ESF Exploratory Workshop on

**Affectivity and Liminality: Conceptualising the dynamics of suspended transition**

**Brighton (United Kingdom), 17-19 November 2013**

**Convenor: Paul Stenner[①]**

**Co-convenors:
Megan Clinch[①], Monica Greco[②]
Johanna Motzkau[①]**

**SCIENTIFIC REPORT**

## 1. Executive summary

The workshop was held at Myhotel in Brighton, UK on Monday 18th and Tuesday 19th of November 2013. Including the ESF representative (Professor Rainer Kattel), there were 24 participants from 10 European countries (the UK, Denmark, Spain, Slovakia, Italy, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Portugal and Estonia), representing a variety of disciplines (psychology, sociology, medicine, philosophy, anthropology, organisation studies, communication studies and applied social science). The overall aim of the exploratory workshop was to engage participants in a process of reflection and exchange contributing to the development of a novel psychosocial concept bringing together themes of liminality and affectivity: 'liminal hotspots'. The concept was explored as a way of specifying and explaining a diverse set of psychosocial problems – arguably of growing social importance - involving scenes of 'impasse' in which occasions of transition of various kinds become 'blocked' or 'troubled' and people find themselves held suspended in episodes of 'permanent liminality'.

**Staging the workshop.** The workshop adopted a modified version of Andersen's (1985) 'reflective teams' methodology and was carefully designed to avoid a traditional 'academic paper + questions' format. The special format allowed a more transversal and collaborative engagement with the theme of the workshop fuelled by the cases brought by the participants. A provisional definition of liminal hotspots was offered as: *occasions of sustained uncertainty, ambivalence and tension in which people feel 'caught suspended' in the limbo of an 'in between' state of transition*. In advance of the workshop each participant was invited to submit a short description of a potential 'liminal hotspot case' from his or her own research. These were collected and grouped into four themes: A) Liminal hotspots in clinical contexts; B) Liminal hotspots in relation to self and relationships; C) Liminal hotspots in contexts of knowledge production; and D) Liminal hotspots in relation to problems of truth, chance and authenticity. The thematic groupings provided the basic structure of the two-day event. The overall structure involved four orienting keynote presentations and four parallel sessions (two per day), one for each theme, followed by plenary sessions. All participants familiarised themselves in advance with the hotspot cases, and were given access to a workshop website with relevant blogs and publications. One case from each theme was selected as a 'focus hotspot'. Instead of giving a brief introduction of their hotspot, authors of the four focus hotspots were interviewed in depth by a member of the organising team in front of their thematic group. Members of the audience were given distinct roles: a '*reflexive team*' comprised of the authors of the other cases constituting the theme, and an '*audience*', made up of those whose cases fell into a theme dealt with in another session. The reflexive team gave short summaries of their own cases (phase 1) prior to the interview (phase 2). After the interview the members of the reflexive team gave focused reflections highlighting links and disjunctions with their own cases (phase 3). Following questions and discussion from the rest of the audience (phase 4), the group collaborated in identifying prototypical features of the hotspot theme (phase 5). Designated reporters then fed the results from the parallel sessions into plenary sessions for general discussion. Participants thus collaborated from the outset in an abductive process of empirically guided theory generation by offering elements of their work for collective analysis and comparative discussion. In sum, the structure of the workshop was such that over the two days four focus hotspot cases were given detailed attention, each in the context of the cases brought by the reflexive team composed of three presenters discussing their own hotspot case in relation to the focus case. This workshop design resulted in extremely rich and focused discussion and debate.

**General conclusions.** There was a good deal of excitement and positive feeling about the theoretical and methodological value and social relevance of the concept of liminal hotspots, and the aim of identifying prototypical hotspots in order to clarify features and dynamics was enthusiastically embraced. The hotspot cases dealt with varied considerably. This variation was managed conceptually along what we came to think of as two dimensions: a) an extensive dimension of *scale;* and b) an intensive dimension that was metaphorically grasped in terms of *temperature*. Extensiveness, for example, varied from a consideration of gambling as an 'institution' begun in Venice but increasingly spread into normal social practice, to a hotspot conceived methodologically as a momentarily created perplexity in an interview with a judge. With respect to intensity, examples ranged from cool zones of unproblematic structure (where affectivity is collected and consolidated and where

contingency meets with forms of tinkering that reproduce structure unproblematically) through warm spots of managed friction (e.g. the management of the different and sometimes conflicting standards at play as a person with high cholesterol transits different scenes of everyday life), to spots that 'heat up' as a result of blocked or suspended transition (e.g. when a doctor / patient  encounter involving unexplained symptoms results in an unresolved 'passage', leading to tension and dissatisfaction).

Another important result was that careful comparison across thematic domains also yielded more general prototypical features and dimensions outlined in more detail below. Liminal hotspots were conceptualised in a number of ways that allowed insight into both positive and negative ways of engaging with and managing liminality. *Sociologically*, they were conceptualised as scenes of troubled or blocked transition located in broader trajectories of social change where features of liminality (including characteristic affective dimensions) become permanent or enduring as a state of exception becomes 'the rule'; *Psychologically* they were conceptualised as transition managed by the subject in a way that requires radical reorganisation of anchoring reference resulting in change of desire (e.g. the re-articulation of desires for the future, recollections of the past, and the norms and standards of the present); and *Methodologically* they were conceptualised as moments of rupture (or voids) in structure with significant transformative potential.

## 2. Scientific content of the event

**Day 1: AM.** Following a welcome from Monica Greco and an introductory presentation from Rainer Kattel (the ESF representative), Paul Stenner gave the first keynote address entitled 'Conceptualizing the dynamics of suspended transition'. This presentation was designed to set the scene by introducing the key terms (liminality, affectivity, suspended transition and liminal hotspots) setting the topic in broad historical context, and framing liminal hotspots as 'happenings' or 'events' rather than entities or states. The notion of suspended transition was introduced and a number of core tensions and potential features identified for further discussion through the workshop (e.g. the distinction between staged and un-staged liminal occasions, pattern repetition and pattern shift, and volatility).

