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THE LIMINAUT Lost and Found in the Field

ABSTRACT

Following a research project working with the concept of mountains in the age of the Anthropocene, this article takes on an experimental exercise in *sonic thinking* applied in the phenomenology of space. Instead of providing a reader with a concrete set of answers or methods, it presents process-oriented insight into an emergence of a possible perspective on spatial research represented by the persona of *liminaut*. The liminaut strives to narrow down the epistemological gap between the subject and the studied space by thinking through media, and approaching space not as a disjointed object of inquiry but as an organic plane, which

has a potential to co-form the researcher. The article at hand might be read both as a theoretical and practical adventure, as well as a foray into the deserts of the real, testing the limits of representation. As with any experimental approach, there may be more questions than answers ensuing—yet, following the relevant acoustic metaphor, the paper shall be read as a moment of acoustic inception, a sequence of noise from which a new kind of thinking emerges and spreads onwards.

KEY WORDS: liminaut, sonic thinking, mountains

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INTRODUCTION

This article tells a story of emergence, processual undulation, and ensuing reverberation. It follows an intellectual, artistic, acoustic—as well as embodied—journey into the liminal thicket of theoretical as well as physical space, in which the scientific/artistic subject gets lost, and is forced to find a new form of thinking.

This project started as an attempt to marry different theories and practices struggling to understand a specific kind of space: the mountains. Inevitably then, the following lines will be weaving and waving through diverse fields including, among others, non-representational theory, affect studies, and, importantly, artistic research, which according to Helen Vendler involves “pulling the energy of the performing arts into the social sciences to crawl out to the edge of the cliff of the conceptual.”² The motivation to create the method presented in the following pages can be traced back to the very spark of curiosity and craving for at least momentary glimpses of the new horizons beyond such an edge.

SETTING OFF

This article follows a project aimed at revisiting spatial research methodology, trying to complicate the subject-object relationship between a researcher and the space he or she observes. The author aimed to juxtapose several different theoretical voices on the backdrop of hands-on field research, leaving as much space for the exploration of the unexpected as possible.

Looking into the very core of the methodology at hand, this article takes on an exercise in *sonic thinking*, a media-philosophy approach coined and voiced by Bernd Herzogenrath as “a thinking with and by means of sound, not a thinking about sound,”³ which follows the premise of artistic research where rather than the final product, “the process of the emergence of a work becomes the center of attention.”⁴ This article follows the turn to the non-representational proposed by Candice Boyd and Christian Edwardes, attempting to “embrace life’s messiness without the need to contain or reduce it to a set of social constructions.”⁵ Rather than a firm list of conclusions, the article strives to communicate a certain dynamics and possibility of becoming in tune with the “attempts to address what transpires in the affective

² Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 79.

³ Bernd Herzogenrath, “sonic thinking—An Introduction,” in *Sonic Thinking* ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 9.

⁴ Herzogenrath, “sonic thinking—An Introduction,” 6.

⁵ Candice P. Boyd and Christian Edwardes, “Creative Practice and the non-Representational,” in *Non-Representational Theory and Creative Arts*, ed. Candice P. Boyd and Christian Edwardes (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.

bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality,”⁶ where, inevitably, “there are no ultimate or final guarantees.”⁷ Following the always-inquiring approach of a philosopher such as Deleuze,⁸ however, I deem such an exercise worth the risk.

Despite the inevitable degree of messiness in such a project, I solemnly follow Nigel Thrift’s call “to achieve a diagnosis of the present which is simultaneously a carrier wave for new ways of doing things.”⁹ Let me now trace the flow of ideas organically, from their roots in theoretical thought towards practice and finally, a moment of singularity, from which a method emanates and spreads outwards. Whether such a process can bear future concrete conclusions, I cannot tell with certainty, however, what I can clearly state is that it brings forth a new kind of thinking, a process-oriented approach, which will initiate further unexpected reverberations with their creative overtones.

SCRAMBLING TOWARD INSIGHTS

In December 2021, I decided to invest myself in a broad, interdisciplinary research project focusing on different layers and facets of the concept of mountains. The original and primary aim of the project was to explore the ever-changing concept of mountains in the age of the Anthropocene. Considering myself a zealous hiker and a mountaineer, I aimed to reconnoiter any theoretical approaches in the broad fields of cultural and affect studies that could answer theoretical questions surfacing during the time spent immersed in the physical mountain space. I wanted to leave enough space for the element of surprise because, during my years of thinking and working with various concepts and ideas, I have found surprise to be the key to any meaningful discovery.

