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The two rival concepts of devotional leisure: Towards an understanding of Twenty-First Century human creativity and the possibility of freedom

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The two rival concepts of devotional leisure: towards an understanding of twenty-first century human creativity and the possibility of freedom

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Abstract

The starting point of this article is that the ultimate objective of sociology so far as the study of leisure is concerned should be with understanding the ways in which twenty-first century modern men and women attempt to reconcile the demands of individuality and community (aka freedom and security) by focusing on what they choose to do when they can do anything at all. The first introductory part sets up the rest of the article by offering a brief critique of the sociology of leisure which operates with the somewhat startling assertion that in modern societies leisure is largely consumerist in orientation and that as a result freedom is a fiction. Counteracting this assertion with a startling one of its own it is subsequently argued that the twentieth century interregnum saw modernity radically revise its modernity which led to a transformation in the power of human agency and emergence of the insistent voice 'I too am in individual'. Taking as its starting point Peter Sloterdijk's reading of Nietzsche's imperative to 'Become who you are' articulated passionately in his book *You must change your life* (2013), the second part of the article argues that in the twenty-first century terms like authentic leisure and consumerist leisure, work and leisure are not antithetical to one another, and there is a radical need to rethink how people give meaning and order to their lives though their leisure pursuits. Here the article explores the relationship between Sloterdijk's concept of anthropotechnics, the art of living and leisure. The next part of the article fleshes out the theory of devotional leisure which is one part of a more embracing project set out in the book *Re-imagining leisure studies* (Blackshaw 2017). Here the article explores two contrasting ways of understanding devotional leisure practice, namely 'devotional leisure' and 'performative leisure' by drawing respectively on the examples of surfing and car cruising. The article concludes with an attempt to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory forms of devotional leisure practice with a discussion of urban exploration, speculating that their uniqueness to one another is never absolute, and the more you perceive their particularity, the more you understand their double nature, as simultaneously aspects of a third endeavour.

Key words anthropotechnics, art of living, community, 'devotional leisure', freedom, heterotopia, interregnum, *khôra*, 'performative leisure', *skholē*

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Introduction

It was over a century ago that Friedrich Nietzsche made his famous attacks on the abstractness and artificiality of the academic philosophy of his day and called for an impious alternative which would do justice to the most important concern of any free person which, as he said, is to ‘Become who you are’. What Nietzsche was offering here was celebration of ‘human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who *create* themselves’ (1974, 335). As he was very much aware there had been answer to this appeal with the birth of the rationalistic Enlightenment at the onset of modernity. But the optimism about the emancipatory potential of that positive age had waned considerably by the twentieth century not least because of the vacillations of modern capitalism which had brought recurring economic crises and the slaughter of thousands in two world wars. Even during the brief period of optimism in the middle of twentieth century when capitalism appeared to have finally secured economic stability and high standards of living seemed to be in the grasp of most (if not all), the majority of critical scholars doggedly adhered to Gramsci’s (1971, 276) gloomy observation that ‘a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’. In common with Weber (‘iron cage’ rationality), Georg Simmel (the ‘tragedy of culture’) and Marx (‘commodity fetishism’) they were tormented about what they saw as a new age of disenchantment in which capitalism, with its goal of continuous accumulation in the pursuit of profit, was viciously infiltrating every area of social and cultural life, and especially our leisure.

This temper was perhaps best articulated by Herbert Marcuse in his classic study *One-dimensional man*, published in 1964, which suggested that if leisure flourishes in modern society, it is essentially ‘unfree’ since it has been reduced to a low-level form of consumerism. Marcuse concluded that by the middle of the twentieth century leisure had two functions (MacIntyre, 1970). On the one hand, its role is to placate material needs that might otherwise lead to social disorder; and in so doing, it ensures that these needs encourage identification with the established order of things, on the other. The motors underpinning this process, Marcuse argued, are technological advances and invidious management strategies which work in tandem to disguise social differences and inequalities: ‘If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer…, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population’ (Marcuse 2002, 10). Marcuse thus understood modern leisure as part of a flattening out process of culture, a collapse of the two-dimensional into the one-dimensional.

Over the last forty or so years, Marcuse’s pessimism has been reflected in a series of critical studies in the sociology of leisure – from the perspectives of Marxism and Feminism to those drawing on the insights of contemporary sociologists such as Baudrillard, Bourdieu and Bauman – lamenting the ubiquity of consumer culture in a wide range of leisure domains. As I have argued previously, for all their strengths in laying bare the impact of hegemonic consumer culture on leisure too many of these studies have tended to underestimate the individuals they suppose are in thrall of consumerism, while simultaneously overestimating the grip of modern ‘iron cage’ rationalization systems. There is no doubt that for many people in modern societies the meaning of leisure inevitably seems to lie in the unalloyed pleasure and happiness they find in consuming, but in my view there is little question that what Nietzsche expressed all those years ago is a deeply rooted human need that is still widely felt.

