the term has three main steps. The term was introduced in his 1909 classic book by Arnold van Gennep, then a close acquaintance and even friend of Marcel Mauss since their university time, who wrote this book to serve as a cornerstone for social anthropology as well as for sociology. However, due to a bitter confrontation with Durkheim, in which in practically all accounts van Gennep was in the right, but Durkheim wielded academic power, van Gennep, his book and his concept were pushed to the periphery and all but ignored, except in specialised studies dealing with rites of passage.<sup>1</sup> This was a terrible damage, as van Gennep had a range and depth of knowledge that was incomparable greater than Durkheim's, at par with Mauss's – yet, the work had a minimal impact, as compared to the influence exerted by Durkheim. In the second step, the book was picked up, accidentally, by Victor Turner in the mid-1960s, who immediately recognised the relevance of the concept for the project he was engaged in, and so the term started its triumphal run. However, there were two serious shortcomings of Turner's use of the term. First, probably yielding to a professional blackmail, according to which the term should not be used outside the setting of small-scale 'tribal' societies, he claimed that more advanced societies only have 'liminoid', or liminal-like, and not properly liminal situations. Second, he came to assign an almost exclusively positive sense to the term, on the back of the social movements of the 1960s, celebrating ambivalence, flux, uncertainty, creativity and the dismantling of the rigid and ossified structures of the modern world, identified with 'the past' and 'tradition'. The most important innovative aspect of Victor Turner's related contribution concerns his recognising, after he again accidentally picked up a book about Wilhelm

Dilthey, that Dilthey's effort to re-think experience beyond Kant, and in particular to write a fourth, missing critique, of 'historical reason', can be brought to a fruitful completion through the term 'liminality'. The third step was the extension of the concept into the social sciences in general, in sociology inaugurated by Zygmunt Bauman and S.N. Eisenstadt. The term became used with particular emphasis in two recent efforts: the proclamation of a 'performative turn' in the social sciences, associated with the works of Jeffrey Alexander and Bernhard Giesen (2006), and the Yale-Konstanz group in general; and in the people around the journal *International Political Anthropology*.<sup>ii</sup> It is in this latter that the two ideas emerged that will be the main subject matter of my paper. The first is the idea of 'permanent liminality', which I introduced, taking up some cues from Victor Turner, in my *Reflexive Historical Sociology*. The second is by Agnes Horvath who, through her PhD research about the manner in which the Communists gained power in a post-war situation of the collapse of the established order of things discovered a problematic, even negative aspect of the term, and eventually combined it with a number of other anthropologically based concepts like 'imitation', 'schismogenesis' and in particular the 'trickster'. Thus, far from simply celebrating the novelty and creativity offered by liminal situations – an approach that obviously has its own relevance – the term allows to understand the manner in which anguishing situation of uncertainty can emerge; and, in particular, can help us to understand how and why such situations can be explicitly used and even artificially provoked.

My paper will take up these latter points by relating them to the specific purpose of this conference, focusing on the emotional aspects of liminal situations and the possible manner in which stability can be found in them. In particular, and in radical contrast to the Cartesian and Kantian, rationalistic philosophical anthropology, which pretends that the stability in uncertain situations is provided by reasoning, I offer a Pascalian 'fundamental-anthropological' perspective (the term is from Bateson, Huizinga, Hamvas and Bakhtin), focusing on the power offered by the stability of the heart, and identify the purely external, spectator-based rationality, developed by Descartes, Adam Smith and Kant as rendering possible, and even justify or cover up, a trickster-like external manipulation of emotions, by a kind of image-magic that, apart from the concrete power of images, uses rhetorical discourse saturated with verbal images and theatre-like sceneries or settings, of which the supposedly 'rational' but in fact highly theatrical 'public sphere' offers a perfect example, especially through the deployment of mass communications technology, which takes full use of the delicacy of liminal moments, like situations of crisis or transition – or can even outright provoke such crises.

Let me start by introducing the term 'permanent liminality'.

### ***Permanent Liminality: An Unforeseen Complication, or the Batesonian 'Error'***

What is 'permanent liminality', this nuisance and 'error'?<sup>iii</sup> The definition of the term is very simple; and one of the reasons I insist on using this term is because, due to its simplicity, it manages to render intelligible, and jointly, situations that otherwise would be difficult to grasp. Thus, it simply happens when a temporary suspension of, or deviation from, the normal, everyday, taken for granted state of affairs becomes permanent. The point is not about deviating from 'the' norm, understood in a Kantian-universalistic sense, but from whatever people living at a given time and place were taking for granted as normal and ordinary in their lives.

The point can be easily understood through rites of passage. According to van Gennep and Turner, such rites consist of three stages, and the ritual can be suspended as each of these stages (Szokolczai 2000: 212-4). Such suspensions have important

correlates with central concepts of historical and anthropological sociology, like asceticism, disciplinary society, or court society. Moving to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has close affinities with the perception of their times by important social theorists, philosophers or artists, like the idea of Heidegger and Patocka concerning the never-ending wars of the century, captured in a crucial 1976/7 essay title by Jan Patocka, ‘The wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century as war’, published just the moment he was launching Charta 77, one of the most important sources of the East-European dissident movement, and just before he died, of heart attack, after a police interrogation; the films of Luis Bunuel, like *Viridiana*, with its unending ‘beggars’ banquet’, or *The Exterminating Angel*, with its never-ending feast that the participants cannot leave, though all the doors of the building are open; or Gregory Bateson’s studies concerning ‘schismogenesis’ and the ‘double bind’. But it also has its most classical sources. Let me mention here Plato’s concern with *stasis*, considered by him in the *Republic* as the worst illness that can threaten a polity, and which contains in itself the very term ‘static’, but which also involves a kind of permanent, never-ending, pointless movement and expenditure of efforts, which can be best translated as a ‘tug-of-war’.