Looking back at the project in retrospect, I must admit that my expectations of finding the unexpected were correct. It was not the planned destination I have reached, but a liminal, sonorous space in-between thought and practice, subject and object, research and art, where, as Deleuze envisions: “resonances emerge, very, very strange correspondences that one shouldn’t even theorize.”¹⁰ It is precisely these

⁶ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 9.

⁷ Seigworth and Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” 9.

⁸ Voiced for instance in his seminal work *What Is Philosophy?* (1994).

⁹ Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

¹⁰ Bernd Herzogenrath’s translation of: “. . . des correspondances très très curieuses, que à mon avis il ne faut même pas théoriser, que je préférerais appeler l’affectif en général . . .” Gilles Deleuze, “Image Mouvement Image Temps, Cours Vincennes–St Denis: le plan–02/11/1983,” *Webdeleuze*, accessed February 10, 2011, www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=69&groupe=Image%20Mouvement%20Image%20Temps&langue=1. As cited in: Bernd Herzogenrath, “sonic thinking–An Introduction,” in *Sonic Thinking*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 5.

resonances, and the ensuing ripples in thought, matter, and body, that I dare to explore, offering to the reader an emergent position of an artist-researcher as *liminaut*—a figure that I have coined to describe the position of an ever-inquiring and honest researcher of space, who dares to step beyond the subject-object dichotomy, reflecting on the affective dynamics (i.e., “the voice”) of the space itself. I believe this position, which will be described in greater detail below, should be considered by anybody working on spatial research since it allows one to step into the gap between theory and practice—between dry description and vivid experience.

MOVING STANDPOINTS

Considering process-oriented thinking one of the governing forces of this article, I would first like to present a reader with the theoretical grounds of my project. I shall start by exploration of what I believed to be a relatively solid (yet moving) theoretical framework, proceed via the first forays into the intellectual unknown all the way to the physical act of getting lost in the field, where the entire journey culminated and, from where the central concept of *liminaut* resounds back and forth.

The approach to thinking and working with concepts that enabled and governed the initial steps of this research was guided by the moveable methodologies of Mieke Bal, who argues that in humanities, “you do not apply one method; you conduct a meeting between several, a meeting in which the object participates so that, together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field.”¹¹ In the context of spatial research, such an approach entails getting in physical touch with the space itself, venturing into the object and acknowledging its affective influence upon the inquiring subject, and honestly foregrounding the process of being and thinking *in* and *with* the space rather than just *about the space*. *Sonic thinking*,¹² where the medium becomes part of the method, thus becomes an open gateway to such complex, in-between approaches.

I would like to invite the reader to approach the entire article as a piece of acoustic field recording with all its peaks, moments of silence, random emergences, and resonances between thereof, but also noises, clicks, and ruptures, all of which create a complex and meaningful whole—a reality of assemblage, in which according to Deleuze and Guattari, “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author).”¹³ Rather than a rigid grid of answers, I would like to open a space, in which concepts, experience, and bodies might travel and generate tensions, potentialities, and resonances.

¹¹ Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 4.

¹² See and compare the previous and following discussions concerning Bernd Herzogenrath’s concepts.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23.

Practicing sound recording in the field inevitably stresses the importance of process and the implied interconnectedness between subject, method and object. In field recording, instead of the familiar map, the researcher is forced to follow a sound-driven journey directed by the environment itself that takes on unexpected shapes and draws *lines of flight* that even Deleuze and Guattari intrinsically link to the sonic reality of music and its tendency to resonate and create new meanings.¹⁴ What ensues is a new kind of movement in and perspective on the studied space—an approach governed more closely by the demands of the environment itself rather than by the original aim of the researcher—at least such is the approach of the aforementioned *liminaut*.