The next keynote by Arpad Szakolczai focussed predominantly on how liminality could and should be treated as a theoretical concept on a par with terms such as 'institution', 'structure' or 'system'. Permanent liminality was defined (*when a temporary suspension of the everyday, taken for granted state of affairs becomes permanent*) and a case made that this concept renders intelligible situations that otherwise elude our grasp. A core theme was developed around Pascal's notion of 'reasons of the heart' and the ways this essential contribution has been rendered unintelligible through translation into Kantian categories. This translation was in turn connected to 'trickster' activity, where liminal situations are incited and deployed to anti-social and exploitative ends. Pascal's 'reasons of the heart' are presented as a way out of the permanent liminality generated by the schism between heart and mind at the core of enlightenment rationality.

The third keynote by Sergio Salvatore offered an outline of a model of affect with 'implications for liminality'. Consistent with Szakolczai's concern to integrate 'heart and mind', Salvatore's model grasps affect and emotion dialogically in relation to two processes of sense-making. The basic mode corresponds to an 'unconscious' defined semiotically as a primary mode of (symmetrical) connectivity. It generates forms of experience distinguishable from - yet fundamental to – 'higher' modes of thought based on asymmetrical semantic relations. Following Blanco, affectivity is construed as a basic form of asymmetrisation, which provokes the differentiation of 'bags of symmetry' (emotions) that form the medium for further articulation in more abstract thought. Affect is thus a constitutive feature of all experience, and objects as such are conceived as emerging from affects rather than generative of them. This processual model of affect emphasises the inherently liminal nature of affective experience as an on-going 'sculpting' of the limen between self and world, 'me' and 'not me'.

Discussion of these keynotes dealt with many issues, but centred on the importance of a process ontology (where structure is *explanandum* not *explanans*); an abductive methodology (i.e. a *process* of knowledge formation with data approached theoretically

based on concepts abduced from data); and a concept of affect continuous with more abstract sense-making. The paradoxical and symmetrical (both/and) features of liminality and affectivity were compared and connected to a processual grasp of causality as relating potentiality to actuality (unactualised potential can be *both/and* without contradiction, whilst actuality entails an 'asymmetricising' decision).

**Day 1: PM.** Johanna Motzkau provided an overview of the methodology for the workshop, explaining how its organisation borrows both from family systems therapy (with reflexive teams designed to multiply perspectives and grasp process as well as content) and from an abductive technique of 'prototyping' developed from Nissen (2012). The group then divided into two parallel streams: Hotspot case Sessions A & B.

**Session A: Liminality in clinical contexts.**
*Phase 1* involved 10 minute presentations given by the reflexive team made up of Ed Moreno, Gemma Flores and Morten Nissen. Moreno and Flores presented a case dealing with issues surrounding end-of-life in Catalan hospitals – including technologically mediated enactments of brain death and organ transfer, overseen by transplant coordination teams. These teams 'work with' hotspot features such as 'uncertainty', 'vulnerability' and 'forward thrust' to secure permission for organ donation. These practices are in turn enabled by life-support technologies which 'extend' life/death into a suspeded liminality yielding forms of 'controversy / multiplicity' which are 'mediated by biological protocols'. Nissen presented a case for counselling as a liminal hotspot, illustrated by his own work with young substance takers in Copenhagen, and dealing also with the liminal tension between user driven standards and objective and imposed medical standards.

In *phase 2*, Paul Stenner interviewed Lina Felde about the liminal space transited by the symptomless chronically ill (e.g. those managing high cholesterol). The interview yielded highly relevant ideas about the difference between warmspots and hotspots. What Nissen calls 'standards' (emergent norms practice), Felde and Stenner spoke of as structures or regions of practice that a cholesterol 'patient' must navigate whilst 'carrying' the implicit individualised medical normativity that follows diagnoses.

*Phase 3* involved the reflexive team spending 15 minutes commenting on the interview from the perspective of their own case experience and this fed directly into the subsequent audience discussion (*phase 4*) and prototype discussion phase (*phase 5*). Prototypical features and dimensions linking these cases included a) the distinction between staged and unstaged liminal hotspots (counselling is evidently a highly staged scenario designed to assist the management of transition through the creation of a liminal experience in which affectivity can be 'contained' and explored, and where life can be 'modelled' and otherwise differently performed – likewise transplant coordination teams must rehearse and 'stage' an encounter with the relative of a deceased in order to secure permission for organ harvesting); b) the intervention of new technologies in creating scenes of suspended liminality (brain death as a new category was enabled by the development of life-support technology capable of prolonging 'vegetative' life, and thus artificially extending the liminal phase between life and death in a way which permits organ transplant procedures). Morten Nissen also spoke in this context of the use of smart phones in therapy sessions, 'interrupting' the process but creating novel mixtures by breaking the 'private' space to different publics).

**Session B: Liminality in the context of self and relationships.**
The first phase involved 10-minute presentations by each member of the reflexive team, namely Paulo Jesus, Miroslav Popper and Katharina Scherke. Jesus presented a case dealing with extra-marital sexual experimentation among heterosexual middle-aged couples using online platforms; Popper presented research on cohabitation (as opposed to marriage) among younger generations in Slovakia; and Scherke presented the case of nostalgia as a liminal emotion (e.g. 'bitter-sweet') that occurs, and is sometimes intentionally pursued, in the context of situations of transition or ambiguity.
In the second phase, Johanna Motzkau interviewed Giazu Enciso and Joan Pujol on their focus hotspot case, which centred on the case of a man ('John') seeking support from an online forum hosted by the Catalan Polyamory Group about the process of 'becoming

polyamorous'. The interview highlighted the importance of norms and normative systems for understanding the conditions under which situations of 'permanent liminality' arise. The interview explored attempts by polyamorous communities to provide an alternative normative system to the one based on monogamous heterosexuality, for example through a problematisation of language and the invention of neologisms to re-describe feelings according to a different system of moral evaluation. The example of John's experience allowed for a discussion of the difficulties associated with the movement between and transition from one system to another.