The central issue with ‘permanent liminality’ is that we move outside the realm of Aristotelian logic, to use another classical term. According to this logic, double negation means affirmation; the end of temporary instability is stability. In a situation of ‘permanent liminality’, however, movement becomes so much accelerated and taken for granted that this is no longer even perceived; thus the idea of change must be impressed upon everybody by an acceleration of change that eventually even the accelerated rate of change is accepted as natural and taken for granted, and this can go on practically without end – at least, in a certain sense, as the limits of human and natural of finitude eventually will make themselves felt.

The concept has fundamental relevance for two central concerns of this workshop, ‘affectivity’ and ‘innovation’. Concerning the former, any liminal situation excites or incites the emotions, whether positively or negatively. Childbirth or death, a vacation or a major examination generate emotional tension in the persons undergoing the change, and all those around them. But it is also important to realise that emotionality is not merely an accompaniment of such changes, being – from the perspective of reason – an ‘irrational’ force that must be placed under control so that the challenge could be rationally handled.<sup>iv</sup> Quite on the contrary, there is no ‘rational’ solution to death, or even birth; life is not a problem that can be solved. The successful response given by human beings to any liminal situation depends on other factors – most importantly the manner in which they can get their act together, which depends much more on a combination of will and emotion than ‘rationality’.

This is the case, and even more so, under conditions of ‘permanent liminality’. But in order to understand what is going on in such a peculiar situation, we need to render evident the nonsensical nature of the very idea of a ‘rational’ solution of a liminal crisis. This, by the way, was clear for Max Weber, this is why he introduced the fateful term ‘charisma’ into political science, for situations that were ‘out of the ordinary’ (*ausseralltägliche*), and thus could not be solved by ‘traditional’ or ‘rational’ means. This is because rationality assumes stable external reference points: laws, norms, institutions and structures, which can be taken as objectively given, offering a measure for human conduct. But a liminal situation of crisis implies exactly the suspension of stability, thus the absence of such points of anchorage. A charismatic leader, in the Weberian sense, is a person who keeps inside such a stable compass, even when the world is collapsing around, and manages to restore normality.

In some way, Weber captures liminality from the opposite end as Turner. For Turner, a liminal situation is carnivalesque fun, the suspension of boring, ossified

structure, an opening up of creativity and play. For Weber, it is crisis, disaster, warfare, conquest, destruction. Of course, the question is whether a concrete real-world liminal situation conforms to the image held by Weber or by Turner; and even here, they may be a difference of opinions. Any revolution has its adherents and dissenters.

The difference of permanent liminality, as compared to any 'ordinary' liminal situation, is double. It concerns the valorisation of the situation and its visibility, and in both counts yields most paradoxical results. Concerning the value of permanent liminality, it is zero; or, if you want, purely negative. A situation of 'permanent liminality', as Plato realised so well in his analysis of *stasis*, brings utter disaster to all parties involved; it consumes their forces, persisting until all their resources are exhausted, leaving nothing but utter devastation. Nobody can really win, as change has become so much accelerated and taken for granted that any effort to tie it down to something stable and accommodating became impossible; indeed, most participants of the situation have long forgotten even the idea of how it was when things were 'stable' and 'normal'. The second, not less disconcerting idea is that the situation is invisible for anybody who is part of the system. Change can only be perceived by somebody who stays fixed. If everybody is part of the same system of movement, then it seems that nobody actually moves. All of us, on the planet, circle around the sun; however, given that we move together with the planet, we do not perceive it, rather consider that it is the sun that is moving around us. Only a complete outsider can see this – a position anthropologists identified with the trickster.

One could argue that the needed stability against the infinite movement of 'permanent liminality' is offered by laws. This is true to some extent, as laws have indeed their solidity. However, since the French Revolution, there is a tendency to replace laws that passed the test of time and were considered as all but eternal with pure conventions, following the genius of Talleyrand (see Calasso, 1983), based on 'popular consent', thus subject to being changed exactly in the direction of following the whimsies of the times, thus becoming less and less reliable as measures versus 'permanent liminality'. Without diminishing the significance of the legal system, we need things that are more stable. We need to reach into more basic anthropological foundations. And it is here that I suggest a turn away from 'reason', a guide considered already by Max Weber as unreliable even for ordinary liminal situations, and look into something which for us seems the exact opposite of reason and as a most unreliable guide, which is the *heart*.

The central argument of my paper is that the most stable part of human nature is not the mind, but the heart. The heart can be our only guide in world turned systematically upside down by permanent liminality. Of course, by 'heart' I do not mean anything anybody would like to do, due to emotions incited by words and images, media and other sources of mass hypnosis. I mean but what it is that lies really at the bottom of the hearts of human beings; something that can and must be gained access to, once the enormous heap of rubbish deposited there is cleared away; and something that, among living beings, can only be accessible by the concrete single individual human being, or the 'person'.

As a guide, I will follow a few ideas of Blaise Pascal.

### **Pascal and the reasons of the heart**

Let me start by admitting that, no matter how much I tried to make use of Pierre Bourdieu's book with the promising – and very authoritative – title *Pascalian Meditations*, so that I could vaunt a prominent predecessor, I failed to find there a single useful idea. Probably for Bourdieu Pascal was only a pretext, or vehicle, for his own ideas – which methodologically, and even ethically, is highly problematic.

Pascal is indeed one of the most difficult as well the least known of the philosophical classics. His ideas about the ‘reasons of the heart’, if known at all, are only considered as a prelude to sentimentalism, or an apology of Christianity. His neglect is often justified by claims that his ideas are pre-Kantian, and therefore belong to the prehistory of philosophy. As we’ll see, it is indeed true that Pascal cannot be understood through Kantian categories. However, it does not mean that Pascal had no idea about the genuine powers of reason. Quite on the contrary, when Pascal took the reasons of the heart more fundamental than the reasons of the mind, arguing that the ideas of Descartes were ‘uncertain’ and ‘futile’ (B76, 78), and claiming that mathematics is simply irrelevant for the understanding of human nature (Force 2003: 228), he knew what he was talking about. Pascal is one of the most important figures of the history of mathematics, the inventor of probability theory; in physics, together with Torricelli he demonstrated, before Newton, the existence of a partial void (Force 2003: 224), in memory of which ‘pascal’ is a standard unit in physics, used to measure internal pressure; and he built a computing machine that is considered a major step towards modern computers, so much so that the first popular structure computer programme, developed around 1970, was simply entitled PASCAL. Thus, ‘[t]here is little doubt that he was one of the great rational minds in history [...] whose powers of concentration on determinate thoughts were extraordinary’ (Desmond 1995: 91). He never repudiated his scientific and mathematical work, and up to his death maintained his belief in the importance of the powers of human mind. His point was simply that the mind through reasoning is incapable to touch upon the really fundamental aspects of human existence. Nothing would have been more ludicrous to him than Kant’s idea according to which the most important anthropological constant, thus foundational for human beings, is their reasoning power.