My map of the entire project was drawn as a juxtaposition of several different layers. As the grounds for discussion with the students in my seminar, and introduction to the complexity of mountains as a travelling concept, I needed to draw somewhat-firm lines and grids along the field of human geography of the mountains, as proposed by Macfarlane in his dual, intertextual project, consisting of a volume entitled *Mountains of the Mind* (2003) and the accompanying concept-driven documentary film *Mountain* (2017). Macfarlane positions himself not only as a historian of a concept but also as an eco/phenomenologist, arguing that a mountain is not a mere static object of science but “. . . a collaboration of the physical forms of the world with the imagination of humans—a mountain of the mind.”¹⁵ Importantly, being an avid climber and embodied thinking practitioner, Macfarlane does not stop at the mere celebration of the cerebral and highlights the importance of corporeal knowledge of the mountains, insisting that any human representation “is nothing less than a facsimile of the world itself . . . a map is an abbreviation: this is its definition, its strength, and its limitation. To know a landscape properly, you must go into it in person.”¹⁶ At this point, I must openly caution the reader that direct immersion in real space should not be equated to the extreme idea of subject and object blending into unity—the idealized possibility of getting in touch with the very substance of the real. After all, the human struggle for perfect, unobscured knowledge of the object has been proven futile by a long line of thinkers from Kant¹⁷ to Lacan.¹⁸

In the context of both *sonic thinking* approach and the object of the mountains, the gap within the relation of the observer to the observed can be explored alongside Amy Ireland’s argument that “what, for the observer-as-subject is clarity, for the observer-as-object is noise,”¹⁹ which entails that “as the signal passes through the

¹⁴ See and compare various perspectives on the concept in: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in the Chapter “Introduction: Rhizome” (some important mentions at pgs. 11, 13, 21).

¹⁵ Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), 186.

¹⁶ Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 186.

¹⁷ Especially his idea of “ding-an-sich” discussed, for example, in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

¹⁸ In *Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953–1954* (1991), Lacan attributes further difficulties in our attempts to study objects to the concept of culturally laden “symbolic order.”

¹⁹ Amy Ireland, “Noise: An Ontology of the Avant-Garde,” *Aesthetics After Finitude*, ed. Baylee Brits, Prudence Gibson and Amy Ireland (Pahran: Re.Press, 2016), 222.

human—by virtue of this processing which ultimately renders it intelligible to the human—it becomes distorted. Signification, then, rests on a fundamental interruption and deformation.”²⁰ Ireland treads alongside the ultimate futility of our struggle to understand objects, yet she arrives at a surprising speculative conclusion that the hope for those who long to touch the real might rest in the noise itself: “If Enlightenment subjectivity is constituted in this jamming of a signal from the outside, can we, by negating human noise (i.e., the a priori, the rational), reconstruct a vision of the source?”²¹ Conversely, I strive to muffle or even make use of *human noise* through delving into the area between subject and object—into the source of tension and fuzz, on the basal, embodied plane, where the body can serve as a guide through unstable planes of the theoretical and the subjective. Merleau-Ponty in his seminal work on *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) marries the long-severed poles of human interaction in the world through the sense of embodiment, which is “the central phenomenon of which body and mind, or sign and signification are abstract moments.”²² The proposed persona of *liminaut* certainly travels into such abstract unstable zones and grapples with different slippery terms and theories, yet, phenomenologically speaking, body and embodied experience remains to be the grounding pivotal point.

The *sonic thinking* experiments presented in the following pages strive to put some of Ireland’s ideas discussed above into embodied practice—for a *liminaut*, noise, both in its sonic and epistemological connotations, becomes a gateway to the unexpected, the error, while diversion becomes strength and a source of creative power. Fueled by a Deleuzian zeal for inquiry, I believe that the obstacles in breaching the gap between subject and object shall not shut the discussion but open up a wider array of experiments and gateways into the liminal space in-between, which, if not easily entered, might be at least approximated by those who dare.

READING MAPS

Delving into such a broad problem of the subject-method-object in scientific inquiry and their possible co-constitutive relationship along the phenomenological line of thought, I would like to bring two concepts into resonance—a loosely related duet, whose voices will later feed back, amplify and guide this article towards a final glitch in practical thinking.

The first conceptual oscillator resonating with the context at hand is Jean Baudrillard’s seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). Baudrillard insists that humans with their machinery of capitalist production have perfected the craft of representation and reproduction to a point where the represented got almost entirely lost in a successive chain of fabricated layers, arguing that “today abstraction is no

²⁰ Ireland, 222.

²¹ Ireland, 222.