The third phase involved the reflexive team spending 15 minutes commenting on the interview from the perspective of their own case experience. The subsequent discussion also involved the audience. Emergent themes linking the different cases included: a) normative or reference systems as 'anchors' through which individual's affective experiences are organised; these may be institutional systems (marriage), culturally normative systems (monogamous heterosexuality), spatio-temporal systems (the difference between places or between past and present as mediated by more or less disruptive events of transition); b) the difficulties associated with transitioning from one reference system to another, including notions of 'failed' or 'successful' transition, and how these colour affective experience.

**Plenary.** Bjorn Thomassen and Estrid Sørensen acted as reporters, giving a 10 minute summary of the process and content of Session A followed by Agnes Horvath and Gabriel Bianchi who did the same for Session B. Discussion centred around the prototypical features and dimensions listed above.

**Day 2: AM.** Following a recap by Dr Johanna Motzkau, the fourth keynote presentation was given by Dr Monica Greco and Dr Megan Clinch entitled 'Liminality of symptoms, symptoms of liminality'. Dr Clinch examined contested aspects of the diagnosis and treatment of thyroid disease to demonstrate how different forms of liminality – epistemic, functional and affective – emerged and jostled against each other. She then argued that the dynamics that obtain within and between these forms of liminality shaped what symptoms are and how they feel for dissatisfied patients. Developing this theme, Dr Greco specified the difference between a liminal hotspot and the more generic concept of liminality as it has been used in the sociology of health and illness. She argued that the use of liminality in this literature tends to ignore the original link between this concept and the context of a rite of passage. Using the example of medically unexplained symptoms (MUS), she proposed that we examine the diagnostic process as a rite of passage between one state/identity and another – and that we focus on the qualities of that space of transition, which in the case of MUS is where patients often get 'stuck'. She then proposed three keywords through which to think about liminal hotspots: *volatility* (the rite of passage is a space of transformation designed to maximise the capacity to be affected, not just psychologically but 'all the way down' to the somatic dimension); *participation* (boundaries between self and other, individual and society are blurred and 'opened' – rites of passage are spaces of hightened suggestibility); and *reversibility* (attributions of causality, blame and responsibility lose their grounding as self and other become indistinct).

**Session C: Liminality in contexts of knowledge production and scientific practice.**
In *phase 1* the reflexive team presented their summary cases. Des Fitzgerald presented two autobiographical liminal occasions drawn from his experience in interdisciplinary research projects linking social scientists with neurobiolgists to study autism. Here, liminal hotspots arise through the incommensurabilities between the assumptions of different scientific practices, and these become visible in the affective experiences of the researchers. Jette Kofoed presented a hotspot arising from her research on exclusionary processes amongst children and young people mediated by information and communication technologies. The exclusions experienced by a 13 year old Dane whose fake 'desirable' Facebook identity was exposed by classmates yielded a liminal hotspot that escapes the usual definitions of bullying as entailing a victim and a perpetrator. Using a method to track liminality provides the researcher with a vocabulary to access these dynamics. Estrid Sørensen presented the group with a clip of a German gaming television show in which the presenters discussed the content of 'Modern Warfare 2'. She focused on a liminal occasion in which an aspect of the game ('shooting' civilians in Moscow airport) had generated a controversy which reorganised

the relationship between gamers, game producers and regulators on the one hand, and researchers and policy makers concerned with game-prompted violent behaviour, on the other. The event rendered that relationship volatile, enabling a transformation of the positions involved.

In *phase 2* Megan Clinch interviewed Signe Vikkelsø about her focus hotspot case involving two liminal occasions ('moments of bewilderment') deliberately engineered by psychologists, the first drawn from one of Bion's 'experience groups' and the second from one of Milgram's obedience experiments. Bion and Milgram purposefully provoked situations in which 'confident assurance is challenged and moments of perplexity emerge', raising the question of the scientific staging and manipulation of liminality via the suspension and subversion of expected structures, roles and rules.

The discussion in the final phases concentrated on 1. Whether this manipulation is adequately grasped as 'trickster' activity (i.e. distinguishing positive [cultivating] and negative [exploitative] ways of provoking, handling and guiding liminal passages); 2. The importance of carefully articulating 'basic assumptions' (Bion) informing judgement of hotspots; 3. The importance of 'cultivation' of self and 'containing' (as distinct from 'framing') of excessive feelings in liminal situations in balance with the transformation of self and the flow or movement of feelings. Cross-cutting features in the session included: a) the importance of moments of evaluative transformation during which the judgement of an 'audience' towards a subject can instantaneously shift from positive admiration to outrage and persecution at a perceived 'scandal' or 'fraud'; b) the pertinence of the distinction between staged ('contained') and un-staged liminality; c) the relevance of the *management* of liminality to its (positive or negative) outcome, and also of the cultivation of *self* management (arguably an aim of Bion and Milgram) and d) the role of liminal moments of perturbation in challenging people into developing insight (the positive role of the trickster).

**Session D: Liminality, truth, chance and authenticity.**
The first phase involved 10 minute presentations by each member of the reflexive team, namely Bjørn Thomassen, Agnes Horvath and Gabriel Bianchi. Thomassen presented 'gambling' as a hotspot case, illustrating historically how this affectively charged practice, once subject to systematic restraint (e.g. by being allowed only in certain spaces, or at certain times), has expanded to become a norm of (modern) daily life rather than an exception. The example was used to illustrate how 'liminality' has become spatially central and temporally permanent as an expression of the modern project. Horvath's presentation concerned the artificial 'incitement' of liminality through technology and the use of manipulated affectivity to produce effects of liminality; the example offered was that of Tassili cave paintings. Bianchi presented data from his research on wanted and unwanted sex among young people in Slovakia: here the focus was on the (de)regulation of sexuality and how young people define the threshold between what is wanted or unwanted, including how that threshold relates to the difference between what is pleasurable and unpleasurable.