Perhaps in their leisure pursuits it is not consuming that people are really after at all, but the pursuit of life itself – its highs and lows, frustrations and disappointments, the inevitable mixture of partial successes and unfulfilled dreams – and that is this what really counts. What this suggests to me is that the meaning of life is perhaps the meaning of leisure. In other words, even if the meaning of life remains elusive, what we do in our free time presents us with myriad opportunities to snatch intimations of the absolute.

For some while, and in a number of previous publications, I have been seeking to establish an approach to the sociology of leisure which departs in a substantial fashion from the existing critical traditions. My starting point is that the world of our lived existence, with which Nietzsche was concerned, is not as the sociology of leisure suggests a mere order of social class and gender constructions and top down consumer hegemony. The reason why too many sociologists today still are inclined to credit themselves with this outdated wisdom is that sociology today inherits from Marxism of over a hundred years ago the pretension to possess a secure collection of heuristic concepts – categories which permit it to classify, comprehend and criticize the culture of our present age. However, human agency does not respect the divisions placed on it by sociologists. In other words, sociology too readily accepts the shapes that capitalism, patriarchy, racism and convention have forced on our lives.

To understand the implications of social inequality for leisure we have to look at the present day context in which it takes place. This is the view that informed Weber’s (1992) critique of Marxism. Contrary to Marx, Weber argued that we should not only recognize that capitalism is centred on the market (rather than production), but also that there exists more than one type of capitalism. The respective divisions between what kinds of leisure are available to the rich and poor, men and women, black and white may indeed often be very different. But as Bauman (2000) has convincingly argued being ‘poor’ under the auspices of contemporary capitalism is radically different to being ‘poor’ under the auspices of 'producer' capitalism in the sense that it is experienced in a world in which contingency takes the place of necessity. One of the upshots of this is that old forms that used to explain social inequality no longer provide accurate insights of our experiences – there is too much of a slippage between word and world.

The truth is that today, notwithstanding our social origins, we *expect* more from life than our forebears did. We get frustrated or feel let down when our expectations rub up against much the same, but the difference in the twenty-first century is that we don’t succumb. Instead, in order to try to shape our lives on our own terms, we stand up and fight. That TINA dictum, ‘There Is No Alternative’, is confronted daily by myriad tiny, irrepressible grenades that explode deep inside countless imaginations. Some of us are better placed, and for that reason more successful, than others in overcoming the obstacles that capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy, racism and convention have forced into our lives, but whatever cards we have been dealt we ensure that our destiny takes shape in a way that accords with our own sense of things. In this way we are able to find some agreement between what life throws at us and our own expectations. As Bauman suggests we must recognize first and foremost that

> Freedom of individual self-assertion, if combined with the generative personality, is capable of multiplying the material and spiritual affluence of the human world, and with it – and thanks to it – also the meaningfulness and moral quality of human existence and coexistence. Such a combination, if we succeed in the effort to substitute it for the present-day mode of self-creation and self-assertion based as they are on rivalry instead of collaboration, has a chance of preventing the demotion of humanity to

> the level of a zero-sum game. Freedom of individual self-definition united with the practice of 'excorporation' is a warrant for growing richness and diversity of human potential – but also for enhancing the space of self-definition and self-constitution of all of us and each of us (Bauman, in Bauman and Raud, 2015, 129)

Using some slightly different terminology to Bauman, Sloterdijk (2013) has suggested, following Nietzsche, that what makes modern people human is our openness to enchantment and the universal need to make our lives momentous in one way or another, to render life meaningful. It is my view that many of us attempt to realize our potential in the enchanted kingdom of leisure. To understand what this entails we must shift our critical focus away from the prevailing pessimistic mind-set in the sociology of leisure which implies cultural determinism, as though this were the only way history could have gone, or can go.

It is my view that twenty-first century leisure has patterns of its own, quite distinct from those of the theories derived from the sociology of leisure. With the onset of the twentieth century interregnum AUTHOR DETAIL modernity radically revised its modernity. This was a revolution deeper than conjunctural change. With it three big things changed resulting in three types of revolution (Heller, 1998): everyday life, economic, and political. The revolution of everyday life resulted in self-emancipation and a renewed interest in the art of living, economic revolution in market fundamentalism (i.e. the rise of neoliberalism) and political revolution in the onset of 'life politics' or the 'politics of self-actualization' (Giddens 1991). If human life was to be changed there was no choice but to be radical. Things that modernity in its 'solid' incarnation did not like – ambiguity, contingency, multiplicity – now not only had to be lived with but had to be embraced. In other words, modernity was forced to rethink itself and imagine how it would work in a world where identity and belonging are complex, ambiguous, fluid and contingent.

What this means for sociologists of leisure is that they must recognize that the different life-worlds in which leisure takes place have spatial, temporal, and existential orders of their own quite distinct from those that have been found in the objective systems of the sociology of leisure. After the interregnum leisure life-worlds are not only innumerable but are constituted by a different kinds of purposes and by a different kinds of meanings – to borrow Karl Spracklen's (2009) terminology. And if they are to be explored and understood, they must be explored in different ways that will leave their distinctive features intact.