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 169.

longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”²³ Following Baudrillard closely, one might arrive at a rather bleak conclusion that “(t)he territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it,”²⁴ that an axiom has already irreversibly replaced the real. Yet, Baudrillard’s rendering of our reality as a multi-layered simulacrum still offers a speck of hope—at least for those who dare to venture beyond the Empire of representations, the cast-out researchers daring to go into “deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself,”²⁵ searching the last “shreds” and “vestiges” of reality. It is precisely this travelling, daring voice that this article decided to adopt in its embracing of the non-representational approach to geography and artistic research.

The second, somewhat softer and more soothing voice which I would like to bring into resonance with Baudrillard is that of Arne Næss, a Norwegian philosopher pursuing his gestalt approach to the study of the real in an essay entitled *The World of Concrete Contents* (1985), which, stemming from his grounding in ecosophy, resounds with the object matter at hand (the spatial research/phenomenology of mountains) with less dissonant overtones. Subverting the alleged objectivity of the subject in the research project, Næss rejects the notion of *ding-an-sich* and turns towards infinite interconnectedness: “There are no completely separable objects A concrete content can only be one-to-one related to an indivisible structure, a *constellation* of factors. Concrete *contents* and abstract structures make up reality as it is in fact.”²⁶ Næss thus closes the Kantian epistemological gap between subject and object by placing both into a single world—rather than thinking about the mountain, Næss scrambles over its sides and builds a cabin upon its wind-blown face. To circumnavigate the simulated, axiomatic kind of thinking, Næss suggests the researcher to abandon veneration of an idealized isolated subject for “ontologies in which secondary and tertiary qualities are at least on a par with the primary ones.”²⁷ A similar idea surfaces outside of the nature-related ecosophical thinking in a broader framework of Graham Harman’s *Object Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, in the notion of *flat ontology*, which “initially treats all objects in the same way, rather than assuming in advance that different types of objects require completely different ontologies.”²⁸ Employing such theories in field research practice, the ultimate goal of *liminaut* then, is to conduct spatial research in which space is given more agency than a mere studied object.

Decades earlier, immersed in the realm of human-nature relationships, Næss

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

²⁴ Baudrillard, 1.

²⁵ Baudrillard, 1.

²⁶ Arne Næss, *Ecology of Wisdom*, eds. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), 73.

²⁷ Næss, 74.

²⁸ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican, Penguin Books, 2018), 54.

urges to adopt the method of *amateur research*, where a body is guided by the object of study instead of posing a fixed paradigm on it—a method requiring “very little abstract thinking, very much seeing, listening, hearing, touching. The secondary and especially the tertiary qualities are in focus—the worlds of concrete contents—not the primary qualities studied in physics.”²⁹ Pitching this concept into harmony with Deleuzian notion of *assemblage*, in which objects shed their substance and become intensities, directions, potentialities and “multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single assemblage, operating in the same assemblage: packs in masses and masses in packs,”³⁰ the liminaut suddenly finds oneself not in the structural space of axiomatic science, but a world of concrete contents teeming with life, forces and unforeseeable affective dynamics.

TEARING MAPS

Facing the essential challenge of breaching such a major gap between the subject and the studied object considering the resonances discussed above, the entire project was pushed to respond with a methodological turn towards non-representational theory, embodiment, performativity and working with media as extensions of the body. Therefore, I have decided to employ various practices of artistic research that move in the liminal zone between the analytic and the creative, following the vision of Boyd and Edwardes, who suggested to “. . . extend the limits of artistic and geographical knowledge . . . to create work, which locates itself at the bleeding edge of the art-geography nexus.”³¹ Such an exercise inevitably involves a certain sense of risk, loss, or almost shamanic ritual sacrifice—as Dewsbury puts it, “. . . as with most artistic practices, it comes with the side-effect of making us more vulnerable and self-reflexive.”³² In the case of the field research at hand, this kind of vulnerability was consciously sought as a means of more intimate immersion.

I have already briefly delineated the media-philosophical approach of *sonic thinking*—in this section, I am going to further elaborate on the significance of sonic and non-representational approaches as performative acts in the context of spatially-oriented research and their potential for an affective immersion in the studied assemblage of the subject/object and exploring new ways of thinking.

I would like to stress that within the scope of this article, I shall not be listing the wide array of different ways of working with sound in the field. Everybody picks a different approach on the basis of their own capacities and the demands of the space itself. The actual material outcomes of different fieldwork performances might be

²⁹ Næss, *Ecology of Wisdom*, 61.

³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 34.

³¹ Boyd and Edwardes, “Creative Practice and the non-Representational,” 1–2.