In the second phase, Monica Greco interviewed Johanna Motzkau on the focus hotspot case, which centred on the phenomenon of 'suggestibility' in the context of legal practitioners' dealings with child witnesses. Suggestibility and the need to prevent or minimise it were seen to give rise to a set of practical paradoxes or dilemmas, such as the need for policemen to maintain a 'cold' and professional attitude to avoid influencing the child while also being 'warm' or friendly enough to encourage them to share information. The empirical extracts explored through the interview revealed that while attributions of 'suggestibility' are usually referred to the child, the suggestibility and affectivity of juries was implicitly acknowledged as an object of manipulation, though not explicitly as a basis on which decisions are made (these are made in the name of rationality and truth).

The third phase involved the reflexive team spending 15 minutes commenting on the interview from the perspective of their own case experience. The subsequent discussion also involved the audience. Emergent themes linking all the presentations included: a) affectivity/suggestibility as the 'propensity for being affected', blurring the boundaries

between self and other; those who affect us can be other people but not necessarily people, also e.g. drugs, technologies, etc.; b) caves/casinos/courtrooms: enclosed, ritual spaces where the boundary between real/unreal, truth/untruth is at stake, played with, and where realities/truths are produced, constructed; the characteristics of such spaces and what happens when the activities that (used to) take place within them are de-ritualised and/or become themselves a kind of norm;  c) the anthropological foundations of the human capacity to be affected: the contrast between reasons of the mind, reasons of the body, reasons of the heart. A conclusion emergent from this session was that our practices have been polarised into those of the body and those of the mind and a liminal hotspot is where these two types of practice short circuit within a distinct moment, i.e. where this split ceases to function and the practice/interaction concerned stalls (even if for a moment), ruptures, is suspended or breaks down as a result.

**Day 2: PM.**
**Plenary.** Gemma Flores and Eduardo Moreno acted as reporters for Session C and Giazu Enciso and Katerina Scherke reported for Session D. Discussion centred around the prototypical features and dimensions listed above.

### 3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

The workshop has laid important foundations for the articulation and illustration of a powerful and much needed integrative *concept*. This concept has enabled the specification of a *subject matter* that is of growing social significance, but that we argue has not been adequately recognised or grasped in existing social scientific research. This recognition has required the development of a specific *theoretical approach* rooted in process thought. Concept, subject matter and theoretical approach have proven to be inseparable in this task. The *integrative* nature of the concept makes an important contribution to the field, which has tended to valorise rigorousj analysis to the neglect of synthesis and creativity. During the workshop, this integrative capacity was summarised in the figure of the Newgrange Triskele, which can be taken as symbolizing *to-and-from movement within and between coherent pockets of difference enfolded within an immanent unity*. The results of the workshop contribute to this integrative task in five distinct ways:

First, on a theoretical and methodological level, the concept integrates an *empirical* focus with an *ontological* level of concern. As expected, some participants preferred to focus at an abstract level on ontological questions whilst others preferred a concrete empirical focus on actual occasions of suspended transition. This division of labour is quite typical, but it was generally agreed that a strength of the concept of liminal hotspots lies in the potential to *integrate* these aspects, extracting the more abstract generalities from the more concrete empirical details and moving 'to and fro' between these registers according to our chosen abductive methodology of articulating 'prototypical' cases, features and dynamics. This integration raises a number of important objectives for future research. Three new methodological objectives include the further development of the prototype approach, the refinement of the 'reflexive teams' technique for fostering collective abduction, and the consolidation of the insight raised at various points during the workshop concerning the methodological importance of participants locating themselves on a boundary or borderline permitting more than one perspective (the role of the researcher as a 'doubly marginal' figure). Another future objective is to distinguish the theoretical approach adopted from the main alternatives, developing collective re-engagement with the subjugated tradition of process thinking whose concepts are poorly understood from within the dominant categories inherited from Descartes, Newton, Kant and others that informed the modern traditions of empiricism and rationalism. Key figures in this subjugated tradition discussed in the workshop include Pascal, Spinoza, Tarde, Bergson, Whitehead, van Gennep, Langer, Turner, Deleuze and Stengers. These thinkers recognise that the modern scientific and intellectual tradition has itself generated bifurcations, contradictions and inconsistencies that can be viewed as significant liminal hotspots with paralysing effects upon knowledge practices and hence on societal development. This tradition has advocated abductive forms of scientific practice, which escape the limitations of the various positivisms (grounded in inductive and deductive practices), and hence obviate the need for a post-modern or social

constructionist reaction. Recent theoretical counter-reactions to social constructionism – such as Actor Network Theory and affect theory - have also re-engaged the subjugated tradition mentioned above, but tend to be limited by a focus either on potentiality (affect theory), or an actuality (ANT), and hence lack the integrative scope of the approach in development.

The second integration concerns micro and macro aspects of the problem. Some participants clearly preferred micro-level analysis of the details of unfolding interactions, whilst others found the concept of value in explaining an expanding number of contemporary life-problems as part of a broader set of macro-societal processes associated with the possibility of characterising modernity itself in relation to *permanent liminality*. Again, a key conclusion concerns the value of the concept to balance and integrate micro and macro empirical foci as interconnected 'fractal folds' where one event is always in some relation with all other events. This raises the future scientific objective of further illustrating this task of weaving a path between big picture macro issues of a rather epochal kind (permanent liminality as a defining feature of contemporary society), and micro details of hotspots which are specific and which may or may not be connectable to these larger questions.

The third integrative strength of the concept was its potential to facilitate communication across disciplinary specialisms and between levels of existence and explanation often kept separate (e.g. organic, psychic, social). Some, for example, preferred to focus on the historical trajectory of social change informing a hotspot, whilst others preferred to focus on implications for the subject (whether emotional or somatic) as they respond and cope with the dynamics of hotspots. Liminal hotspots were thus found to have rich transdisciplinary potential in integrating these aspects by 'thinking them together'. A future scientific objective raised here concerns the potential of liminal hotspots to inform the development of transdisciplinary versions of social science, and to situate these developments in social and historical context *in terms of* liminal hotspots.