In this article I have accepted these observations as a challenge, and in working out my answer, I draw on many sources and attempt to draw out a number of particular issues. It will be argued below that the emergence of what I term devotional leisure is crucial to the emancipation implicit in the spatial, temporal, and existential orders found in twenty-first century modernity. My aim is to show that devotional leisure, so far from being something secondary or reactionary, is the motor that sustains modern life. Indeed, so much is this so that sociologists of leisure must disabuse themselves of the habit of contrasting authentic leisure and consumerist leisure, and instead see leisure in a continuing process that encompasses both. In order to establish that contention, there is much in what follows about the limitations of extant sociology. It is argued that devotional leisure is leisure that may or may not be freed from the shackles of social class and gender and consumerism. It has its origins in the assumption, identified somewhere in Greek philosophy, that leisure 'is rewarded differently by different persons, and varies according to the habit of the individual'. It is also argued that devotional leisure comes in two forms which can be fashioned as a

‘personality’ and are intrinsically bound up with their own versions of identity and belonging. These two contrasting ways of understanding, developed by historical agents and what I call ‘devotional leisure’ and ‘performative leisure’ – two terms (or both) which stand as a rebuke to all absolutist ideas of identity and belonging – I shall argue have been designed to establish two modes of existence fit for twenty-first century artists of life.

The theory of devotional leisure is one part of a more embracing project set out in the book AUTHOR DETAIL, which as its title suggests is a radical deconstruction and reconstruction of leisure studies. It would be impossible fully to do it justice within the limits of this journal article. All that can be done is to try to extract from the details certain important narrative threads and general theses which are insisted upon by that theory and in the course of the examples used, and to infer from these what conclusions we might be able to draw from them. At the same time, lack of extended attention to certain specific concepts (such as interregnum, *khôra, skholē*) indicates neither a lack of appreciation nor avoidance of critique but rather constraints of space.

Anthropotechnics (or the art of living) and leisure

The crux of the theoretical framework underpinning the following discussion takes its inspiration and point of departure from Peter Sloterdijk’s book *You must change your life* (2013). In this book, which is an ode to human creativity and to the powerful grip of the narrative of human freedom, Sloterdijk celebrates the evocation of continually living as a person for the first time, of being prepared to change one’s life. The book is conceived as a parallel reading of Nietzsche’s imperative to ‘Become who you are’. While Sloterdijk brilliantly demonstrates a contemporary understanding and application of this imperative, this article attempts to illuminate the very same issues of interpretation by focusing on leisure as a particular kind of life practice that comes into its own in the twenty-first century. The following discussion is in this regard an interpretive account which tries to demonstrate what happens when social contingency comes over you, with the realization that the present is as it is but things could always be different, and that when this happens the world and your place in it is inevitably going to change.

No words could better set the stage for such an exercise than the words ‘You must change your life’ that recognize the ‘fact that life is problematic shows that the shape of your life does not fit into life's mould’ – in Sloterdijk’s view, anyone who imagines their identity in any way fixed is an anachronism. ‘So You Must Change Your Life and, once your life does fit into the mould, what is problematic will disappear’ (Wittgenstein cited in Sloterdijk 2013: 138-9). What is at stake here is a chance to grasp our present age in its full significance, since the refining and purifying work involved in changing your life holds the potential for unlocking new secrets about individual and collective human endeavours, including a reinvigoration of the ways by which we understand enchantment, in words such as ‘magical’, ‘spiritual life’, devotion’, ‘aesthetics’, ‘ethics’, “ascetics’, ‘performativity’ – and, of course the one that often encompasses all of them, ‘leisure’.

Consider the following assertion: leisure comes into its own as the form of life practice par excellence in the twenty-first century. This statement builds on Peter Sloterdijk’s (2013) view that we make ourselves through anthropotechnics: forms and networks of cognitive, physical and social training through which we live our lives and construct our worlds in the face of the uncertain risks presented to us by modern living and the certainties of death. It is my view

that uses of leisure are primary spheres of anthropotechnics. In these uses of leisure we perceive that we can become ourselves, in a radical way.

Although individuals have been experimenting with new forms of life over the centuries, Sloterdijk argues, with the interregnum we now realize that we are ‘beings for whom being is a question’ who want to determine our own worlds rather than be determined by the social, economic, political or cultural situations in which we find ourselves. Just as ‘producer’ modernity stood cognitively under the sign of the work ethic, twenty-first century our ‘consumer’ modernity presents itself under the sign of ‘Mußt dein Leben ändern’ (‘You must change your Life’). Like Nietzsche, Sloterdijk celebrates the view that freedom does not await the arrival some kind of external liberator, but is available to individuals in this world at every moment.

Vis-à-vis Max Weber (1992), Sloterdijk argues that what once entailed developing a union with God changed to the personalized and emotional notion of life practice. In this regard, contingent individuals are not interested in the ‘innerworldly asceticism’ associated with the work ethic as identified by Weber, but in anthropotechnics (Sloterdijk 2013). According to Sloterdijk, the human world is one that has a need for ‘spiritual regimens’ and the cultivation of matters relating to the body and the soul.