#### *Reading and misreading Pascal*

If we try to understand the thinking of Pascal, however, we immediately encounter a major puzzle. The problem can be best identified through reading Pascal in translation, and then comparing it to the original. The word by which English translations express the kind of knowledge and certainty provided through the heart, we encounter the word ‘intuition’. This term, however, belongs to the conceptual arsenal of Kant, the French original being a complete different:  *finesse*, and especially  *sentiment*. As ‘sentiment’ is also an English word, with the exact same spelling and today meaning more or less the same as  *sentiment*, or ‘feeling’, we must explore the stakes involved here.

The first point to realise here is that such translation effectively substitutes one of the most important cornerstones of Pascal’s thinking with a concept from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.  *Sentiment* for Pascal means the manner in which the heart operates,  *at its most basic level*. It does not at all mean the fleeting ‘feelings’ a concrete human being might entertain, derived from accidents of life-history and subjective preferences. The argument is that the most basic and stable aspects of our life are based on deep-seated emotional certainties; and that these are  *right* without any need for proof. Pascal offers as convincing examples our sense of space and time, or the certainty whether we dream or are awake, which cannot be proven or disproven by rational discourse, and yet we all know, deep in our heart, what these are – except if we are deranged.

Intuition is a concept of Kant by which identifies almost the exact same kind of conviction, but he locates its source in the mind; even further, in the  *transcendental* mind. This has two central features for our purposes: first, it has no relationship with anything real – the transcendental mind is universal, which also means that it is nowhere, being an abstract entity, which is connected to the purely rational operations of the brain. It is this

fundamental Kantian presupposition that is continued, in various ways, in analytical philosophy, artificial intelligence, neurosciences, and the like. The second is that the mind has nothing to do with feelings; any emotion, thus any activity of the heart, only confuses the delicate operation of the mind, so must be eliminated as much as possible. In this Kantian framework intuition is connected to the highest levels of the operation of the mind; thus, it is the furthest possible away from emotions and the heart. This means that translating *sentiment* by 'intuition' is to reposition Pascal's thinking on the horizon of Kant's, rendering it unintelligible.

Thus, the problem is much deeper than a mere issue with translation. Whether in French or in English, or in any other European languages, we are unable to understand what Pascal meant, as our terminology, even the core of our language has changed since. How could it happen? For understanding this, we need to return to a crucial moment in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century where a tectonic shift happened, within a few years, at the most basic anthropological level of European civilisation. In order to make this change intelligible, we must preface it by a short analysis of the meaning of 'sentiment'.

*The meaning of 'sentiment', or the meaning of meaning*

The root word of English or French 'sentiment', the Latin verb *sentire* 'perceive, feel, know', is by no means a simple equivalent of the current meaning of 'feeling'. This can even be perceived through contemporary languages, where English 'sense' or French *sens* mean a 'reasonable' way of behaving, or simply 'meaning'. Italian *sentire* even today has a broader range of meaning, including 'hearing', but also 'understanding'. The Latin word can be traced to the \*PIE root *sent*, simply meaning 'to go', visible for e.g. in French *sentier*, which means a beaten path.<sup>v</sup> It therefore had a much broader range of meanings, where emotions and reasons were not yet separated, rather connected, and at a fundamental anthropological level. One could argue that, among others as a result of Cartesianism, already in Pascal we have a certain limiting of the meaning of 'reason', which preceded the alteration of the meaning of 'sentiment'. This is visible in the way in which the meanings of the terms 'esprit' and 'raison' seem all but conflated, for us, in Pascal.

The close connection, dialogue or cooperation between the working of the mind and the heart, or between emotion and reason, is not a feature of Indo-European languages alone. The same can be seen in Hungarian, where 'to understand' is *ért*, while 'to feel' is *érez*, both to be traced in the same basic root *ér*, to which a number of related words like *érték* 'value', *érdem* 'merit', *érint* 'touch', or *érett* 'mature' also belong. It can be seen in a particularly clear manner through the way in which 'reason, understanding, meaning' (*értelem*), and 'feeling, sentiment, sensation' (*érzelem*) are all but identical words, differing in one letter only, which in an agglutinating language is not a coincidence, but indicates a point in the development of language where a compact meaning becomes differentiated, just as branches separate from a trunk.<sup>vi</sup>

All this renders evident the particularly problematic character of Kant's insistence that the history of words, and language in general, do not matter, implying that any talk about language is just a piece of sophistry, as this Kantian proviso effectively prevents identifying the peculiar operation he made in altering the meaning of words, hiding his own traces, and offering the blackmail of taking or leaving his work as a whole, otherwise becoming simply 'irrational'.

So what happened in Europe, concerning the meaning of 'sentiment'? For this, we need to shortly review the relevant events of 1755-61, a most significant moment in European history in which – at a particular liminal situation – a certain 'trickster rationality' was set in motion that eventually managed to insinuate itself at the very heart



of European culture, in the sense of rationality as an anthropological constant, as we now understand it, and in a taken for granted manner.