³² J. D. Dewsbury, “Performative, Non-Representational, and Affect-Based Research: Seven Injunctions.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, ed. Dydia DeLyser, Steve Herbert, Stuart Aitken, Mike Crang, and Linda McDowell (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2010), 326.

infinitesimal. Rather than the particular form of the medium, I would like to bring the reader's attention to the processual nature of the sound itself and the liminal nature of thinking and working that follows its basic properties.

As for the field trip, which I have recently organized, our main goal was not to produce an adamant recording or composition of sounds, but rather, to use any method of extension of the body that would fulfill Dewsbury's goals of getting "embroiled in the site and allow ourselves to be infected by the effort, investment, and craze of the particular practice or experience being investigated."³³ Returning to the core approach, the focus of this particular exercise in *sonic thinking* has been the process, not the product—it strives to employ the full potential of art research, which according to Boyd and Edwardes offers "retreat of the (cognitively-driven) intentional act as the means of providing a totalizing explanation or interpretation Instead, attention is turned to the configurations of bodies and things that 'enable and extend' an artist's conscious awareness."³⁴ In such a way, artistic research becomes a compass that can lead one into the liminal deserts on a quest to find the remnants of the real, which is a movement and potential valuable enough even if the body decides to shred the recordings together with the maps and remain silent forever.

In fact, I could go as far as to argue that in approaching the shimmering void between the subject and object, a perceptive, hearing body sitting on a stump alone in the middle of the mountains is a far more appropriate metaphor for the proposed approach than an array of machines and professional studio equipment with a composer trained in musicology occupying the same position. The key is not in a clear-cut method but a corporeal immersion in space and its sonic qualities. The liminaut does not strive to cut out a finite structure but to go beyond the subject-object dichotomy and to embrace the rhizomatic nature of the studied space.

Illustrating such an approach through a crafts-related metaphor in the ensuing exercise, sound can be seen not as a paint to work with but a raw material to respond to—a texture of wood that dictates the cut, a path that is missing on the map but is taken without hesitation. Deleuze and Guattari label bodies invested in such an activity *artisans*—"those who follow the matter-flow as pure productivity,"³⁵ and as Herzogenrath further quotes Deleuze and Guattari: "It is a question of surrendering to the [materiality], then following where it leads by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form on matter."³⁶ In any case, I do not dare to argue that thesis statements, research questions, and answers generally do not matter, yet, investigating the issue at hand, I would like to argue that research can turn from a goal-oriented endeavor into a meaningful process—a material-driven embodied thinking adventure.

³³ Dewsbury, "Performative, Non-Representational, and Affect-Based Research," 326.

³⁴ Boyd and Edwardes, "Creative Practice and the non-Representational," 1-3.

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 411.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 408, quoted in Bernd Herzogenrath, "sonic thinking—An Introduction," 6.

GETTING LOST IN THE FIELD

In concordance with the theories and tendencies of thinking through sound discussed above, what emerged as the most potent tendency within the recent fieldtrip practice I have partaken in, was the turn to process-oriented thinking and liminality. Working and thinking outside the walls of academia, everyone who craved reaching their intellectual pre-set goals was suddenly performing an aimless pilgrimage into the liminal. These participants often returned not with wordings and descriptions of the results but fascinated, charged with the affective potential of the in-between, or even slightly derailed by the very experience of the process. The following discussion on the concept of liminality emerged as a reaction to a set of interviews with the students participating in the fieldtrip—readers might feel that the ensuing argumentation is often dissolving on the verge of what is possible to describe in linguistic reality, and they would be right to assume so. The difficulty, however, never entails impossibility, and it is the very urge of putting these strange resonances between my own and my students' experiences into words, that has propelled the entire discussion at hand.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

Let me open the discussion on affective spatial analysis by exploring the notion of liminality. In the recent history of humanities and philosophy, liminality has become a concept travelling across vast arrays of sub-fields, theories, and practices. Initially adopted by Arnold van Gennep in the early 20th century in the context of his analysis of *The Rites of Passage* (1960), liminality soon became a flexible concept in ethnology and other fields employed to signify “A transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life; [especially] such a state occupied during a ritual or rite of passage, characterized by a sense of solidarity between participants.”³⁷ With his background in more general anthropology, Turner ascribes the liminal both temporal and spatial attributes, where “the state of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.”³⁸ Liminality thus becomes a prime example of a concept moving across fields according to the dynamics pointed out by Bal in her conceptual framework of *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002), a concept set out on travels “back and forth several times between (artistic) practice and (academic) theory, and between (academic) practice and (artistic) theory,”³⁹ allowing for looser, performative and affective interpretations of the liminal. Indeed, looking at the current properties of the term, *liminality* has become a truly liminal term in itself, fulfilling somewhat

³⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, online, last modified in March 2022), s.v. “Liminality,” accessed April 28, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/248158?redirectedFrom=liminality&>.