It is religions, moral judgements or appeals to tradition that have historically tried to attend to this essential feature of our existence. The argument that this is the job best carried out by religion returned with a vengeance in the last decades of the twentieth century after the purported failure of the rationalistic Enlightenment. Sloterdijk argues that this view needs to be challenged since religion does not, in actual fact, exist.

In pursuing this argument Sloterdijk argues that human beings are always subject to a sense ‘verticality from above’ which after Nietzsche pronounced the death of God was revised into a new version that ‘permits a deeper understanding of the emergence of embodied improbability’ (2013, 86). This signalled a shift from the maxim ‘God told me’ to the human claim to miraculous powers. In the place of religion what exists today are only new kinds of discipleship (sometimes taking on fundamentalist tendencies) which must be understood as attempts to appropriate religion in order to fulfil human spiritual needs. This view assumes a dichotomy between believers and unbelievers, which in the modern world collapses. In place of this dichotomy, we should distinguish between those concerned with life practice (*homo artista, homo repetitivus)* and the untrained – those other ‘last humans’, the ‘identicals’ or 'conformists of being different' who prefer to retain the identity of the ‘super-habitus’ and safety of the ‘base camp’ (Sloterdijk, 2013). In other words, as individuals free to choose our own destinies we are entitled to choose ‘unfreedom’ should we really want to. The point is that we are all required to make a choice. For Agnes Heller, this requirement explains the groundless ground of freedom, or the idea that freedom doesn’t have any foundation, and the insight that we are compelled to take the *existential leap*. This leap cannot be explained sociologically, but only legitimated by the leap itself. Ultimately, this is the choice each one of us must take.

In Sloterdijk’s (2013) view it is human beings who produce themselves as individuals, for we are existential beings who not only pose the question of our own existence but reproduce ourselves as personalities through our actions. For Sloterdijk self-realization is no longer a political ideal but a widespread reality. This does not indicate a loss of this phenomenon's importance; on the contrary, it reveals how the art of living has spread to influence all aspects

of life. Indeed, since the art of living has become commonplace in the twenty-first century those who create themselves have begun to appreciate the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. In fact, so argues Sloterdijk, the discovery of the ordinary has actually become the great subject of the art of living which actually proceeds from and in parallel with what he calls 'acrobatics'.

In common with Max Weber, Sloterdijk (2013: 38) suggests that modernity must be understood as a process that radically secularizes life practice by removing spirituality from its religious context and replacing it, not in work, but in leisure. First, to borrow an insight from Debray (2007), Sloterdijk suggests that unbending reflexivity has led to a shift in the subjective centre of gravity from human consciousness to the realm of the corporeal, which is valued in and for itself and has a *material* significance to which we feel a sense of moral obligation. In other words, the legitimating reference for the work ethic is no longer *spiritual* (i.e. God tells me it is sacred) or an *ideal* (i.e. my consciousness tells me it is true) but *effective* (i.e. my body shows me it works). This somatization of spirituality is best illustrated in sport:

> No one can be credible as a contemporary today, then, unless they sense how the performative dimension is overtaking the work dimension. Thus the sports system has developed into a multiverse with hundreds of secondary worlds, in which self-referential motion, useless play, superfluous exertion and simulated fights celebrate their existence somewhat wilfully, in the clearest possible contrast to the utilitarian objectivism of the working world (Sloterdijk 2013, 212-3).

This first kind of spirituality is accompanied by a second tendency, what Sloterdijk calls the ‘informationalization of spirituality’, which can be found in popular culture and its myriad subcultures. As is evidenced in a massive literature straddling cultural studies, leisure studies and sociology, subcultures burst onto the scene in no uncertain terms at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century and emerged in the form of life-worlds to do with leisure, consumer choices, lifestyles, with class, gender, generation and sexuality, and involvement in political movements also playing a key role. These two tendencies become the two metaphors of twenty-first century spiritualization: sport as a symbol of acrobatic achievement and popular culture as a locus of devotion which ‘covers the lives of contemporary individuals with unpredictable flashes of inner emergency’ (Sloterdijk 2010, 38).

Once discovered as metaphors of spiritualization, these two tendencies make palpable the difference between those who make something or often a great deal of themselves in their leisure and those who do not. Anthropotechnics rather than work becomes the test of the will of those of us who ‘must change our lives’ (which means all of us), the measure of our concentration, and the personal litmus test of our self-worth. As soon as we know this, we have no more need to ask why individuals fulfil themselves through action, through 'acrobatics'. Anthropotechnics is less a plan of action than a practice. It is about living in a certain way. We are not equipped to adopt a theoretical attitude to ourselves. Creative individuals fulfil themselves in their becoming, through action. We cannot know in advance the value or the consequences of our actions at the point of decision. Choice is not the issue of self-knowledge but an *existential leap* into our destiny (Heller 1996, 147). This is not the path laid down by anyone else. This is our path, the one we have chosen for ourselves. We have to follow this wherever it may lead us. It is through anthropotechnics that we pursue ourselves, that we hope to find ourselves in what we have created, meaning that what we

make in our leisure reflects us, not so much through an identity but something fundamental about us as a personality.