*The Lisbon earthquake and the rise of 'sentimentalism'*

At about 11am on 1 November 1755 a major earthquake shook Lisbon, creating an enormous tsunami of rare proportions. The resulting devastation, including 70000 dead on the spot, many of which were at mass in celebration of All Saints Day, radically shook belief in the ordered harmony of the world, and played an major role in the direction Enlightenment philosophy developed, in particular with Voltaire and Kant. However, its impact was a much broader process of re-thinking foundations, and it is at that level that we can locate a series of path-breaking, foundational works at various levels of culture and thinking, like *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne, often claimed as the first really modern novel, offering revolutionary novelties in its handling of internal time, advancing Bergson; the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* by Adam Smith, foundational for his work in economics; or *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke, central for modern aesthetics, in particular by developing the term 'sublime' on which Kant would base his aesthetics in the third *Critique*, in contrast to the presumably outdated idea of 'beauty'. However, at the same time and in a manner that was profoundly linked to each of the previous, a much less noticed development took place in the world of theatre, the rise of 'bourgeois drama', or 'domestic tragedy'. This genre, having its roots in England in the 1730s and 1740s, thus coinciding with the rise of the modern novel there, with Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, in 1756-57 suddenly became championed at the same time in France by Diderot and in Germany by Lessing, and with astonishing effects.

Two elements in this new genre are central for our purposes. First, the central underlying idea was a new kind of *realism* on stage: instead of the classical division between serious tragedies, about idealised mythical heroes, and lighter comedies, about realistic contemporary types, it offered realistic scenes from concrete everyday life that resembled the life of spectators as close as possible. It thus raised emotion-mongering illusionism to an unprecedented pitch. Second, it developed, systematically, a new perspective on acting, arguing that actors should not 'feel' their roles from the inside, but rather can produce a desired effect on the audience in so far as they are not emotionally involved.<sup>vii</sup>

This new type of theatre had a major impact by generating a movement within European culture that would soon shake it in its foundations, in tandem with Enlightenment rationalism, which was sentimentalism. While broad movements of the spirit usually cannot be tied to a singular time and place, the main moments of this movement can be assigned with quite singular precision: while having antecedents in England, in particular the novels of Samuel Richardson, the breakthrough came after the writings and presentations of Diderot and Lessing: these are, in particular the *New Heloise* and *Emile* of Rousseau (respectively 1761 and 1762); and the novels of Laurence Sterne; a movement that culminated in the truly hysterical reactions provoked, over all of Europe, by the publication in 1774 of Goethe's *Werther*.

I can only indicate a couple of quick points here. First, in order to allude to the connections here, in particular the crucial mediating role of Diderot and Lessing, Burke's aesthetics was immediately read by Lessing and had it translated, thus laying the foundations of Kant's aesthetics; second, Lessing also translated Sterne's *Sentimental Journeys* into English, and in this translation created the very term *empfindsam*, as a translation of 'sentimental' into German, which – together with Lessing's championing of 'pity' as *Teilnehmung* – generated a foundational confusion in modern German between feelings, sympathy, empathy, participation and pity, that never became possible to sort

out. The central point is that the Enlightenment by no means heralds the victory of reason over irrationality, rather wedged a fatal and radically *unreasonable* and untenable gap between rationality and emotionality, a gap that ignores a basic understanding contained at a foundational level in human languages, and thus generated a false and unnatural, distorted understanding concerning what the human being is at its most basic level. Furthermore, there were evidently historical agents who worked on this fracture, and jointly, on both its ends: stimulating ‘pure’ rationality and the accumulation of knowledge as ‘pure’ facts on the one hand, and the explicit, shrewd, even cynical provocation of emotions on the other. It is for such reasons that I consider Diderot and Lessing, not as brave heroes bringing enlightenment to the people, but as par excellent trickster figures who – in the liminal moment that emerged in Europe after the Lisbon earthquake – contributed to the systematic wedging of an absurd and tragic gap between reason and sentiment.

The central impact at the heart of European thinking was a historical reorganisation at the most basic anthropological level, resulting in ‘rationalism’, in the sense we understand today, as the anthropological cornerstone of modern thinking. Understanding Pascal means to situate his thinking outside this horizon, and as a way to move thought beyond the taken for granted horizon of Kantian rationality.

*Understanding Pascal’s ‘reasons of the heart’*

Pascal recognised that the heart and the mind fundamentally complemented each other – none could be reducible to the other, and each performing basic functions that the other could not do on its own (see B1-4, B82).<sup>viii</sup> Even further, each had its own, serious weakness. Reason is weak, being exposed to fantasy, imagination and feelings (B95, 274-5), its most laudable act being the recognition of how many things lie beyond its capacities (B267-8; see Morris 1992: 81). The heart, on the other hand, was easily corruptible, thus it also became weak and unsteady (B801), unjust and unreasonable (B100), and even empty (*creux*) and full of dirt (*plein d’ordure*; B143).

Still, of the two, Pascal assigned a clear primacy to heart (Force 2003: 220, 224-5; Borkenau 1984: 539), and for a series of reasons. To begin with, the heart could make use of reason – according to one of his most famous aphorisms, ‘the heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing about’ (B277); while reason, in its limited sense of reasoning power, cannot rely upon emotions of the heart. Furthermore, the heart even has to do with truth (B100, B949); and not just with any truth but the truth of first principles (B282). This being one of the most famous aphorisms, central for the purposes of this paper, it must be discussed in some detail.

Pascal here argues that we know the truth not only by reason, but just as much (*encore*) by the heart. In particular, it is only through the heart that we gain certainty about certain basic guiding principles about human conduct, like the distinction between sleeping and waking, the perception of space and time, of movement and numbers, which reasoning cannot prove (see also Moriarty 2003: 156-7). In order to overcome this impotence, and guided by its hubris, which according to Pascal is one of the most important, Titanic features of reason,<sup>ix</sup> its acolytes can only try to refute such inner certainties, but they do not succeed, and thus are forced to base their arguments on certainty concerning basic principles that is provided by the heart. This is indeed close to what Kant states about intuition (*Anschauung*) concerning the basic categories of the transcendental mind, yet the difference is fundamental. For Kant, such intuition purely an operation of the mind, or the same organ of reasoning, whose slipperiness Pascal has repeatedly demonstrated. Also, such ‘transcendental mind’ has no rootedness in the human being, thus no solid existence, no material stability whatsoever, while what is