Fourth is the integration of a subjective dimension and concern with subjectivity in terms of its public objects and objective social conditions. Both liminality and affectivity stress the importance of *experience* to social life, but this is not at the expense of a concern with the facts of experience. Indeed, classical liminal occasions might be viewed as key moments during which subjectivities are *retuned* to new structural conditions such that those conditions can in turn be fine-tuned to subjective expectations and desires. When such occasions are troubled or when new structural conditions fail to arise, they take the form of hotspots in which such psychosocial *attunement* becomes problematic, raising questions of the 'containment' and 'management' of forms of affectivity that have temporarily 'lost their objects', and objects that have 'lost their affective objective'. The subjective is at the very core of any vital social arrangement, and the notion of 'the heart' articulated during the workshop provides a key value of stability as does the importance of a subject articulating a contact with 'itself in the past' in order to envisage a coherent and livable future. This issue raises the future scientific objective of theoretically consolidating this important *psychosocial* dimension of a process approach.

A fifth integrative strength concerns the practical or applied dimensions of this concept. Developing the integration of hotspot theory and practice is an important future objective opened up by the workshop. Practical applications were not a main focus of the workshop, but the key way in which they were raised was with respect to the *management of liminal affectivity* in liminal hotspots. The theme of managing complexity, uncertainty, ambivalence and the emotional subjectivity that attends these is becoming a global social theme in innumerable fields. There is a practical role for the engaged social scientist as someone well placed to act as a *guide* through liminal hotspots, providing practical prototypes designed to help those going through them to manage their peculiar features, and to maximise the possibility of a positively transformative outcome. Concentration on the importance of the *staging* of liminal hotspots could contribute to a theory of change aiming for the positive and progressive management of liminality. A future objective is to explore this practical dimension of the transformative potential of moments of rupture (or voids) in structure. Of relevance here are a number of *dynamic features* which were discussed but which remain metaphorical and require further development. These include the dynamic whereby a pragmatic *paradox*

(involving contradictory injunctions) leads, perhaps through phases, to scenarios of *paralysis* (not knowing 'how to go on'), *polarization* (conflict) *panic* and *pattern-shift* (invention of a new way of patterning conduct). Hotspots often entail forms of *fixation* where thought and conduct lose connectivity with other regions, converting an open 'spiral' into a vicious 'circle' set up in symmetrical op-position to a comparably circular antagonist (thus generating the 'heat' of a hotspot). Also relevant are *social dynamics.* Group C, for example, identified as a feature the volatile nature of the relations between actor and audience/public in their liminal hotspots. The subjectivity of the 'liminal subject' appears highly vulnerable to instantaneous transformations of value, as when an audience transforms from appreciative celebration to condemnation. In these hotspots, the audience / actor relation tends towards a dynamic of 'scandal' where 'liminal' subjects are prone to feeling / being ex-posed and humiliated in the face of condemning judgement.

A number of other prototypical features and dimensions were identified which are presented schematically in Appendix 1.

**Future plans**
During the final 'future actions' session all participants expressed a substantial interest in developing the themes discussed during the workshop and working together as a group again.

Web presence
We already have a online web resource hosted by the Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance at the Open University. This includes a blog and a password-protected document library. We intend to keep this resource active as a basis for content-sharing and communication amongst participants.

Immediate follow up and dissemination of workshop content to participants
In the week after the workshop all participants were asked if they would provide an 'off the cuff' account of what they thought a liminal hotpot was. These two-page accounts will be made available to all participants, along with transcripts of the keynote sessions, the scribed hotspot sessions, and any other materials generated during the event. It is hoped that these materials will form the basis of a resource that will inform any future work undertaken by the group (see below).

Publication
Two possibilities for publication were discussed. First a special issue of a high impact journal which, as noted by a number of participants, would be of particular benefit to the junior members of the group. The organisers have already approached *Theory, Culture and Society* who have expressed an interest in principle but required more information with regard to individual contributions (i.e. abstracts). *Body and Society* has also expressed an interest in a special issue on the theme of 'Liminal Hotspots'. Second, and possibly supported through a further series of workshops (see below), is the publication of a book that would reflect and build upon the innovative workshop structure. This would provide participants with the opportunity to conduct further and more in-depth conceptual development and provide a framework that could be later explored and refined through a large scale grant application involving all participants.

Further workshops and grant applications
A grant application has been submitted by the workshop convenors to the UK Economic and Social Research Council (Ref. ES/L003376/1 - £ 590,442.20. Project title: *Coming Unstuck: Managing Liminality in Practices of Health, Welfare and Justice*). This develops the applied focus listed above as a research objective. The outcome of this application is expected in early 2014.

A further grant application is in preparation by Paul Stenner and Megan Clinch under the ERSC Transforming Social Science scheme. This will address the research objective related to transdisciplinarity listed above.

The methodology adopted for this workshop will be further developed and applied in the context of a consensus conference organised by Paul Stenner and a team of co-researchers in connection with a current National Institute for Health Research grant (NIHR – PB-PG-0909-20039) exploring patient and practitioner perceptions of self-management of chronic lower back pain. This will take place in Spring 2014.

As described above, one possibility for developing the results generated by the workshop is the publication of a book based on the theme of 'liminal hotspots', and which would attempt to reproduce and further develop the innovative workshop structure and process. In order to do this a number of participants suggested applying to COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) under the Individual, Social, Cultures and Health (ISCH) domain. Through this application we would seek funding for a series of workshops that would further develop the results described above, and which would be structured around the sociological, psychological and methodological findings outline in the executive summary.

One further suggestion was for interested members to convene a symposium in the context of the Sociology of Emotions section of the European Sociological Association conference.