For Sloterdijk, as for Foucault, the art of living is both at once an aesthetics of existence and an ascetics of existence. The point of ascetics is the same as the point of aesthetics: the creation of life as a work of art. He suggests that this duality is perhaps best captured in the term ‘spiritual life practice’. As we have seen, Sloterdijk differs from Marxist sociologists in not wanting to place the stress on work as the key category by which to understand this ‘self-forming and self-enhancing behaviour’. He suggests that the discourse of work be reformed so that the individual is understood more like a trainer who administers his or her own talents and ‘drives the team’ of his or her own habits. Whether we call life practice the 'art of living' or 'self-design' and ‘virtuoso asceticism’ (Sloterdijk 2013) is purely a matter of taste.

Each era determines the specific conditions, techniques, practices, moulding and self-shaping rules that constitute social life amongst committed and spiritually oriented individuals. As we have seen in our era it is sport and popular culture that are the guiding metaphors. These metaphors, sometimes used in combination, offer various forms of life practice that are developed with the aim of transforming the self and revolutionizing relationships to be ‘other’. Individuals are driven by a sense of duty they feel to change their lives since they know what duty is. They have no intention of joining up with social groups that are a normal, part of the order of things. According to Sloterdijk, this is because committed individuals are those who set out to live as fuller life as possible.

If in the twenty-first century we have to constantly make ourselves up, we also as a result have to constantly make ourselves at ‘home’, in some kind of community, because, as Sloterdijk (2011) argues, our becoming-in-the-world is never being alone; it is always becoming-with-others. It is demonstrated below that in twenty-first century leisure life-worlds this leads to the transmogrification of community, which connects in an immediate way with issues of sincerity and authenticity in devotional leisure. As is demonstrated below, community is not a concept that has any precision, but it is a very useful one for all that. In fact, it is the most important concept for understanding leisure life-worlds today. As we will see, community can be put to use in unexpected ways that expand our sense of what it means for twenty-first- century individuals. In this regard I discuss below two kinds of ‘communities’ found in devotional leisure: value-spheres and heterotopias.

‘Devotional leisure’, value-spheres and *skholē*

In *Leisure* (2010) I argued that in our era ‘devotional leisure’ practice is the means by which many of us attempt to fulfil the ambition to live as fuller life as possible. This the kind of leisure practice that appeals to the sixth-sense – that special way of seeing, whose *doxa* we cannot precisely put into words, but which provides us with our own unique window onto the world – which animates us to reach out towards some spiritual truth, higher than ourselves, that provides us with meaning and a purpose for living.

To borrow some insights from Benjamin Crowe, what Heidegger said of religion is true of ‘devotional leisure’ practice, it insists on the idea that meaning is hermeneutical and is passed down rather than constructed. In other words the meaning of ‘devotional leisure’ practice depends upon an unequivocal and straightforward response to an independent realm of meaning. What shapes a leisure life built on devotion and motivates those who commit themselves to it is self-evident as an experienced reality of the meaning of devotion. The crux

of ‘devotional leisure’, then, lies in ‘a way of being, of inhabiting a determinate ‘space’ or ‘nexus [*Zusammenhang*]’ of meaningfulness’ (Crowe 2008, 65). The practices that go on in this space can be understood as a tradition, as a set of tacit agreements about meaning that grounds interpretation. As Crowe (2006, 248) points out, this ‘includes, above all, self-interpretation. In this case, tradition gives shape and content to our identities’.

‘Devotional leisure’ practice signifies obligation, responsibility, and especially desire. Since ‘devotional leisure’ is hermeneutical – it is that rare thing whose stories of emancipation and of belonging are a single story – it presupposes that there is *something* about the leisure pertaining to our chosen devotional practice that cannot be disciplined – its *secret* (its unknown known). When we engage with leisure as a devotion we know that commitment to it is our duty, but its *secret* is beyond interpretation; we do not know, cannot know about its secret; rather we *feel* its warm glow, we *sense* it. Yet knowing all this does not stop us trying to find out its secret. To paraphrase Heller (1999, 144), the object of devotion is the ‘this-ness, the ipseity’ of my chosen leisure practice that makes it distinctive from other freely chosen leisure practices. When we choose leisure in this way we do so with a sense of feeling, as though it were something holy, as though engaging in it were a religious function. There is more to leisure, this attitude would seem to suggest, than mere leisure activities or recreational pursuits; it is to live one’s life in certain way.

What I have in mind when I use the term ‘devotional leisure’ practice is something like Weber’s (2008) idea of a value-sphere. Adopted from Weber’s belief that politics and science must be understood as autonomous or distinct realms of human activity, involving existential choice, which have their own ‘inherent dignity’ (Brubaker, 1984), the idea of a leisure life-world as a value-sphere suggests that not only is leisure governed by particular set of norms, rules, ethics and obligations that are inherent, but also that those who commit themselves to leisure often do so as a vocation; the relationship between their life and their leisure is fundamental.