³⁸ Victor V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 94.

³⁹ Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in Humanities*, 16.

ironic visions of the contemporary meta-theoreticians.

Alluding back to Gennep's definitions I must admit that a certain sense of rituality and passage resonated throughout the field research experiences of my fellow *liminauts* operating within the field research, yet their context was far from the sacred, culturally-bound and formalized rites of change—such an interpretation would reduce the entire experiment to nothing more than biased and critically doomed neo-classical-ethnology. The sense of *liminality* found in the position of *liminaut*, which I aim to propose as the main methodological contribution of this article, is built on the looser connotations of the in-between explored by Victor Turner in his works on *the liminoid*, which places the original ethnological concept into a broader context of critical theory. In today's context, Turner's concepts have been applied in different fields working with the notion of performativity and artistic creation, which is exactly the gateway through which they traveled into my project.

PLAYING WITH THE LIMINOID

Liminality has recently become a vastly flexible concept applicable in an innumerable array of contexts. The role of the liminal in the human power structures can take on numerous forms. Turner argues that we are often perceiving and performing liminality (especially in the subversive, ludic, artistic-research contexts) on the basis of entirely distinct principles than the tribal societies studied by Gennep, proposing therefore a category of the *liminoid* phenomena, which “tend to be more idiosyncratic or quirky, to be generated by specifically named individuals and in particular groups—‘schools,’ circles, and coteries. They have to compete with one another for general recognition and are thought of at first as ludic offerings.”⁴⁰ Turner argues that *liminoids* could become a tool for abandoning representationalism since such “symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the ‘objective-social’ typological pole.”⁴¹ Allowing for free play and diversion from culturally- or disciplinary-prescribed rites and practices, Turner finally points out, that “the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice not obligation,”⁴² being “an independent domain of creative activity, not simply a distorted mirror-image, mask, or cloak for structural activity in the ‘centers’ or ‘mainstreams’ of “productive social labor.”⁴³ I would like to argue that such would be the prospective position of a *liminaut* researcher within the project at hand.

⁴⁰ Victor Turner, “Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow and ritual: an essay in comparative symbology,” *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (1974): 86, accessed March 15, 2022, https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/63159/article_RIP603_part4.pdf.

⁴¹ Turner, 86.

⁴² Turner, 86.

⁴³ Turner, 65.

ENTER THE LIMINAUT

Liminaut, then, embodies what I imagine as the appropriate position of a researcher striving to explore, experience, and understand different spaces. Such a position embraces any available methods that lead to a closer, more intimately embodied contact with the space and at least partial breaching of the epistemological gap between subject and object. During the project at hand, these included *sonic thinking* and other artistic methods, yet, I believe that it is not the exact method but the struggle to reach the liminal position that should differentiate such an approach to space from other conventional approaches. Rather than a definite, rigid methodology, the *liminaut* shall become a performative role that can enable one to discover new methods and approaches to space.

Looking at my definitions of the liminaut, one could possibly object that I am drawing such division along lines of a mere personification or body/ground distinction. The personification is indeed key, yet, I would like to add that there is another functional difference between the *liminaut* and the *liminoid*. While Turner argues that “one works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid,”⁴⁴ my concept of the *liminaut* operates within the range of resonances between “work” and “play,” entering the *liminoid* playfully, yet with an intention. Such a body is taking on a mission of working, interacting with, and getting immersed in different liminalities. The *Liminaut* performs immersed inquires, ventures into affective fields, and tries to smuggle insights back across the threshold into the simulation we live in.

Finally arriving at the key definition, the *liminaut* is a (sonic or other) spatial researcher, who strives to narrow down the aforementioned methodological/epistemological gap between subject and object⁴⁵ by consciously providing the studied space (object) with more agency, reducing his or her own choice-driven action during the field research, and reflecting on the epistemological *noise*⁴⁶ produced by the sole presence of him or her within such a space—in the case of my project, an inquiring, embodied mind guided by the auditory and visual qualities of the mountains.

