The Office Workplace: Communitas and Hierarchical Social Structures

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Abstract: Victor Turner's concept of communitas is being applied to an increasingly diverse number of social situations. Researchers often try to establish the absence of hierarchical or status base structure as a precondition for communitas. The existence of a situational "egalitarianism" is hard to maintain when all social relationships are political. This paper uses excerpts of interviews of civil servants from a small Regional Planning Office in Alberta, Canada. I show the possibility of integrating structural differentiation with the experience of communitas, building on Turner's and related research. This integration helps illustrate the ritual properties in everyday situations, while acknowledging the salience of inherent status and hierarchical distinctions.

Keywords: workplace, occupation, symbolism, ritual, communitas, Heirarchy

Résumé : Le concept de communauté tel qu'utilisé par Victor Turner est employé dans des situations sociales de plus en plus diverses. Les auteurs tentent souvent de s'assurer de l'absence de hiérarchie ou d'une structure basées sur le statut avant de parler de communauté. Une situation d'«égalitarisme» est difficile à maintenir quand toute les relations sociales sont politiques. Cet article analyse des extraits d'entrevue de fonctionnaires dans un petit bureau de planification régionale en Alberta, Canada. J'y démontre la possibilité d'intégrer une différentiation structurelle à l'expérience de communauté, à partir des recherches de Turner et d'autres du même type. Cette intégration contribue à montrer les caractéristiques rituelles dans les situations quotidiennes tout en reconnaissant la présence de statuts acquis et de distinctions hiérarchiques.

Mots-clés : travail, occupation, symbolisme, rituel, communauté, hiéracrchie

Introduction

In this case study I present interview-based narrative indicating experiences of communitas in a small civil service office in Alberta. This is not intended as a review of the ongoing theoretical discussions of Turner's concept, or as a comprehensive ethnographic description of an organization. However, while interviewing unemployed and still working members of a Regional Land Use Planning Office in Alberta, it became obvious that these people had lost much more than their positions and colleagues. Their narratives show a loss of occupational and social community so personalized as to constitute a bond they commonly refer to as one of "family." These responses imply a loss of communitas, as defined by Turner and a rich body of related theoretical and case study research, which I build upon here.

Victor Turner's (1977, 1974, 1969) concepts of spontaneous, normative and ideological communitas continue to be used to discuss intense feelings of "togetherness" in a wide variety of social groups and societal categories. Communitas means a sense of common purpose and communion (Turner, 1969: 95-97) similar to the collective human bond that is the thematic (or existential) basis of the ideal notion of "community." As succinctly interpreted by Newton (1988: 65) and Deflem (1991: 15), Turner conceived of spontaneous or existential communitas as an emotional bond arising from shared experiences that allow a sense of transcending the emphasis on sociostructural positioning. However, Turner (1982, 1974, 1969) thought of the experience as part of a process. As such, the collective feeling of transcendence becomes a framed theme of mutual purpose around which a normative social organization develops, (thus "normative communitas"), followed by an (logically structured) ideological base and further development of normative social structuring (or "ideological communitas"). Eventually, ideological communitas is assimilated and subsumed by the social structure and broader ideo-

logical foundations of the larger society (Turner, 1969: 132). As in ritual, (Kelly and Caplan, 1990: 126) this is both a liberating and conservative process, one of social change as well as maintenance of the social order (Schneider, 1998: 299).

It is unusual to assert the existence of communitas in workplace contexts. Most contemporary case studies illustrate communitas within a liminal "antistructure" as the absence, suspension or inversion of hierarchical structural and status distinctions that are viewed primarily as constraining (e.g. Bettis, 1996; Granzberg, 1989; Kemp, 1999; Kisiara, 1998; Woods, 1993). Consequently, communitas is generally defined in opposition to, and as liberation from hierarchical social structure (Deflem, 1991: 14). This approach emphasizes Turner's distinction between, rather than his equally compelling blending of social structure and processes of communitas. I emphasize the associative properties in this study, and although the workplace in which my respondents had or did work is certainly not representative, its significance lies in the demonstrable awareness of a communitas intertwined by clearly established hierarchical and status based distinctions.

It is inherently problematic to assert a situational absence of sociostructural (in the sense of hierarchical or status) distinctions. Such analyses connect communitas to social contexts in which "the roles and statuses connected with class and gender in the larger society are not operative" (Kemp, 1999: 81) or a "lack of social hierarchy" (Bettis, 1996: 116) or context that exists "outside the structure of roles, statuses and positions" (McLaren, 1986: 259). Such claims of situational egalitarianism inevitably require qualification. The common interpretation of a liminal communitas as "betwixt and between" mainstream social structure derives from Turner's analysis of very specific ritual contexts in which temporary suspension or inversion of hierarchical and status-based distinctions are properties of the ceremony. The salient aspect of Turner's structure-"antistructure" opposition is that in a functionalist sense "antistructure"/communitas was conducive to an existential "spark" that could ignite processes of social and ideological change. In trying to establish contexts lacking social structure, studies run the risk of highlighting structure over the process- and practice-related elements of Turner's concept of communitas and antistructure. As the latter are intended as properties of ritual, such analysis also tends to alienate the concept of ritual from mainstream social structure and organization, including those based on status and gender distinctions, and by extension from relevant historical processes and con-

text. There is an irony here, in that many of these studies attempt to show the ritual properties of common, "everyday" situations.