As is well known, Hegel argued that there are three spheres of human activity in modern societies – the family and intimate social relations, the numerous institutions of civil society and the state – each of which embodies its own particular kind of community and sociality (private and public), but it is the state that is the unifying power in society and the guarantor of ethical life (Heller, 1999). In contrast, Weber argued that modernity is marked by the absence of any such universal binding ethical power. It was his view that moderns have the freedom to connect with their own ethical powers which means that they have the ability to choose among a plurality of social spheres. However, he also stressed that this comes with a requirement of ‘all those who belong to one of these spheres that they acquire the values of their own sphere, and abide by the rules of this sphere as to their own binding ethical power’ (Heller 1999, 37). It is this sense that all social spheres in modern societies must also be understood as value-spheres.

The concept of value-spheres defies the convention of thinking in totalities. In Weber’s view we have the freedom to choose among value-spheres, but we cannot join all of them, feasibly not even more than one sincerely and authentically since the ‘choice of a value-sphere is, namely, an *existential choice*. When one chooses a value-sphere, one chooses oneself as a man or a woman who is committed to this sphere’ (Heller 1999, 38). To choose this way of life is to both feel unconsciously at home in a leisure life-world and to succeed in becoming *someone* in the world, that is, someone distinctive. It is to become an individual *de facto*, to acquire a *personality*, a set of features *and* a leisure life that firmly locates one in a home, as a

member of a community, but also which *sets one apart* in it by making one memorable for what one does, says or is.

The absorption into the inner circle of any leisure value-sphere can only be accomplished through a protracted investment of time and emotional effort, which taken together adds up to existential freedom and imaginative ownership. Thus, we begin to learn the secret of our devotion and the leisure domain becomes really ours. And yet, despite how familiar we may become with our chosen vocation, the magic continues, each encounter with it another step towards the realization of sincerity and authenticity. Sincerity and authenticity here are hermeneutical and must be communicated through a struggle, through a connection of the ways ‘I’ say ‘yes’ to my vocation. ‘Devotional leisure’ is like religion and art, it is a value-sphere that ‘can disclose Truth and provide life with Meaning’ (Heller, 1999: 38).

‘Devotional leisure’ in this sense might be understood as a hermeneutic tradition that is always in the process of being reassessed as it is reused, meaning it is craftmanship-like. The word crafts, derived from the old English, meaning skills, refers to a particular set of abilities that are driven by human curiosity, unhurriedness and dedication to a job well done. What this suggests is that craftsmanship is creative only because it is facilitated by a particular kind of leisureliness. As Richard Sennett has suggested, what is also craftsman-like is ‘the desire to do something for its own sake’, which epitomizes the special human condition of being engaged. Sennett (2008) argues that three abilities are the basis of craftsmanship: the ability to localize, the ability to question, and the ability to open up. When these three elements are combined we are capable of producing works of art which are not only of stunning quality, but which also carry with them the key to their production. As Weber (2008, 34) said:

> A work of art that attains real “fulfillment” will never be surpassed, and will never become obsolete; the individual may assess its significance for himself variously, but no one will ever be able to say of a work that attains real “fulfillment” in the artistic sense that it has been “surpassed” by another one that also attains “fulfillment’.

What this tells us is that 'devotional leisure' practice is another word for *skholē,* otherwise known as 'the free time, freed from the urgencies of the world, that allows a free and liberated relation to those urgencies and the world (Bourdieu 2000, 1). Perceiving the unique value of the art of living, the *skholē*r also finds and creates unique value within him or herself. The sense of this quality in both parties, the *skholē*r and the leisure life-world through which he or she finds fulfillment, is a precondition for a special kind of intimacy. This is because value-spheres operate on the basis of *collaboration* rather than *competition*; their adherents *complete* together rather than *compete* against one another.

‘Devotional leisure’ practices are special cases of democratic interpretation. In *Leisure* (2010) I identified Spracklen’s (2009) study of the ‘self-referencing community’ built around black metal music as a good example of this kind of interpretation in which action is communicative. But the list of leisure practice that has the potential to become devotional is endless since these days any kind of leisure is potentially and actually a devotional practice because today interpretation is located in popular culture – sometimes even in the market. In this regard we should not forget that leisure value-spheres are hermeneutic communities that first and foremost serve the convenience of their members.

Let us look at an example of what I have in mind. William Finnegan argues in his memoir *Barbarian days: a surfing life,* surfing unites all those who have ever made their spiritual

home in that world. To paraphrase him, every surfer has a different experience, but all those who inhabit surfing know that out there in the ocean everything is disturbingly interlaced with everything else. Waves are the playing field. They are the goal. They are the object of your deepest desire and adoration. At the same time, they are your adversary, your nemesis, even your mortal enemy. The surf is your refuge, your happy hiding place, but it is also a hostile wilderness – a dynamic, indifferent world. The ocean is like an uncaring God, endlessly dangerous, power beyond measure (2015, 18-9). For surfers the ocean is the place where they desire to return, again and again, and where they always return, to repeat the same unrepeatable experience. This is another way of saying that surfing experience is a leisure-life lived.