Informal meeting between members of the workshop
Due to the excellent relationships that were developed during the event a number of participants expressed an interest in pursuing contact with other members of the group with whom they shared theoretical and empirical interests. As a consequence, and using the network and resources facilitated by the organisers, a number of individuals within the group have committed to using their own research budgets to fund various further research meetings, many with the aim of generating contributions to the publications ideas outlined above, and further publications and events.

### 4. Final Programme

| Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November | | | |
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| 8.30 – 9.00 | | Registration | |
| 9.00 – 9.15 | | Welcome and introductions - Monica Greco | |
| 09.15 - 9.30 | | Welcome from ESF representative Rainer Kattel | |
| 9.30 – 10:15 | | Keynote: Paul Stenner – Affectivity and liminality (30' paper + 15' questions) Chair: Megan Clinch | |
| 10:15 – 11:00 | | Keynote: Arpad Szakolczai - 'Trickster liminality: The reasons of the heart and of the mind' (30' paper + 15' questions) Chair: Monica Greco | |
| 11:00- 11:15 | | Coffee Break | |
| 11:15 – 12:00 | | Keynote: Sergio Salvatore - 'Outline of a foundational model of affect: implications for liminality' (30' paper + 15' questions) Chair: Joan Pujol | |
| 12:00 – 12:15 | | Introduction to group sessions - Johanna Motzkau | |
| 12:15-13:00 | | Lunch | |
| 13.00-14.30 | Session members and roles | Hotspot case session A: Liminality in clinical contexts<br>Reflexive team A: E. Moreno, G. Flores, M. Nissen<br>Interviewee A: L. Hoel Felde; Interviewer/ Chair A: P.Stenner<br>Scribe A: M. Clinch; Reporters A: B. Thomassen, E. Sørensen<br>Audience A: A. Szakolczai, D. Fitzgerald | Hotspot case session B: Liminality in the context of self and relationships<br>Reflexive team B: P. Jesus, M. Popper, K. Scherke<br>Interviewees B: J. Pujol and G. Enciso; Interviewer/ Chair B: J.Motzkau<br>Scribe B: M.Greco; Reporters B: A. Horvath, G. Bianchi<br>Audience B: S. Vikkelsø, Sergio Salvatore, J. Kofoed, |
| | 13.00-13.15 | 'End of life in hospitals, towards an art of dying: liminality and resistance', E. Moreno and G. Flores (10' presentation + 5' questions) | 'Liminal selves: Narrative development and affective intensities on the threshold' P. Jesus (10' presentation + 5' questions) |
| | 13.15 -13.30 | 'The (time-) space of counselling' M. Nissen (10' + 5') | 'Partnership, social status and related social norms' M. Popper (10' + 5') |
| | 13.30 – 13.45 | | 'Nostalgic Moments' K. Scherke (10' + 5') |
| | 13.30 – 14.30 | Focus hotspot: Lina Hoel Felde, 'About the applicability of the concept of liminal space' | Focus hotspot: J. Pujol and G. Enciso, 'Polyamory as a Liminal Hotspot' |
| 14.30-14.45 | | Coffee Break | |
| 14.45 -16.00 | | Reflection, discussion and sketch of prototype A | Reflection, discussion and sketch of prototype B |
| | 14.45-15.00 | E. Moreno, G. Flores, M. Nissen (5'each reflection and suggestions) | P. Jesus, M. Popper, K. Scherke (5' each reflection and suggestions) |
| | 15.00 – 16.00 | Discussion and definition of prototype features (all A) | Discussion and definition of prototype features (all B) |
| 16.00-16.30 | | Coffee Break | |
| 16.30 – 18.00 | | Plenary A/B (all sessions join) – Chair: Sergio Salvatore | |
| | 16.30 -16.45 | Reporters A present process and prototype – B. Thomassen, E. Sørensen (10' presentation 5' points of clarification) | |
| | 16.45 – 17.00 | Reporters B present process and prototype – A. Horvath, G. Bianchi (10' presentation 5' points of clarification) | |
| | 17.00- 18.00 | Discussion | |
| 18.45 -19.00 | | Walk to 'Chilli Pickle' restaurant for dinner at 19.00 (meet in reception of MyHotel Brighton) | |

| **Tuesday 19th November** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9.00-9.15 | | Recap of day 1 – J. Motzkau | |
| 9:15-10.00 | | Keynote: M. Greco and M. Clinch – Liminality of symptoms, symptoms of liminality Chair: J. Motzkau | |
| 10.00-11:30 | Session members and roles | Hotspot session C: Liminality in contexts of knowledge production and scientific practice<br>Reflexive team: D. Fitzgerald, J. Kofoed, E. Sørensen<br>Interviewee C: S. Vikkelsø; Interviewer/ Chair C: M. Clinch<br>Scribe C:P.Stenner; Reporters C: G. Flores, E.Moreno<br>Audience: L. Hoel Felde, P. Jesus, S. Salvatore | Hotspot case session D: Liminality, truth, chance and authenticity<br>Reflexive team: B. Thomassen, A. Horvath, G. Bianchi<br>Interviewee D: J. Motzkau; Interviewer/ Chair D: M. Greco<br>Scribe D: M. Nissen, Reporters D: K. Scherke, G. Enisco<br>Audience: J. Pujol, M. Popper, A. Szakolczai, |
| | 10.00 – 10.15 | 'The liminal laboratory' - Sociology, neuroscience, and the affective labour of interdisciplinary knowledge-making' D. Fitzgerald (10'presentation + 5' questions) | 'Permanent Gambling and the Implosion of Liminality in Contemporary Play' B. Thomassen (10'presentation + 5' questions) |
| | 10.15 – 10.30 | 'Research methodologies: positioning, practices and processes' J. Kofoed (10' presentation + 5' questions) | 'Liminality and the Tassili Algebra: Counting Nil in Technology' A. Horvath (10'presentation + 5' questions) |
| | 10.30 – 10.45 | 'Liminalities in the topologies of violent video games', E. Sørensen (10'presentation + 5' questions) | 'Another liminal hotspot – the liquidity of the borders between wanted and unwanted sex' G. Bianchi (10'presentation + 5' questions) |
| | 10.45 – 11.30 | Focus hotspot: S. Vikkelsø, 'Moments of bewilderment: cases of contaminated realities' | Focus hotspot: J. Motzkau 'Suggestibility as liminal resource: Memory or the affective dynamic of knowing-being' |
| 11.30-11.45 | | Coffee Break | |
| 11.45-13.00 | | Reflection, discussion and sketch of prototype C | Reflection, discussion and sketch of prototype D |
| | 11.45-12.00 | D. Fitzgerald, J. Kofoed, E. Sørensen (5' each reflections and suggestions) | B. Thomassen, A. Horvath, G. Bianchi (5' each reflections and suggestions) |
| | 12.00-13.00 | Discussion and definition of prototype features (all C) | Discussion and definition of prototype features (all D) |
| 13:00-13:45 | Lunch | | |
| 13:45-15.15 | | Plenary A, B, C, D (all sessions join) – Chair: J. Kofoed | |
| | 13.45 -14.00 | Reporters C present process and prototype G. Flores, E. Moreno (10' presentation 5' points of clarification) | |
| | 14.00 – 14.15 | Reporters D present process and prototype K. Scherke, G. Enisco (10' presentation 5' points of clarification) | |
| | 14.15 – 15.15 | Discussion (incorporating discussion of prototypes arising from A and B) | |
| 15.15-15.30 | | Coffee Break | |
| 15:30-16:30 | | Summing up and future actions Chair: P. Stenner | |