As Turner observed (1969: 112-139) emotionally and ritually charged settings like rock concerts, church services, military operations or transition rituals may generate such a strong sense of shared experience, belief and purpose as to evoke a sense of equality among participants. Such events depend on the collective body for the experience itself and may temporarily subsume focus upon relative sociostructural positioning, while the latter can hardly be said to be absent. In this paper I follow Galt's (1994: 794) approach that, when contextually bounded, practice based on shared purpose and symbolism can "perform a transformation" and facilitate communitas by removing participants "from the strict hierarchy of everyday life, to a place so different from it that their everyday inequalities [lose] significance, at least formally." Bolin and College (1992: 380-381) describe communitas as a "rendering of the recognition of common humanity, [that is] antistructural in that it has the potential to subvert mainstream dichotomies like that of gender," or a "paradoxical position in which characteristics of disparate categories are blended." This follows Turner's (1974: 238) description of communitas as representing, not the erasure of structure, but "a passage from one position, constellation or domain of structure to another." I borrow on Fishbane's (1989: 68) realistic perspective that, even during liminal states, societal structure "provides a frame of reference" so that it is questionable "whether liminality necessarily entails an undifferentiated state of affairs."

In industrialized societies, individuals can find communitas among members of a specific occupation when it is a "signal mark of identity" (Turner, 1977: 48). Belonging to a collectively defined occupational category is embodied as a symbolic marker of identity by collective practice in the bounded workplace (Hecht, 1997: 489-490). As "an emotive identification with community, [communitas is] made more significant to the extent that the group is autonomous, or perceives itself as such, from the larger social structure" (Turner, 1969: 96). Bourdieu (1992: 105-106) shows that shared and distinct properties and base logic of occupational fields can serve to "insulate members" and provide such a degree of autonomy. Members of an occupationally specific workplace operate within a social, structural and symbolic context that may be highly differentiated from that of "normative" or mainstream society. In these cases, as corporate managers recognize, experiences of communitas do not rely upon liberation from status differentiat-

ing social structure. More relevant are identity-shaping occupational roles, understandings, specific logic and symbolism, interdependent practice along with congruous organization, social interaction and sense of purpose. That corporate culture can be conceptualized as culture necessitates that all of these aspects be present, and are influenced by those of mainstream society (Gherardi, 1994: 593).

As Galt (1994: 786) says, "it is useful to think of the concept [of reality] as including the multiplicity of aspects of social identity, including formal structures, symbol and ritual, and the ethos of 'hanging together' that Turner labelled 'communitas.'" The multiplicities of social identities Galt refers to show that it is too rigid and inevitably ambiguous to analyze complex social events like rituals (and by extension experiences of communitas) in terms of categorical oppositions (Eade, 1992: 31; Schneider, 1998: 298-299). The concept of communitas is better understood as one of many approaches or discourses *about* an experience, rather than constituting an empirical description *of* it (Eade, 1992: 21). I argue that workplace structuring may contribute to, rather than disallow the experience of communitas. This perspective adds to established discourse on work and workplace culture highlighting the complexities of interaction, interdependent practice and the self-realization inherent in a sense of purpose, in "everyday" domains. Such studies add balance to ones that emphasize workplaces as oppressive and/or exclusively goal oriented domains of linear progression.

Methodology

I interviewed 11 recently unemployed and four still working members of a small (40 person) Regional Land Use Planning Commission Office in Alberta, Canada. Provincial budget cuts in late 1993 included complete withdrawal of subsidization of the Regional Planning System. Without subsidization, some of the smaller municipalities had to withdraw from the system, so that in all the Commission's operating budgets were cut by over 80%. The precipitous cuts required Directors to implement a series of sudden lay-offs, (from about 40 to 12 remaining staff) not knowing whether any positions or the system itself would remain.

Interviews were loosely structured around various themes that respondents deemed of importance. As Marcus (1998: 2) points out, relatively unstructured interviews will illustrate individual processes of reconceptualizing circumstances. The fact that this workplace had just undergone a radical transformation further contributed to processes of reconceptualization in respon-

dents' narratives. These recently unemployed people as well as the still working were trying to rationalize their situation, and gave a great deal of thought to their occupation and (former and present) positions. Examining processes of reconceptualization and ongoing rationalization requires lengthy, sometimes rather unfocussed interviewing. These processes would be much less apparent with highly structured interviews designed to accommodate a predetermined theoretical model (Kaufman, 1999: 232). The theoretical framework emerges largely from the data, indicating a methodology resembling "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