As a form of *skholē*, 'devotional leisure' also performs an important educational function. In various and divergent forms it evinces a cognitive sensibility that leads to the establishment its own educational 'field' inhabited by myriad interpreters who might be understood variously as deeper and wider 'expert' analysts, as *skholē*rs. What is conveyed by these *skholē*rs in the pedagogy of surfing is not just its technical aspects, but an aura of respect for the discourse that surrounds the subculture itself.

What this tells us is that 'devotional leisure' experience is consistently in the process of being shared amongst those who choose to dwell in the value-sphere. In fact, when *skholē*rs come together in value-spheres there is also a wholesale democratizing of the group. Absolute spirit, Hegel said, is about remembrance and recollection (Heller, 2011). Remembrance and recollection is hermeneutics in action – a way not only of sharing experiences from the past but of re-living them in the present. The gap between the past and its reconstruction in the present might be unbreachable, but it is through remembrance and recollection that we encounter this impossibility and in so doing maintain the absolute spirit of our communion. In this regard, Finnegan argues that surfing has its own 'surf-photo compulsion'. Surfers photographs act not only as keepsakes about what rides on the waves feel like, but as confirmation of the evidence of having participated in the act, of having participated in it. As Finnegan puts it, photographs hang 'in the homes of their subjects, framed like religious icons' (p. 314). Even if the viewer was not literally there, the images produced in the photographs function as a means of inclusion. Finnegan's memoir itself performs a similar function in the sense that it is testament to surfing experience that needs to be remembered even when it was not experienced together. The visitors of the spiritual home together re-enter this home as a congregation and, in reflection and discussion, keep the vision of their spiritual home alive.

There are further implications as well. 'Devotional leisure' practice, shaped by globalization and technology, transforms value-spheres in ways unimaginable to earlier generations. So whereas once upon a time surfing had religious import and surfboards were made by craftsman local to Hawaii and constructed using specialist wood from koa and wiliwili trees, today surfing is a global leisure value-sphere and surfboards are manufactured and constructed using a variety methods which range from polystyrene covered with layers of fibreglass to state of the art carbon fibre technology. Although the application of innovative technology to surfboard production goes on unabated, there is still a strong element of craftsmanship involved in surfing, and not just in the development of surfboard technology.

Yet as Finnegan's book demonstrates, leisure value-spheres are spiritual homes whose members remain highly skilled *skholērs*, who, in acknowledging their acceptance in the surfing community, must also be prepared to offer instruction and guidance that is of true benefit to other surfers. This refers to the duties involved in the act of giving and receiving or

gift exchange (Mauss, 2002). This is as a form of skills and knowledge exchange that reinforces the social solidarity of those who choose to make their home together in a leisure value-sphere. This is because the major needs of leisure value-spheres are neither progressive nor accumulative but concerned, to repeat, with companionship and solidarity which together provide the necessary conditions in which individuals render meanings to their joys and sufferings, through the connection of the ways 'I' say 'yes' to my vocation; that is, we keep ourselves culturally alive through the continuous absorption and digestion of the spiritual nourishment that our value-sphere cooked up in the past and continues to serve us in the present.

Devotional leisure as 'performative leisure'

Like Heidegger, Sloterdijk argues that no practice can exist unless it is practiced by the many. But ascetical practices can take two very different forms. In this regard, the human subject needs to be understood as a carrier of 'toughening' exercises' and 'un-toughening' exercises. While the latter are favoured by '*habitus*-controlled agents', on the inactive practicing side, the 'no persons', content to live their lives in the 'human zoo', the former are pursued by the 'acrobats', on the active practicing side, who strive for what Sloterdijk in various places of his book calls 'self-governance', 'self-mastery' and 'self-display'.

With the death of God, argues Sloterdijk, it 'suddenly became possible to turn the attribute 'living' into a superlative and to multiply the noun 'life ' by itself. Whoever says 'life' will sooner or later also say 'life of life'. Then, however, 'learning for life' means learning for pure surplus' (2013, 200). Here Sloterdijk is describing in general terms the perfectionist tendencies of humans which are developed not so much to surpass their creator, but to surpass themselves. What this leads him to suggest is that there is as a result in humans an inbuilt sense of vertical mobility, and this means that whenever we encounter people, we will always find 'acrobats'.

Sloterdijk is primarily concerned with committed individuals who are drawn to changing life for its own sake. In particular, he identifies with those who push themselves in their leisure to extremity, who commit themselves wholly to self-transformation, beyond what seems reasonable. It is suffering that excites these individuals. Pain breaks them open and lets other people in; suffering is the core of what it means to be human. And yet individuals are able to achieve all this in a way that seems effortless: 'Whoever has practised properly overcomes the improbability of good and allows virtue to seem like second nature. Second natures are dispositions of ability that enable humans to stay on their level as artistes of *virtus*. They perform the near impossible, the best, as if it were something easy, spontaneous and natural that virtually happens of its own accord' (*ibid*, 184).