During our field recording sessions in the mountains, the concepts of liminality, *liminoid* and artisan converged in the role of *liminaut* as a relevant term to describe the experience, which has affected me and my accompanying students during the fieldwork. In the moment of getting lost in field practice, the subject-body found itself neither rooted in theories, neither being an immanent part of the spatial assemblage, neither the observer nor the observed. In such a zone, words as we know and use them, are often brought to a standstill and are forced to become smooth, slippery, and less reliable. I would like to posit, however, that despite its difficult and

⁴⁴ Turner, 86.

⁴⁵ See the earlier discussion on Kant, Ireland, Næss, and object-oriented ontology.

⁴⁶ In the sense proposed and used by Amy Ireland in her essay “Noise: An Ontology of the Avant-Garde.”

unstable nature, this discussion is still relevant to the field and might offer a valuable form of thinking useful as a ground for future forays into the deserts of the real.

LIMINAUT REVISITED: LOSING PATHWAYS / FINDING METHODS

With the position of *liminaut* researcher role delineated in terms of theory, let me now proceed to practice—the fieldtrip into the mountains that led to the very discovery of such a persona. This section might leave many ends untied but its purpose is mainly to provide a real-world background to the *liminaut* that could help the readers grasp its possible utilization and perhaps inspire them to adopt such a position within their own research.

The fieldtrip was organized as a culmination of a semester-long concept-driven seminar for a group of 15 students, each working on their own research project tied to the spatial and often sonic exploration of the mountains. Sharing the theoretical background in spatial studies, non-representational theory, and affect theory, the students were given three days to conduct their own field research and find their own methods of working with the real space according to the specific aims of their projects (revolving around the central concept of the mountains, their topics ranged from media studies, media ecology, artistic research, to affect studies, performance studies, etc.). Before the students began their fieldwork, they were urged to leave some space open to surprise and spontaneity—following the aforementioned Deleuzian idea of the *artisan*, they were asked to respond to the studied environment instead of blindly following a plan.

Some students went field-recording samples for later composition, others collected materials to be used as color media, and some went to gather inspiration for their creative projects—the methods, means, and ideas were plentiful. Yet, when we met in the evening to discuss and contemplate the first day's experience, a common idea emerged—everyone agreed that to know the space, one has to get into direct contact with it and engage with the conditions, which the space itself dictates. By the second night, hardly anyone talked about anything different from the need to *get lost* in the field in order to understand its qualities intimately.

To theorize *getting lost* as a method, however, I have bumped into a theoretical obstacle that called for stabilizing at least some ground for such an approach—the ground then became the researcher's body of the *liminaut*, who aimed to explore the space intimately and without constraints of a rigid method, yet anchored by the grounding sense of embodiment. The individual projects eventually arrived at different conclusions and discoveries—yet, what linked the majority of them was the central dynamics of breaching the subject-object dichotomy through *getting lost*—the bodies driven through space by sensory experience and affective forces lost their set ways and found methods. Despite the different means, media, and conclusions, however, all shared the same passion for reaching further towards the material and the object, which is what ultimately defines the *liminaut* as a researcher. I believe that

such a position might prove helpful in any project that deals with spatial research and strives to grasp the full spectrum of sounds and meanings immanent in any kind of place or space.

CONCLUSION

This article now comes to a halt at the limits of language, representation, theory, and practice. Guiding the reader from the relatively firm ground of the theoretical framework, it has taken them on a wild ride on the waves of *sonic thinking*, which, surprising even the author himself, has not arrived at a set of concrete conclusions, but provided a certain insight into the depths of methodology of embodied thinking in space, and tested the limits of language and representation itself. Instead of a set of arguments, I have presented the possibility of adopting a new researcher persona dubbed the *liminaut*—an inquisitive and honest explorer who, phenomenologically speaking, strives to get in touch with the object at hand despite the obvious epistemological obstructions.

I would not dare argue that such an approach provides definite answers, yet, I believe that such a position might prove useful to any researchers aiming to embrace the space in their study in its full complexity and organic messiness and perhaps discover entirely new ways (both *sonic* and silent) of thinking and acting in, of and out of space. ◻

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