I chose to interview people who had long-term histories of occupying positions in a workplace revolving around a single occupation. This ensured established individual workplace positions and a collectively well-understood context. Fourteen of the 15 respondents had worked from eight to 27 years in this same workplace. Six are men and nine are women. They ranged in age from 23 to about 65, and none were members of a visible minority group. Eight of them were married and belonged to dual income households. Nine respondents had children between three and 25 years old. Most children were living with their parents or going to school and being subsidized by them. In a Land Use Planning Office, there is a large number of support staff due to the high amount of legal paperwork, clerical and library work, mapping, drafting, research and so forth. I included some of these people in the study, since they are also highly specialized in relation to the field of land use planning and strongly identify with it. I interviewed all respondents on two occasions, the first time about three months after the layoffs occurred, and again three months later. Interviews were between two and four hours long, taped by permission, and transcribed and entered into a computer text database program. Most respondents expressed themselves at great length, using analogies and contextual frameworks relevant to themselves.

Communitas and Structure in the Workplace

Researchers using the concept of communitas often concentrate on Turner's assertion that social structure appears to be a "social modality" that distinctly undermines or denies the existence of communitas. However, in many instances Turner makes it clear that he is referring to mainstream social hierarchy and status differentiation, and not all socially organizing frameworks. He states that even during the (often extremely "non-social") liminal period of a rite of passage, we could find a "rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated communitas"

(Turner, 1969: 96). Further, in order to realize communitas, it is structure that is "regularly operative in a given society" (Turner, 1977: 201), or "mainstream" structure that must be in a rudimentary (or "altered") state.

A Degree of Autonomy

Clearly, Turner recognizes that social structure and communitas are not absolutely incompatible. In many instances, he made it clear that communitas is directly related to mainstream social structure, whether dialectically (1969: 129), in juxtaposition to or (more to the point here) in hybridization with (1969: 127). At a more symbolically meaningful level, rudimentary social structure can exist "in the form of 'autonomy, or a perception of autonomy' from mainstream social structure" (Turner, 1969: 96). Bourdieu observes that properties, (including organizational structure) of occupational fields are often very different from those of the larger society. As he states, when an occupational field is based on a system of logic distinct from that of the larger society, the field serves to conceptually insulate members from "external determinants" that go "through a restructuring that is all the more important the more autonomous the field" (Bourdieu, 1992: 105-106). This degree of autonomy may be symbolically, temporally and spatially captured in the specialized workplace. Socially, the contrast with surrounding society can include, and be symbolized by awareness of a mutual regard, and ideologically by "an ideal set of mutually accepted values revolving around idealized interpersonal behaviour" (Galt, 1994: 797). Many of my respondents described such idealized behaviour and collective values at the Planning Commission.

The idea of specific field related structure facilitating a strong sense of group membership that could constitute a felt autonomy is consistent with Turner's statement meant to clarify the intended nature of the concept of communitas.

> Yet communitas does not represent the erasure of structural norms from the consciousness of those participating in it; rather its own style, in a given community, might be said to depend upon the way in which it symbolizes the abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are involved. (Turner, 1982: 47)

The conceptually bounded workplace symbolizes a negation of "normative" societal structure through introduction of more personalized and familiarized occupation- and workplace-related social structure. The absence of rank and status implying authority over others is not a precondition for communitas as even "rela-

tively undifferentiated" tribal initiates had to "submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner, 1969: 96). In this collective process, perceptions of family as well as workplace interaction were "idealized" by my respondents, creating a metaphor of strong mutual regard (Galt, 1994: 797) for the workplace that strongly contrasted it with more impersonal mainstream social interaction.

Normalization and Orchestration: The Harmonization of Workplace Members

Although the concept of communitas emphasizes the collectivity, several apparent paradoxes serve to show that individuality is also facilitated by communitas. As Turner noted, "the more spontaneously 'equal' people become, the more distinctively 'themselves' they become; the more the same they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually" (Turner, 1982: 47). Intense familiarity with occupational parameters and interdependent practice creates what Foucault called the homogenizing "power of normalization" which also "individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (Foucault, 1977: 184). Through interaction within understood parameters of occupation and workplace, individual identities are increasingly defined in relation to properties of the specific group. Normalization includes an "orchestration" of practice and experiences, producing an objective consensus of meanings, due in part to the "continuous reinforcement that [agents] receive from the expression of these experiences, whether in spontaneous or "programmed" situations" (Bourdieu, 1977: 80). As Conrad, the Director explained, goal oriented workplace organization incorporates a consensus of occupational philosophy, based around the workplace "team."

Like Foucault's concept of normalization, and Bourdieu's "orchestration of habitus" Fernandez describes communitas as a complex process, "elaborately achieved in an argument of images. In such an argument there is a productive tension between differentiated domains, on the one hand, and their collapse into wide classification, on the other" (Fernandez, 1986: 179). By delineating different individual domains that are defined in part by collective participation within the wider occupational classification, distinctions of rank can serve to organize or "orchestrate" these productive tensions. These parameters, along with the degree of acceptable latitude of each, are represented by job descriptions corresponding to hierarchical occupational structuring or positioning. Using Fernandez's orchestral metaphor, it is the overall

"basic melody," the collectively understood (structural) framework that facilitates "each adding the different properties, the complementary qualities of their domain of expression" (Fernandez, 1986: 176). This consensus, or orchestration around a framework of (here, occupationally specific) root metaphors and key symbols is the element of ritualization in overlapping sociocultural contexts. Sharing these core values and symbols is much like Turner's description of communitas as a time when the context of mainstream social structure is temporally replaced by that of a structure "of symbols and ideas, an instructional structure" (Turner, 1974: 240).