specific to the heart is that it is the joint centre of the life of the body and of the mind – in a manner contained in the Greek term *psuché*, usually translated as soul or spirit, but also meaning breath, and simply life. The aphorism gives again a clear specification how the heart arrives such first principles: ‘le coeur sent’ (that here are three dimensions); ‘Les principes se sentent, les propositions se concluent et le tout avec certitude quoique par différentes voies’. The French original cannot be directly rendered into English, as for us today a direct translating would be that ‘the heart feels’ such principles, or that ‘The principles are being felt’, which would sound meaningless, as sentimentalist. What Pascal meant, however, is that we have immediate internal evidence about such principles, or that – as Nietzsche, who is the philosopher in many ways closest to Pascal according to Eric Voegelin (1999), would say – we gain about them a certainty which requires no proof;<sup>x</sup> and furthermore, that the organ by which we reach such evident knowledge is the same organ that guides our feelings, and also our will-power. In other passages (see especially B3-4, 82, 194-5), Pascal uses two terms that help to better understand his meaning: ‘sens’ (sense) and ‘jugement’ (judgment). These two terms are easy to translate, and together form the term ‘sense of judgment’, which well captures what Pascal is writing about; we should only point it out that the ‘sens’ of a ‘sense of judgment’ is the exact same word that Pascal uses about the heart that ‘sent’ (which, again, cannot be simply translated as ‘feels’). Thus, the central organ of a sense of judgment for Pascal is the heart, on contrast to the ‘intuiting mind’ of Kant.

Pascal’s discussion of the ‘sense of judgment’ located in the heart is contained in a few fragments that were selected as the opening aphorisms of the collection as reconstructed by Brunschvicg. They contrast and distinguish the way the mind and the heart operates, accepting that there are different kinds of ‘right sense’ (*sens droit*), capable of formulating judgements, but gives clear priority to those which that can gain access directly to the first principles, which belongs to sentiments and the realm of the heart. The conclusive fourth fragment of the series formulates this in no uncertain terms: judgement, moral judgement (which can safely ignore *la morale*, by which Pascal means both official philosophy and institutionalised moral, police and legal rule, which are only built upon, thus implicitly even stimulate concupiscence; B453) fundamentally belongs to ‘sentiments’, just as the sciences belong to reason (*esprit*); and only the former can penetrate directly to first principles: ‘Se moquer de la philosophie c’est vraiment philosopher’ (B4), or real philosophy consists in ridiculing philosophising as it was done in his days.<sup>xi</sup>

These first principles are accessible through the heart, as they were deposited there, in times most remote. Here Pascal makes use of the double meaning of ‘principle’, again visible through etymology, as ‘principle’ can be traced back to a Latin term for ‘first’, thus connected to the origins, just as Greek *arché*. These principles are located inside human beings (*sentiment intérieur*), deep in the heart of everyone. They can thus be called as ‘natural’ (B95, B431), and furthermore have some ‘greatness’ (*grandeur*) about them. However, what we today can perceive, reaching to the bottom of our heart, is only what is left of them, due to the corrupt nature of our contemporary position (B435). Here Pascal turns to the forces that in the past and the present manage to undermine one’s *sense* of judgment. They include ridicule, particularly effective against the remains of such noble feelings (*sentiments de grandeur*), dragging them down (B431); imagination and the various forms of entertainment or ‘diversions’ (*divertissement*, again a difficult word to render to English) (B37, 82-6, 125-7, 275; especially B82, a crucial section about imagination), of which Pascal strikingly identifies, as the most pernicious, theatre (B11);<sup>xii</sup> and in particular by nothing else but the powers of reasoning (B6, 95, and especially 274; see also Force 2003: 224-6). This is because our sense of judgment is formed by conversations (B6), and just as a right kind of conversation can form it properly, the

wrong kind of conversations can undermine it. This is why Pascal is so hostile to comedies, which proliferate, as models, through the stage, deprived kinds of dialogues, inciting our passions; and, combining the points about ridicule, conversations and the inciting of passions, we can see how close Pascal was in identifying the close connection between theatricalisation and unconditional, self-founding and self-justifying reasoning. The term often used for this latter phenomenon by Pascal, *raisonnement*, is particularly revealing, as its German translation as *räsonieren*, important for Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?' essay, would be selected as the central mode of proceeding for the 'discursive ethic', set to operate in the 'ideal speech situation' of the public sphere by Habermas.

The conclusion by Pascal is uncompromising: no matter how important the powers of reason can be for human beings who are safely eradicated with their first principles, reason itself cannot apprehend properly such first principles, though – in its hubris – can actually corrupt and destroy those principles, planted in the heart since time immemorial, as it can undermine them through doubting and a search for justification where there is no place for doubting. We can now understand what is wrong, and so desperately wrong, with 'critical thinking' and the 'deliberative democracy' to be waged in a fully open and transparent public sphere.

Reasoning is incapable to guide out of permanent liminality. It even fails to perceive the problem – a problem that it was complicit in bringing about. It can only be sense and resolved by the heart. The last sections of the paper offer a hint about how this was done, and what can we learn from the past – and are in fact starting to re-learn now, after the slumber into which Enlightenment reasoning lulled us.

### **Beyond the schism and back to basics**

Already in offering a sketch about the 'conceptual history' of sentiment, taking cues from Koselleck, I tried to incorporate into the argument fundamental questions related to anthropology and human nature. Here I would like to take up this suggestion by bring three relevant examples, touching upon as basic historical, anthropological and even psychological matters as possible.

#### *Heartbeat in the Chauvet cave*

The discovery of the Chauvet cave was one of the most important events in human understanding in the last century. Yet, even today, it is very little known, and even less reflected upon, by social scientists, though its significance is way greater than anything Kant or Hegel, Durkheim or Bourdieu ever said. The resistance of the virus of Enlightenment progress is tenacious, and the Chauvet cave deals a definite blow at the heart of the idea of linear evolution.

The cave was discovered in December 1994. Due to a landslide, it became completely closed off from the external world about 26000 years ago, and since then only a few small animals managed to enter it. Yet, inside archaeologists discovered some of the most exquisite wall paintings of all times, indeed works of practically unparalleled, haunting beauty, depicted in between 35000 and 26000 years ago. Many of the images were directly dated by the carbon-14 method, so the age of the paintings is beyond reasonable doubt, and while some people keep raising objections, experts agree that it is the single most precisely dated cave in the world.