<u>Workshop guide and instructions</u>
The workshop deliberately avoids a traditional format based on the presentation of academic papers followed by question-and-answer sessions. We have designed the workshop programme to maximise direct involvement of all participants, with a view to generating a collective and creative process through which we hope to define and test the concept of 'liminal hotspots'. The format we have devised – with inspiration from the practice of some of our Danish colleagues – is somewhat experimental. We hope it will work, and we look forward to trying it out with you!  In what follows, we describe how the workshop is organised and what is expected of you in the context of each of the sessions. Please read this description alongside the programme itself.

In preparation for the workshop, all invited participants have contributed an example and data from their own research. We refer to these examples as 'hotspot cases'. We have grouped the hotspot cases submitted by participants according to four loosely defined emergent themes: (A) a theme relating to liminality in clinical situations; (B) a theme relating to liminality in the context of self and relationships; (C) a theme relating to liminality within contexts of knowledge production and/or scientific practice; and (D) liminality in relation to problematics and experiences of truth, authenticity and chance.

<u>Hotspot case sessions (A, B, C, D):</u>
Each thematic session will deal with four hotspot cases, one of which (the focus hotspot) has been selected for more detailed exploration through interview and discussion. The authors of the remaining three will constitute what we call the reflexive team for that session.

During the first part of the session, members of the reflexive team will present their own hotspot cases (10' presentation + 5' questions each). We want to stress that these are not to be thought of as conventional conference presentations, but as contributions to the collective aim of drawing out prototypical features of liminal hotspots. We thus ask presenters to explore – in a speculative way, but with a grounding in data/examples – what they see as the liminal hotspot features of their case, rather than simply present what they have already circulated in writing.

After the presentations, the author of the focus hotspot case will be interviewed in detail by the session interviewer. Through this interactive process, we hope to engage with the data or example originally offered by the interviewee in such a way as to draw out themes and questions of broader relevance to the group and the workshop aims.

To keep a record of the discussion and to help define emergent themes, each session will have a designated scribe, who will take notes in real time on a computer. The notes will be projected on to a screen so that all members of the group can see them as well as comment on them and correct them as necessary.

Participants who are not directly involved in one of the roles described above will form the audience of the session. Audience members will participate through questions after each presentation and by observing the interview and note-taking process. At a later stage (see below) audience members will participate more actively by reporting on the hotspot case session and through open discussion.

<u>Reflection, discussion and definition of prototype features (A, B, C, D):</u>
This session follows directly on from the one above. Each of the members of the reflexive team (3 for each session) will be asked to 'reflect back' on the interview process through a five-minute response, drawing on their own case and research experience to offer their

**5. Final list of participants**

<u>Convenor</u>
1. Paul Stenner, The Open University, United Kingdom

<u>Co-Convenors</u>
2. Megan Clinch, The Open University, United Kingdom
3. Monica Greco, Goldsmiths, United Kingdom
4. Johanna Motzkau, The Open University, United Kingdom

<u>ESF Representative</u>
5. Rainer Kattel, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia

<u>Participants</u>
6. Gabriel Bianchi, The Slovak Academic of Sciences, Slovakia
7. Giazu Enciso, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
8. Des Fitzgerald, Kings College London, United Kingdom
9. Gemma Flores, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
10. Lina Hoel Felde, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
11. Agnes Horvath, Catholic University of Milan, Italy
12. Paulo Jesus, Alameda da Universidade, Portugal
13. Jette Kofoed, Aarhus University, Denmark
14. Eduard Moreno, University of Brighton, United Kingdom
15. Morten Nissen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
16. Miroslav Popper, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia
17. Joan Pujol, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
18. Katharina Scherke, University of Graz, Austria
19. Sergio Salvatore, University of Salento, Italy
20. Estrid Sørensen, Ruhr-University Bochum Universitätsstr, Germany
21. Arpad Szakolczai, University College Cork, Ireland
22. Signe Vikkelsø, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
23. Bjørn Thomassen, Roskilde University, Denmark

## 6. Statistical information on participants

Age bracket of attendees

| Age bracket | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| 18 - 29 | 2 |
| 30 - 49 | 18 |
| 50 -69 | 3 |
| **Total** | **23** |

Gender of attendees

| Gender | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Male | 12 |
| Female | 11 |
| **Total** | **23** |

Country of origin of attendees

| Country of origin | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Austria | 1 |
| Denmark | 5 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Germany | 1 |
| Hungary | 2 |
| Ireland | 1 |
| Italy | 2 |
| Norway | 1 |
| Portugal | 1 |
| Slovakia | 2 |
| Spain | 4 |
| United Kingdom | 2 |
| **Total** | **23** |

**Appendix 1**

Liminal hotspots: prototypical features and dimensions

1. A liminal hotspot is a particular type of *occasion* involving liminality and affectivity, where the word 'occasion' deliberately includes a fusion of time and space.