As the basis for organizing daily practices, this consensus can contribute to a degree of interpretive coherence in the workplace. This coherence serves to bound the workplace, and "within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production—causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted" (Bourdieu, 1977: 80). Such intelligibility produces a normalization based on occupational and workplace ideology and parameters. Along with a strong sense of occupational purpose, this normalization means that workplace "codes of conduct" are not exclusively constraining. "In fact, most actions which are guided by rules of conduct are performed unthinkingly, the questioned actor saying he performs 'for no reason' or because he 'felt like doing so.' Only when his routines are blocked may he discover that his neutral little actions have all along been consonant with the proprieties of the group" (Goffman, 1967:49).

Hierarchical workplace organization can also contribute to an intense coherency of collective occupational and social practice, uniquely organized around a common goal, and taking on a specific style. Geertz (1973: 145) explains this kind of integration as "logico-meaningful integration, characteristic of culture, the sort of integration one finds in a Bach fugue, in Catholic dogma, or in the general theory of relativity; it is a unity of style, of logical implication, of meaning and value." This sense of orchestrated unity is made more possible to the degree that the occupational group (and distinct occupational logic) facilitates a sense of autonomy from the mainstream society (Bourdieu, 1992: 105-106; Turner, 1969: 96).

Properties of Land-Use Planning and Occupational Autonomy

Societal Ambiguity

Planning Commission offices occupy a distinctly ambiguous, somewhat interstitial position as brokers between business and community development and the guidelines of the planning act. Using liminal terminology, Gordon explained the position of the Regional Land Use Planning occupation.

> [The planning commissions] were caught in the middle always. The planning act said a certain thing. And the planners were usually even on the [conservative] side of the planning act. And then the municipalities were sometimes too liberal, they didn't care enough what happened, they wanted to please their constituents. But they tended to blame the planning commission for when they'd have to say no [to business development].

Gordon noted another way that the role of the planning commission placed them in a rather liminal situation in relation to the structure of established social categories.

"[The Planning Commissions] were sort of on their own, you see they were never 'government,' they were always 'quasi-government.' The municipalities supported them partially, the government gave funds...." The complete provincial withdrawal of subsidization of the Regional Planning System was a clear sign to Planners that their occupation was generally not appreciated. Respondents felt that Planning System, in part designed towards regulating business development, was perceived as an impediment, or "red tape." Ross said that planners could handle the criticism of their occupational role, until "the government withdrew their funds" symbolizing an institutionalized disdain for the occupation. Jim, a senior planner for 25 years, explained the personal difficulty in the realization that the occupation was not recognized as valuable in mainstream society.

> What we've done all through the years here, we've been committed to. And we have felt that it's important. It hasn't always been recognized. It's not obvious. You can't "measure" it sometimes. [The value of the field] is not recognized until it's gone. The cost of losing this system is not going to be seen for maybe 5, 10, 15 years. And that's what I've struggled with too.

Occupational Marginalization

A collective perception of marginalization can serve to bring the group together, and add solidarity (Barth, 1969; Bromley and Shupe, 1980), in this case directly related to occupational role and purpose. Marginalization can solidify group boundaries, contribute to feelings of shared difference among group members, and lead to a symbolic "consciousness of community" (Cohen, 1985: 13). Julie, a planner for 12 years, expressed common perceptions of marginalization.

The only reason that it was done is that the [then municipal affairs] minister, Steve West, does not like planning, planners, or anything to do with land-use regulations. He made it a personal vendetta to basically get rid of planning commissions and so on—he just thought it was unnecessary red tape.

The people I interviewed frequently expressed a sense of workplace and occupational autonomy in the form of a strong "us and them" division. Conrad, the Director, said "I just wonder if it [provincial cutbacks] crossed the threshold of becoming a bit of a 'witch-hunt,' and is this a premeditated effort to just disband the whole regional planning ordinance." As Ross put it, "well, yeah well [Planners] were a target, we were a target and that's it short and simple." My respondents show how tightly knit workplace relations and field-specific logic can act to insulate co-workers from mainstream perceptions and status distinctions.

The Bounded Group: A Degree of Autonomy

Planning commission employees realized some autonomy as members of a group operating both symbolically, metaphorically and objectively "outside" development oriented mainstream social values that increasingly reflect an ideological rational of "municipal capitalism" seeking primarily to facilitate, not regulate economic growth and development (Hobbs, Lister, Hadfield, Winslow and Hall, 2000: 703). The distinctively structured Planning Commission office constituted a "zone of patterned liminality" that created the impression of being set aside and excluded from principle areas of normative, non-liminal social life (Turner, 1974: 232 in Hobbs et al, 2000: 711).