Werner Herzog, one of the most important, and especially most sensitive film directors of all times in 2010 made a film entitled *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* about Chauvet. Given the experience of Lascaux, Chauvet cave is completely closed off the public, so the film offers a singular opportunity to get a glimpse inside, all the more

valuable as it was shot in 3D. In the middle of the film and deep inside the cave Jean Clottes, who directed the excavations and is the most highly esteemed French archaeologist of the last decades, ordered everybody to keep completely silent. As a result, after a few seconds, only one sound was audible: heartbeat. For us, this was the heartbeat of those nearest to the microphone; but for anybody who was ever down there, it was his or her own heartbeat.

I watched this film several times, spellbound, without paying much attention to this scene, until at the fourth *International Political Anthropology* Summer School Agnes Horvath and Jesenko Tesan – who just completed an MA in Cambridge, but who is from Bosnia and was drafted during the Bosnian war and against his will to the army – called attention to it, provoking a sustained and most illuminating debate around this matter. People who went down to such painted caves were certainly undergoing some kind of initiatory experience; they were tested there; but nobody knows exactly why and how. The debate brought out something that probably Jean Clottes also had in mind, but did not want to put down into words – as anything he utters about the cave is taken as authoritative, while this was only a hint: that the experience of entering the cave was a way to face up to one's own heart, evoking parallels with Tarkovsky's *Zone*. Risking to enter the heart of darkness, tens of thousands of years ago, hundreds of meters away from the entrance, armed with nothing more than a burning charcoal lamp, was most dangerous; nobody could be sure to see the light again. And down here, by contemplating the walls, the magnificent animals which in the flickering light seemed moving, one had a concrete and overwhelming experience, which must have been similar to ours, as we are human beings of the same kind, at a most basic cognitive and emotional level: an overwhelming joy concerning the beauty of it all, but also compounding the fear of the darkness and the unknown with the fear of the known: as the images evoked the most dangerous animals like lions and rhinos charging, or becoming ready to pounce (Horvath 2013). It was testing at the most basic level, a testing of the heart. In order to tolerate it all, and see the light again, one had to preserve, beyond and in spite of the entire experience, the calmness of the heart; restore the steadiness of one's heartbeat. The encounter, down in the cave, at the heart of the Earth, and surrounded with the liminal void, was therefore also the recognition of something fundamental and deeply concrete, not merely negative or ambivalent: that there is something deep inside us that provides a rock solid foundation to our very being, which is the beating of our heart, where the body and the mind, reasoning and emotion, the soul and the spirit and the brain and the blood coincide, signalled and performed the beating of our heart. It never betrays us; if it starts to beat faster, this is a signal: we then need to respond, but that response should come also from the bottom of our heart, otherwise we never return to a stable relationship with ourselves again, and will become subject to the winds of external influences, whether through rational argumentations, where tricksters of all times and places are bound to come out as winners, as they are used to be outside of everything, and thus perceive the weaknesses of others; or through the artificial stimulation of the emotions, which can again be most effectively done by those who are themselves not emotionally involved.

*Walking at your own Heartbeat: The Camino di Santiago*

Among the numerous contemporary searches for 'experience', as a way to escape the utter tedium of the modern everyday world, one is significantly different; this is the *Camino di Santiago*. Year after year more – especially young – people decide to walk down all the way from the French Pyrenees to the old pilgrimage place at Santiago de Compostela, near the 'end of the world' in North-Western Spain. Since the route was re-launched, after the vicissitudes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1980s, there is a steady and

significant annual growth of pilgrims, if the numbers are adjusted for peaks due to 'Jubilee' years.

Only a few points will be made here, relevant to the theme of this paper, the centrality of the 'heart' in facing liminality, especially 'permanent liminality'. First, in its contemporary form the Camino is a Christian pilgrimage road, one of the three most important such roads, together with the Via Francigena, from Canterbury to Rome, and the visit of the Holy Lands, culminating in Jerusalem. It was created, in the medieval period, in order to celebrate the discovery of the tombs of St James apostle in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. However, the road is much older than that. Santiago is close to a place called Fisterra, or 'end of the world' (*finis terrae*), endpoint of a very old road, which probably goes back into the Upper Palaeolithic and perhaps deeply beyond, as it not simply connects the Southern French and Northern Spanish regions on the two sides of the Pyrenees, containing much of the prehistoric painted caves, but goes through Atapuerca, near Burgos, where one of the oldest and most significant caves were excavated, with a history traced back to 800,000 BC, and evidence about the possible use of speech dating to 500,000 years ago. Second, though among contemporary participants of the Camino there is an official definition between those who undertake it for religious, spiritual or merely cultural reasons, the distinction is quite porous, as many people shift categories between them – though only in one direction. This is because the road has its impact on those who decide to undertake it and persist after the initial, inevitable difficulties. As pilgrims are repeatedly reminded, in both secular spiritual and religious settings, the road does not give you what you want, but what you really need. In this sense, it is strikingly close to the Zone in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, where those who make the trip to the room at the heart of that dangerous area will be granted what they desire at the bottom of their hearts, but must be careful because they will not be granted what they explicitly declare, rather what they *really* wish. Thus, the protagonists of the film, the Professor and the Writer eventually refuse to enter the room, thus making their dangerous trip totally pointless at a surface level – and utterly meaningful in another. Similarly, and going back to the Camino, the road grants the pilgrims, after weeks of walking, the rhythm of one's own life, dictated by one's heartbeat. This is why pilgrims continuously form and re-form their companionships on the road, as everyone must find one's own rhythm – and misunderstanding oneself, just as hubristic kudos, can be costly, as stories and signs abound concerning those who found their grave, instead of a new life, on the *Camino*.