2. A liminal hotspot involves an occasion of *transition* in which someone or something finds themselves in the *process of becoming* someone or something else.

3. In a liminal hotspot the occasion of transition or passage is somehow *troubled*, perhaps blocked or otherwise suspended, perhaps 'forced' by environmental change.

4. Transition implies a distinction with something *relatively* (i.e. from a given perspective) more static, familiar or taken-for granted: a 'state' or 'being', or a 'structure' or 'system'

5. Our society is composed of a multiplicity of 'structures' of different scales, temporalities and qualities, all in process of transition. At any given time, people are occupied not just within 'structures', but also with moving *between* structures. Troubled passage between structures yields *inter-structural liminal hotspots*.

6. Passage between structures was at the core of van Gennep's concept of 'rites of passage'. These ceremonialise and otherwise *stage* significant inter-structural life transitions. The *staging* of transition can take various forms (from ritual to theatre to scientific mediation), all of which involve notable affectivity. Not all experiences of liminality are staged, however. A relative contrast can thus be drawn between *staged* and *unstaged* liminality (the latter including transitions forced by events like unpredicted disasters).

7. 'States' or 'structures' are also forms of process or transition: they are concepts referring to patterned regions of relative stability that are 'enacted' occasion by occasion. They are essentially matters of perspective, and have a fractal character in which all parts share characteristics of the whole. A given structure is made up of smaller structures and participates in broader structures. From a microscopic perspective, 'structure' is itself potentially composed of *intra-structural liminal hotspots:* i.e. in the process of *patterning* 'structure' there are always indeterminacies and people must manage each novel occasion creatively if the pattern is to endure.

8. Two ways of managing intra-structural hotspots can be distinguished: processing indeterminacies into existing patterns, and inventing new patterns to accommodate them. With the former, 'structural' social practice 'smooths over' or *regularises* anomalies, 'tinkering' to ease the flow of practice. With the latter, intra-structural anomalies are attended to as significant catalysts of new structural patterns (liminal hotspots catalyse *pattern-shift* or transition within and *of* structure). A third possibility is to neither regularise nor catalyse pattern shift, but to get 'stuck'.

9. Since social structures are inseparable from the combined experiences and actions of the human *subjects* that produce (pattern) and are produced (patterned) by them, social transformations necessarily entail subjective transformations or pattern-shifts. Liminal hotspots are thus *psychosocial* phenomena.

10. Structures, relatively speaking, are complexity reduction devices. They serve to 'contain' and / or *delimit* potentiality by setting conventionally recognised limits to the experience and conduct of subjects, establishing socially valued differences and asymmetries (which probabilise regulated experience and conduct).

11. When someone is *in the process* of becoming a 'something else' that is not yet known, they find themselves no longer 'limited' by what they once were (the past

pattern) and not yet 'limited' by what they might become (the future pattern). From the perspective of the one in process, this gives the occasion features of comparative *indeterminacy* and *uncertainty* (people face 'bewilderment').

12. This uncertainty reflects the feature of *potentiality* (in contrast with actuality) typical of occasions of transition where the outcome of the occasion is precisely not yet known.

13. The feature of potentiality also yields *ambivalence*, since the change *might* be for the better or for the worse, since progress and degeneration are both *possible* (the uncertainty can equally be exciting or stressful). Negative extremes include panic and disintegration, positive extremes include experiences of communitas and participation that can yield higher values.

14. The 'unlimited' feature of potentiality yields a relatively symmetrical or de-differentiated mode of experience that from a more structural vantage point would show up as logical contradiction or *paradox*. Liminal occasions are classically understood as embracing a symmetrical 'both / and' logic which defies the (assymetrical) Aristotelian logic of identity and the excluded middle. Liminal hotspots have the *doubly* paradoxical feature of being *both* 'both / and' *and* 'neither / nor', the first marking a positive valence of plenitude and the second marking a valence of negation.

15. 'Affectivity' can be considered as the relatively unlimited potential of feeling that is the counterpart to the relatively delimited affective experience of 'emotion'. Affect is likely to become more salient in a liminal hotspot.

16. 'Subjectivity' can be considered as the relatively unlimited potential of personhood that is the counterpart to the relatively delimited experience of 'identity'. Subjectivity is likely to become more salient in a liminal hotspot.

17. Subjectivity and affectivity (as relatively unformed potentials) bring qualities of heightened suggestibility to liminal hotspots. Distinctions between self and other and between truth and falsity lose their hold.

18. This amplified mutability or capacity to be affected is captured by the word *volatility*. This also marks the seemingly instantaneously transformations in value that occur in hotspots, and the interaction of usually distinct 'levels' (e.g. psychic and somatic).

19. These features of volatility, ambivalence and potentiality apply to all liminal stituations, but taken on new significance in liminal hotspots where troubled transition or blockage serves to *sustain* them.

20. Transition might be troubled by a number of factors, including overwhelming complexity or multiplicity, a breakdown of order, or the imposition of contradictory demands from powerful others. Liminal hotspots might entail the paralyzing confusion of a number of distinguishable modes of liminality such as epistemological liminality (concerning limited knowledge, leading to uncertainty); functional liminality (concerning different aims of practice which can become confused, leading to pragmatic paradoxes); and existential or affective liminality (concerning existential transformation, leading to ambivalence and ontological insecurity). Some hotspots are zones in which these modes become concentrated and fused.