Their fundamental reasons for viewing their occupational roles as socially contributory often appeared to clash with a dominant mainstream ethos of "unfettered capitalism," further bounding the group. As Walter said, "The fly-by-night [corporations] are the ones who come in and rob a community and then leave. *We had some degree of a protective effect against that kind of thing.* If that's not there anymore, there's going to be too much influence towards the quick dollar." Respondents felt a sense of autonomy through ideological marginalization and distinct core values that were mainly reinforced in the workplace.

Cathy noted that the workplace environment was so different than mainstream social life, that people assumed "a whole different identity. I was a different person [in the workplace], than at home you know." At the same time, many people like Allison thought of the highly familiarized workplace as encapsulating their central social identity. As she said, "I guess my identity was in here socially more than I ever realized." Walter, a planner for 22 years, echoed these views, saying "oh definitely, most definitely, a lot of my identity was wrapped up in the workplace. Most people that I know identify me with that place and vice-versa, so you are where you work to a great extent."

Crossing the boundary between the larger world and the symbolically "encapsulated" workplace would reinforce the meaningfulness of the group, by emphasizing difference (see Barth, 1969: 1-30). The workplace becomes a space in which a redefinition of reality takes place, based on field specific logic (Bourdieu, 1992: 105-106). Respondents viewed their particular Planning Commission office as having a unique operating philosophy, differentiating it from that of other Planning Commissions. As the Director explains, "Our philosophy and approach here, was, is not the same. We've all been targeted with the same brush, and there's no way that all of the Planning Commissions did things in the same manner." Structured workplace organization is salient in meaningful workplace processes. Through organized workplace practice, occupational ideologies are "embodied, because at one level the physical organization of work and the technical practices...[derive] largely from institutional ideologies. 'Constituted,' because it was through those practices that workers were able to engage with, enact and give their own meaning to these ideologies" (Hecht, 1997: 489-490).

Community Ritual and Symbolism: The Role of Management

Managers generally realize that a sense of the workplace as partly autonomous from surrounding society is based on structure and organization around properties of the specific occupation. Part of the role of directors and managers has always been to create "symbols, ideologies, language, beliefs, ritual and myths" (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 104). An even more personalized sense of autonomy is a central advantage of organizing the workplace into "teams" (Hassard, 1993: 15; Scott, 1981: 22-23; Steele, 1986: 79-86; Weisbord, 1988: 37-38). Occupational and workplace related meanings are negotiated as "the values of group members appear to become increasingly aligned with the materials a group works with. Eventually, members may routinely construe (or even redefine) reality in terms of the special "stuff" with which they customarily work (Hackman, 1990: 488). This "redefinition" based on occupational content is analogous to the redefinition based on distinct occupational logic that Bourdieu (1992:

105-106) speaks of. Familiarized workplace practice contributes to a strong feeling of homogeneity, and a collective identification with occupational interest and purpose.

Conrad, the director of this workplace also used a team approach in creating a perception of more equal power relations. He followed the management edict that "team performance levels... require the *team* to be decisive, the *team* to be in control, and the *team* to be the hero" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993: 132). In the Planning Commission there were usually two central teams, but as Conrad said, the "team" philosophy also applied to workplace as a whole, since "if it's a team approach, you say 'this is what I can contribute to your decision-making, this is what I can add,' and then they make their decisions after that. It can't be a [hierarchical] power trip."

The nature of the occupation meant that workplace members relied on each other to efficiently complete projects, regardless of rank or team membership. Social and occupational interaction, communication and co-ordination were extensively developed among all workplace members. As Cathy said, the interdependence led to a unique sense of solidarity, or lack of "personality tensions." Fiona added that even when positions were being cut rapidly, this solidarity was maintained, so "there was never any open competition, like 'I'll backstab this person so that my job will be secure for me.' I didn't see any of that."

Workplace members work as a sort of "umbrella team," sharing a large number of support staff, specialized professionals and material resources. Interdependent practice contributed to a collectively felt autonomy from the larger society. Also contributing to a feeling of homogeneity, hierarchical structure in this workplace was kept as informal as possible. Conrad said "[we] had to have some kind of structure, but our structure was always pretty loose anyway, so anybody always had access to the director, they always had access to the support staff. So it was all a pretty loose structuring." The sense of autonomy is a naturally developing property of small interdependent working groups (Hackman, 1990: 448) as well as one encouraged by management. Similarly, solidarity and experiences of communitas are possible results of interdependence and collective practice, as well as constituting a management objective.

"Community Ritual" and Individual Agency

Along with the integrative team approach, workplace members actively participated in community-building rituals initiated by management and/or staff. There were elaborate celebrations for retirements, birthdays, promotions, marriages, new babies and any other important occasions. These rituals definitely promote a sense of workplace community, by integrating family and work symbolism (Lazcano and Barrientos, 1999: 214). Such ongoing ritual practices also contribute to a workplace specific structure, what Bell (1992: 93) calls a ritualized, meaningful collective body, made possible by a "symbolically structured environment."