Descending deeply under the ground, into the heart of a cold and dark cave, and walking on the wide open plains under the Southern sun are evidently the most opposed kinds of activities possible. Yet, the two are also fundamentally connected, and in more ways than one. They are at one at the most basic historical level, as both activities were evidently part of the same Palaeolithic Atlantic landscape; furthermore, painted caves were always centres of pilgrimage, and it can be conjectured that the visiting of these caves was part of a long-term long-distance trip directed towards the 'end of the world' where many of the folk-tale heroes ended up, drooping their feet into the ocean below. And they are also connected at the deepest anthropological level, as they tested, regulated or re-set, the most important part of the human body and soul, the heart.

This theme of the heartbeat will be taken up in the last section of the paper, which will move to an even deeper and basic level, the psychology concerning the experiences of the human child, even the embryo, before the moment of birth, inside the maternal womb, and the effects of the mother's heartbeat. Thus, while touching another anthropological base, at the same time it incorporates a deeply interpersonal, thus in a way 'social' point.

*The Mother's Heartbeat*

The central question, under conditions of permanent liminality, is how to generate the stability necessary for a meaningful life. The Cartesian cogito and the Kantian transcendental mind are incapable to provide this, and the complicity of Kantianism with the spinning of liminality through the Lockean tabula rasa has been confirmed through the idea of the public sphere, a par excellence liminal arena (Szakolczai 2013), which – far from solving it – only exacerbates the problem.

Such stability, at a level beyond the conscious self, is to be searched, historically and anthropologically, in the interaction between the mother and the infant; and a particularly interesting area concerns the use of sounds, in particular music. In his conclusive work *Laws*, where Plato was searching for the most basic anthropological foundations of human life, and where 'laws' should be linked to the 'first principles' of Pascal, rather than modern legalism, Plato argued that the title word *nomos* has a musical connotation, implying harmony (*Laws* 799E-800A). It is this emphasis on sounds and music that I would like to take up in the concrete setting of the relations between mother and infant in the earliest childhood; and even before, already inside the womb.

Following a hint of Darwin, and influenced by Adam Smith, Malthus and Marx, most experts were searching for the origins of music in work, the rhythmic sound of the beating of tools, or in male competition for sexual favours. In contrast to this, some researchers, gaining increasing voice, came to emphasise that the origins of music are to be searched not in male assertiveness, but in the intimacy of the mother-child relation. Here I will first follow an article by Ellen Dissanayake (2001), who resumed this line of research in a recent, authoritative collection on the 'origins of music'.

Stating the obvious, all too often forgotten in lofty transcendental theorising, what happens to a human being in the first few months of life is fundamental in securing stability for newborn babies for their entire life. This stability is offered not at a cognitive level, but by touches and sounds that not only make no sense, but look strange, even ridiculous from the outside, and whose exposition to onlookers is even more embarrassing than the act of suckling. Researchers termed such behaviour and voice-uttering as 'motherese' (see also Masataka 1998), taking up suggestions by Gregory Bateson about the 'protoconversational' (Dissanayake 2001: 391), and consider such conduct as practically universal (Ibid.: 398).

What is the reason for such 'infantile' behaviour? How and why it works, and what effects does it produce? In the perspective of this paper, focusing on permanent liminality, the very start of the argument contains a stunning claim: the central feature of early childhood interaction is that 'mother and infant live in a split second world where demonstrably significant signals (events) in kinesic, facial, and vocal modalities last approximately one-half second or less' (Ibid.: 391).<sup>xiii</sup> In other words, and by no means stretching the argument, in the first period after birth mother and infant entertain themselves in a mutual state of permanent liminality. This implies first of all a relationship that is similar to what Bakhtin called dialogical, as both partners fully and freely give up themselves to the interaction, entering each other's state (Ibid.). This, however, is a nonverbal relationship, being partly or even fully out of conscious control; the words used by the mother matter not by their semantic meaning (Ibid.: 394), but through their mode and tone of utterance, showing how Bakhtin is right even beyond his intentions, as his claim that every utterance is different here reaches its ultimate meaning: every single sound uttered by the mother is different, as it is stated at a different and always highly significant moment of the infant's development, even if the utterance has no meaning whatsoever in the sense of semantics or linguistic philosophy. Furthermore, while the voices uttered indeed have a rhythmic character, this is by no means a uniform hammering, rather a mutual emotional involvement, containing anticipations and

expectations which the mother raises, so that it would eventually be satisfied – if everything goes well (Ibid.).<sup>xiv</sup> In order to characterise the nature of this interaction, Dissanayake introduces another striking formulation: this interaction works by its ‘use of sequential structural features that rely on expectation to create emotional meaning’ (Ibid.); or, again returning to the terminology of the paper, it uses, unconsciously, as if encrypted at the natural and unconscious behaviour of all mothers of all times and all places, the same kind of sequence-structuring process that was laid bare by van Genneep through his analysis of rites of passage.

These interactions work, since tens and hundreds of thousands of years, as this is why we all are human beings, capable of having and expressing emotions, while having a stable selfhood and capable of formulating reasonable goals for our lives. It is exactly the foundation of the stable human personality that, according to Dissanayake, the mother-infant interaction establishes. She formulates the main result of this mutual attuning in such a striking way that it must again be quoted fully: ‘[b]y three to four months, levels of emotional engagement in both partners can be defined by particular coordinations of spatial orientation, visual attention, facial expressivity, and type of temporal reactivity’ (Ibid.: 391). Translating the sentence into the language of social theory and philosophical anthropology, our capacity to perceive space, time and images is not due to the ‘transcendental mind’, which supposedly hovers in the void, but is implanted into us in our first few months by our mother. And so its place is indeed in the heart. Pascal is right over Kant, and the case now can be closed.

Yet, even this argument can be moved to an even more basic level, concerning the sounds, in particular the mother’s heartbeat, to which an embryo is exposed inside the womb. Since the by now classic articles of Lee Salk, a number of researches confirmed that infants remember sounds heard inside the womb, and that the character of their mother’s heartbeat leaves an imprint on their own character. Of course, a full scientific study of such a phenomenon is practically impossible, as it is – to say the least – difficult to enter the womb, especially the space between the would be mother and the embryo, not to mention the ethical issues such a research evokes, as Salk made it evident even in his original articles. Yet, as we today need ‘science’ in order to confirm the most evident matters, it might be worthwhile to present some of the main results of this line of research, relying in particular on a 1999 article by Giselle Whitwell, with some complements from a recent paper by Avi Gilboa (2013).