Another important ritual practice was the weekly meeting of all the staff. These meetings promoted feelings of homogeneity and downplayed hierarchical authority by giving everyone a voice. Such participatory rituals, as uniquely set apart contexts, tend to produce a temporary sense of an "authority and transcendence that all share" (Bloch, 1986: 189). Along with the celebratory community rituals, participatory rituals and a team approach, utilizing a flexible scheme of working hours also contributed to a sense of shared authority, de-emphasizing (thus transcending to a degree) hierarchical distinctions. As June said, "here you're trusted to know what your job is and to do it. Here it's much more flexible. So if I decide to work from 9 until 5:30 instead of 8 'till 4:30 that's fine. And, nobody even questions it. You don't have to tell somebody "I'm going to work this time." Fiona said that "I have to feel that I have control of some part of it, and that I get to influence what happens."

Obviously, the degree to which occupational and workplace properties necessitates interdependent practice is an important factor in the development of a sense of community or communitas. However, individual agency as a shared authority in shaping the workplace environment also contributes by lending more personalized and symbolically meaningful qualities to the "social home" of the workplace. That these processes are also inspired with meaning through reflexive creativity and agency is generally underemphasized in workplace studies (Hunter, 1992: 347-348). This neglects workplace complexities and the agency of workers" (Ludtke, 1985: 304).

Modern management philosophy recognizes that processes leading to a sense of community cannot only be legislated. Freedom and flexibility is part of management philosophy, but is objectified through processes of individual agency and creatively negotiated meanings. Cathy related the ability to gain knowledge independently to the abilities of the workplace collectivity, saying that "I gradually built up my own body of learning, as opposed to it being formal training, and that really opened up a whole new avenue of the type of work that not only I could do, but *this whole office could do.* So I found that helped keep it fresh."

Informed management practice includes reinforcing a sense of individual agency and awareness of community (Troyer, Mueller and Osinsky, 2000). Hackman (1990: 488) describes this process of integration as due in part to management co-ordination, as well as a "natural" property of purposeful interdependent practice.

> [Group members] gradually achieve greater internal coherence as a social system: The materials they work with, the content of group interaction, and the values of group members should fit together increasingly well over time. ... members may come to feel that the group provides them with a quite comfortable social home.

Dorothy described taking work home with her, and strategizing about work to be done the next day, as a lifestyle choice of "focus," definitely not as an imposition. As she says, "[Land Use Planning] was the focus of my life. And, not just because I didn't have another focus, but because I really liked what I was doing, and I thought it was worth doing." In considering individual and collective agency among my respondents, the sense of family or communitas they express cannot be solely attributed to managerial design plan towards efficient office ecology. In any case, even conscious organizational strategy designed to harness a sense of spontaneity can result in communitas becoming a "genuine characteristic of the venue" (Hobbs et al, 2000: 711-712). This can lead to a feeling of belonging so strong as for members to conceive of the workplace as a home (Barnett, 1993: 48).

Communitas: The Workplace "Family"

The experience of a family-like communitas crossed organizational divisions such as different teams, promotional timing and even rank and title. Reasons for the development of communitas can only partly be attributed to managerial strategies in this office. As it should, reasons for the experience had more to do with collective effort towards orchestrated practice that made work more pleasant for everyone. Amber, a media director there for eight years, noted that the familial atmosphere did not exist when the workplace was too large and some people were seen as lazy. "We are more of a family now the people that are here now are productive people, there's no dead weight left, everybody's working hard, so that's what kind of bound it more."

Most respondents sincerely thought of other members of the workplace as part of a "family." Walter, a planner for 22 years, defined two distinct levels of familial relationships in his occupational role and workplace position.

> [Unemployment] was like I'd been cut off from some of the family. Because of the length of time you sort of almost took a paternalistic approach to how you dealt with things, like if, say a developer had proposed something to take place in a particular municipality. And other employees, who you've worked with for a long time—in some cases you see them more than members of your family!

Although these contributed to the experience, it was not only the rituals encouraged by management that were facilitating communitas here. Just as important were the everyday social rituals that are comforting as "promises about continuity" (Moore and Myerhoff, 1984: 17). Expectations of continuity included those of trust and support, and these were relied upon as a person would rely on their literal family. Fiona, a contract worker at the planning commission for 13 years, expressed the common trust shared by workplace members.

> I guess I counted on people here a lot more than I ever thought I did, in the way that—you know like you knew the guys were always here—see, because I've been single all these years—they were good company—they were like brothers all the time, every day, and all of a sudden they were gone, they're not there anymore or the different people here.

In this workplace, communitas was also enabled by interdependent practice necessitating frequent social rituals like etiquette, gestures, manners and other "social forms." Through these everyday rituals, "social reality and social relationships are endlessly stated and restated [conveying] a wealth of social agreements essential for ongoing interactions" (Moore and Myerhoff, 1984: 17). Along with a definitive occupational logic and social organization, the workplace environment is symbolically significant to members bounded by virtue of shared meanings. Cathy, a design planner for 12 years, notes that promises of continuity include a familial assurance of shared social and occupational support.