According to the research summarised by Whitwell (1999),<sup>xv</sup> even embryos within the womb hear sounds, and many months before they are due to be born. This is the reason why, in the past, expectant mothers were singing lullabies and telling stories to their as yet unborn child, until they were instructed by ‘rational’ educators to stop behaving ‘irrationally’. Ages-old customs, however, are again revealed as having a deeper understanding of human life than rationalistic theories, as it has repeatedly been demonstrated that children like the kind of music, and even the kinds of stories, that they have heard inside their mother’s womb.

The most important ‘sound environment’ of an embryo, however, is the mother’s heartbeat. This is the sound a child will remember most, and so the argument concerning music and prenatal sounds can be turned around as well: a child not only will have preference to the music heard inside the womb, but all children, and eventually adults, will prefer the kind of music that most resembles the mother’s heartbeat. Thus, the rhythmic movement secured by drums and other percussion instruments, one of the most important and widely spread musical instruments, does not imitate the rhythm of



work, or the hammer, rather the rhythm of the heartbeat, and at a most basic level the mother's heartbeat.<sup>xvi</sup>

In an recent article Avi Gilboa (2013) argues that the ideas of Salk, Whitwell and others, concerning the importance attributed to the stability of the mother's heartbeat must be extended to the importance of those situations of stress where this heartbeat actually accelerates, as children also need to get accustomed to such states, and thus proposing that the womb has a 'dual nature'. This argument seems well taken, and rhymes with the importance of the 'permanently liminal' relationship between mother and child, characteristic of the first months. However, just as such extreme closeness has its time, and must end, situations of stress could only be beneficial if they are not lasting. The basic level of stability, at the level of the nascent personality, is imprinted on a child by a stable maternal heartbeat; just as the stability of the perception and '*sentiment*' of the basic coordinates of the external world is formed in the first months of the infant through the symbiosis of, or osmosis between, the mother and the child. So the dual *aspects* of the womb are rather part of a same whole.

Finally, in this way, through the womb and the maternal heartbeat, we can also sense, at a deeper level, the reasons why our ancestors, for tens of thousands of year, kept descending deep inside the earth, into womb-like caves, in order to reconfirm and renew the solidity of their own hearts, by listening to the sound of their own heartbeat, while contemplating, and occasionally creating, images of incomparable beauty.

### **Conclusion: against creativity**

All this suggests a corollary concerning contemporary permanent liminality, which certainly will not be to everybody's liking; and which has the character of an argument taken too much to its ultimate conclusion. However, perhaps sometimes arguments have to be followed through, without blinking before their eventual consequences. Under static, ossified, rigid conditions, change in the sense of creativity, innovation and adventure, in one word liminality is most welcome. Under conditions of permanent liminality, however, such a terminology loses all its value. After all, as Michel Foucault argued, a prerequisite of any meaningful study is 'a historical awareness of our present circumstance', and we also must be clear about 'the type of reality with which we are dealing' (Foucault 1982: 209). Permanent liminality is indeed intolerable, as it generates a sense of *stasis*, meaninglessness; the more things change, the more they stay the same; but to argue that therefore there is need for *more* change, *more* innovation, *more* excitement, is to offer the source of the problem as a solution: to re-infect the sick body; to pour oil on the fire.

Which leads to a single conclusion: we absolutely do *not* need more technological, economic, but even scientific, political or social innovation. We had more than enough of it, and for many generations to come. It must now be digested. What we need is to return to the most basic values and truth of human and social life. We must listen to our own heart; we must be in a position that we would dare to face the Zone, in the language of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*; and for this we must understand that the real foundations of human existence, in so far as it is rooted in human existence at all, are not offered by 'rational' education, but by the mother's heart.

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> For details, see Szokolczai (2013b), and Thomassen (2012, 2014).
- <sup>ii</sup> See in particular the 2009/1 issue of the journal, containing the papers from a Cambridge conference on liminality, forthcoming in Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2014). IPA is available free online at [www.politicalanthropology.org](http://www.politicalanthropology.org).
- <sup>iii</sup> I take Batesonian 'error' from Horvath and Thomassen (2008).
- <sup>iv</sup> Even the classic work of Elias on 'involvement and detachment' shares this perspective.
- <sup>v</sup> Victor Turner similarly traces 'liminality' to trailblazing.
- <sup>vi</sup> For theorising compactness and differentiation, completely different from the Durkheim-Parsonian logic differentiation (understood as complete break or separation) and integration, see Voegelin.
- <sup>vii</sup> For further details, see Szokolczai (2012).
- <sup>viii</sup> For the numbering of the fragments, I will use the Brunschvicg edition.
- <sup>ix</sup> Concerning Titanic reason, see the fascination of Sophists of all times with the figure of Prometheus; see in particular Plato's *Protagoras*, a dialogue about the founder of the Sophist school, and a recent, authoritative book on Diderot subtitled 'the true Prometheus'.
- <sup>x</sup> About this, see also the very important of the Cartesian moment by Foucault, in his first 1982 Collège de France lecture, about the importance attributed by Descartes to 'evidence', which sealed the breaking of the link between philosophy and spirituality (Foucault 2001: 16-7, 28-30).
- <sup>xi</sup> About the manner in which the bodily aspects of emotions, thinking and willpower are handled in non-modern civilisations, see Ferguson (2010).
- <sup>xii</sup> The original word is *comédie*, but the meaning is indeed more general, visible in the fact that the French 'National Theatre' at that time was called *Comédie-Française*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> On the liminal aspects of childbirth, see Hänsch (2000).
- <sup>xiv</sup> About this, see again Bateson (1972).
- <sup>xv</sup> See also Levitin (2006), referring to research by Alexandra Lamont.
- <sup>xvi</sup> See again in Hungarian, where the verb for the beating of the heart, *dobog*, is derived from 'drum' (*dob*).

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