> I know a lot of people that have problems getting along with (co-workers)—but here we all got along really, really well. It was a really nurturing environment—you knew if something happened to you there was always a friend you could come to. Even if there was something wrong at work, you knew it would get worked-out. You didn't really have to worry that you had messed-up too badly.

Like Walter, after 23 years as a planner in the workplace, Ross noted that "[unemployment] was like being

cut off from family. In some cases you see them more than other people, members of your family."

The high numbers of hours spent in the workplace increased the meaningfulness of this domain through shared practice. Fiona noted that a sense of family did not occur in every workplace, yet in the planning commission office, individual personalities seemed to be compatible.

> I've worked in other places and this is by far the best place for me to work. Especially right now, there's no one that I would like to see leave this place at all, everyone seems to get along really well, it's more like family.

In this office, there was a strong occupational as well as social interdependence. That the workplace was a locale of solidarity could be due part to its property of bounding a specialized occupation, as Durkheim (1933) noted. A strong sense of social interdependence was indicated as employees arrived half an hour before the workday began in order to participate in the morning coffee-time, when occupational and social life coalesced. As Walter describes this, it sounds much like Barth's (1969) stress on the importance of crossing boundaries in awareness of group identity. Here, the morning coffee socialization integrates home and office life, gradually shifting towards the latter:

> The coffee thing in the morning was a combination of business and pleasure both. And, sometimes the hockey scores or whatnot would get into the conversation, but normally we'd talk about what was happening with our families and what was happening with work—it was all kind of mixed together. Sort of 'shoot the shit'.

Becoming dislocated from this highly integrated "family" caused extreme trauma and intense feelings of loneliness. For Martha, a part-time secretary there for 14 years, the social interaction in the workplace was specifically valued as it had evolved over time, and would not be quickly forgotten.

> I do miss the people,—they were extended family. With [biological] family you never lose touch, but with these people, I'm going to lose touch, I mean it's a sad thing but that's a fact of life. Even though you felt like you had this extended family, you just don't stay in touch and you do lose that. So it's like letting go, it's slow, it's just gradual too, you never stop thinking of those people.

During the position cuts, mutual support in the workplace was so strong that it contrasted with feelings of loneliness at home. As Cathy said, "when the layoffs occurred and you'd see another brother fall by the wayside, everybody felt it very much. Everybody was very supportive and concerned when you went through it, but you still had to deal with it when you got home."

Several people described being separated from the rest of their workplace family in terms of being "alone" even when they had families and children of their own. The strength of the daily relationships in the workplace was such that losing it made some people feel as lonely as if they had lost all social contact, as Martha expressed in terms of death.

> I liked the people. If it hadn't been for all the good people, I wouldn't have stayed for 13 years. To me you know what [losing my job] was like? This is a weird analogy probably but it it's like, it's like when you die, you don't know what's beyond, and you have to sort of walk that path by yourself.

It became apparent that although the workplace setting was highly structured, and imbued with status distinctions, there was "room" within this structure for a strong awareness of communitas. In fact, occupationally specific structural organization facilitated coherent interaction and contributed to a harmonization of agents within a symbolically meaningful bounded workplace.

Communitas in the Workplace—Process, Structure and Order

In a large scale study of individual perceptions of work and home, Hoschild (1997: 53) says, "I did not anticipate the conclusion I found myself coming to: namely, that *work has become a form of 'home'* and home has become 'work.' The worlds of home and work have not begun to blur, as the conventional wisdom goes, but to reverse places." The familial office atmosphere my respondents described resembles the kind of "reversal" of mainstream societal characteristics that Turner (1969: 125) associated with communitas. However, since (at least formally) "normative" hierarchical organization is present in the workplace, it may be more relevant to think of this reversal as contradicting mainstream anthropological discourses about, rather than descriptions of the workplace. As Hunter (1992: 347-348) points out, cultural studies tend to impoverish "processes of human completion" by conceptually detaching self-realizing activity from processes of everyday labour.

My participants show that along with being well aware of status distinctions, collective and symbolic occupational purpose, logic, practice and interdependence

can serve to meliorate these structural distinctions so they may be included in, and even facilitate an experience of communitas. According to Durkheim (1933: 359) it is a natural property of occupational specialization to create solidarity, "As organs are more rigorously solidary when functions are very divided." Durkheim also recognized individuality in this solidarity, as Kertzer observes in the context of ritual. This means that "solidarity is produced by people acting together, not by people thinking together" (Kertzer, 1988: 76).

Like Kelly and Kaplan (1990), Morris (1987) and Gluckman and Gluckman (1977) the approach used here favours less oppositional concepts of structure and communitas, and a conceptual integration of ritual meanings and everyday social life. Sociocultural research of work often neglects the creativity and self-realization that can occur within these "mundane," pragmatic parameters (Hunter, 1992). My data supports research indicating that symbolic and metaphorical meanings including the experience of communitas are distinguished from, yet made meaningful through their inherent relationship with social organization and interaction. Hierarchical and status-based structure, in a dialogic rather than dialectical relationship with the experience of communitas, constitute "part of a person's overall (contrasting) social experience" (Alves, 1993: 896). Rather than describing a "quasi-liminal" or "liminoid" state, this approach builds upon Turner's (1974: 254) statement that in societies in which communitas has been incorporated, or "domesticated," "there is a thread of structure through ritualized communitas within liminality." With his consistent perception of social structure as primarily constraining, Turner viewed this type of communitas as one that "has been thoroughly domesticated, even corralled" (Ibid, 254). Still, it is more important that he allowed for the possibility of structured contexts for liminality and communitas. In these contexts, "the social structure does not disappear, but is simplified, generalized" (Hobbs et al, 2000: 712). As well, Turner recognized that "even when communitas has been institutionalized, there remains a core of potential communitas— that is, spontaneous communitas (Turner, 1969: in Alexander, 1991: 31). Turner (1969: 132) viewed ideological communitas as a "consciously defined model for obtaining spontaneous communitas, the feeling tome associated with mutual belonging" (Galt, 1994: 795).

It is often not feasible to try to find "antistructure" as lack of status-based and/or hierarchical structure in situations when this structure can be asserted to influence and frame virtually all social interaction. Recognition of the structure inherent in experiences of communitas helps alleviate some of the criticisms of research based on interpretation of communitas as linked inextricably to anti- or unstructured states. As Fernandez (1982) notes, communitas is not a "simple" state, but one as complicated as normative social interactions, including distinctions and tensions that follow a hierarchical structure. Conceptualizing the experience of communitas as structured would allow easier integration of empirical data. The resultant "normalization" of communitas helps recognize alternative creative forms, logic and spontaneity as properties of culture, like disorder (Kelly and Caplan, 1990: 138), rather than in dialectical relationship to it.

The degree of autonomy facilitated by small groups like the workplace is actualized through process guided by unique logic and distinctly orchestrated practice such as that of the specific field (Bourdieu, 1992: 102). Symbolically, membership in a category of people sharing a characteristic such as occupation, which is a strong, definitive part of their identity, is conducive to the experience of communitas (Turner, 1977: 201). The symbolic meaningfulness of belonging to such a category, which makes it such a central part of the self, is the result of processes of interaction, the "collective harmonization of agents" that Bourdieu (1977) speaks of.

Implications for Further Research

Integrating the concepts of communitas and hierarchical social structure in contexts of collectively understood logical and symbolic frameworks has several implications for anthropological research. In these situations, the experience of communitas can describe the ethos of unity and solidarity that builds on and emphasizes the creative processes of everyday collective practices. Communitas integrated with hierarchical structure warrants recognition as a factor in individual and collective meaningfulness of and personal identification with many formal and informal institutional domains.

Theoretically, the value of this integrative approach does not lie centrally in any proposed expansion of the situations in which communitas may be found. As mentioned earlier, the concept of communitas is already applied in a great variety of contexts, all of which can be shown to include at least some semblance of hierarchical and status distinctions. Many of these studies try to assert that these structured distinctions do not exist, or exist only in what is ultimately a subjectively construed "rudimentary" form. My data shows that it is more feasible to use the concept of communitas along with recognition of status based and hierarchical structure common to practically every social context. This approach

allows the concept of communitas to be an analytical possibility in the study of hierarchically organized groups when this organization is distinct from that of mainstream society. Communitas describes the very personal social bond or intense solidarity that may occur in groups in which members are interdependent and focussed on a coherent, common goal or purpose. Communitas appears to be compatible with hierarchical and status based structuring when group members realize some autonomy from mainstream society, even when this autonomy is largely due to a felt marginalization. The example used here is that of an occupationally specific workplace with distinct field-related goals.

An approach that integrates hierarchical structure with the conceptual bond of communitas also allows for a perception of social structural distinctions and positioning that is not primarily one of conflict or repression. This approach shows that hierarchical structure can, in some cases contribute to the individual's ability to have a well understood space and place in an interdependent, purposeful collectivity. This model is applicable in many social situations where structure provides social grounding, direction and relational identity as well as status based differentiation. It shows the complexity of the effects of social structure, which can individuate as it homogenizes (Turner, 1982: 48).

Finally, by allowing for the possibility that differentiating social structure can facilitate communitas, the latter concept is not defined mainly in relation (as antithetical) to social structure. This enables a less structuralist and more practice oriented model of communitas. Integrating communitas with hierarchical social structure makes the concept potentially applicable to many everyday social situations, as Turner intended in his later elaborations on the subject. Further, communitas integrated with social structure sensitizes us to the ritual processes and symbolism that permeate everyday hierarchized contexts of all kinds. In this way, the spontaneous creativity of communitas is realizable in "common" social situations rather than being limited to some hypothetical state of "antistructure." This study of a small workplace shows that communitas can be found in unanticipated settings, given certain conditions, and that these conditions are more widely distributed than is commonly acknowledged.

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