As Sloterdijk explains:

> The technical definition of practice I have posited opens up a first approach to the phenomenon of involuntary verticality. In every performance of practicing, an action is carried out in such a way that its present execution co-conditions its later execution. We could say that all life is acrobatics, although we perceive only the smallest part of our vital expressions as what they really are: the results of practice and elements of a *modus vivendi* that happens on the high wire of improbability (2012: 8).

That twenty-first century life can involve the fulfilment of the desire for 'verticality' in spite of the obstacle of being 'ordinary' to become simply 'human beings' is testament not only to the democratic nature of 'performative leisure' but also of individuals who manage to make a great deal of themselves. Spencer Seabrooke is a young man who has pursued a number of 'performative leisure' practices with determination since a very young age. For Seabrooke, the dichotomy between life and art no longer exists. His life is nothing other than the hard-won art of being true to his personality, doing normal things like doing manual labour for living, as well as less normal things like extreme sport. Seabrooke knows full well too what it takes to break away from 'horizontal' effort, that is to say, imitation and the nurturing of routine, to fulfil the human desire for 'verticality' – the desire to walk with apparent effortless abandon the way he did 5 months after the BIL conference when he broke the slacklining world record by making his way across a 305-metre deep gully at the Stawamus Chief in Squamish, British Columbia on 2nd August 2015 (Schmunk, 2015).

Fundamentally, the practising life is ascetic. As Seabrooke said after breaking his world record: 'The day I started slacklining was the day I started training'. Asceticism is the term Sloterdijk uses to encompass all those exercises and forms of self-discipline which are necessary to training for the practising life. Asceticism is regarded as a prerequisite for the higher reaches of secular spiritual life, particularly the dimension of performativity, which are conditioned by powers which 'flow into the intensification of the practising subject, which progresses to ever higher levels of a purely performative mode of being in the course of the exercises. What was once called the *vita contemplativa* to contrast it with the *vita activa* is, in fact, a *vita performativa'* (Sloterdijk 2013, 212).

As Spencer Seabrooke is no doubt aware from the moment he puts his first foot on the slackline he must be ready since it is not only tests his ability to keep his balance on the slackest foundation, but it is also there to show that if he is not too sure of himself, he will fall. As he put it after crossing the gully at the Stawamus Chief, 'When you're at the edge, it's so grippingly terrifying that your body wouldn't even let you do it unless you were ready' (cited in Schmunk, 2015). It is in this regard that slacklining, as a form of 'acrobatics', is a useful metaphor for understanding performative leisure. But in Sloterdijk's view, human life itself is just like slacklining in that it is 'an acrobatic achievement, and no one can say with certainty what training provides the necessary skills to master this discipline. Hence the acrobat no longer knows what exercises keep him from falling – aside from constant vigilance'. This democratization of the artist's life which is heavily dependent on practice and learned skills by no means indicates a loss of the significance of this phenomenon; on the contrary, so argues Sloterdijk, it reveals how such practices nowadays 'affect all aspects of life' (2013, 63). This is why in his view the ideal metaphor for 'normality' is acrobatic exercise.

It is not enough, however, to walk the slackline and perform the *salto mortale* at a great height. As Sloterdik explains:

> the acrobat's decisive message lies in the smile with which he bows after the performance. It speaks even more clearly in the nonchalant and gesture before his exit, the gesture one could take for a greeting to the upper tiers. In reality, it conveys a moral lesson: for our like, that is nothing. Our like – meaning those who have completed the course in impossibility, with making an impression as a subsidiary subject (*ibid*, 196).

What this tells is that the imperative 'You Must Change Your Life' also entails taking yourself seriously by turning yourself into an object of admiration. This dual position yields the image of what Sloterdijk (2013, 329) calls an 'ontological hybrid':

> a theatre director who has been condemned to a practising self-reference from early on, and now faces the task of realizing the script of their own existence on stage and observing how others observe them. One can now say it explicitly: in *Homo artista*, the agent and the observer merge to form a single dynamic dual.

In other words, it is not enough to have achieved great heights in 'performative leisure', it is also important to have done so in a way that is 'fit to stand the gaze of millions' which David Foster Wallace argues is 'the unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness, and that genuine human worth is not just identical with but rooted in the phenomenon of watching' (1993, 155). This phenomenon implies a particular relationship between an audience and a performer.

Performative leisure and community: *khôra* and heterotopia

One of the major differences between the two kinds of devotional leisure is that whereas 'devotional leisure' has a hermeneutic tradition, 'performative leisure' does not. As we have just seen, 'devotional leisure' follows the path of an identifiable vocation which finds absolute spirit home-experience as a value-sphere and as such it carries a historical weight that is dense with meaning but is still open to further interpretability. In 'performative leisure', devotion alone is the basis of authority since it is a kind of devotional leisure practice that has no hermeneutical tradition; this means that it can only speak for itself.

That may be so. But we have to recognize that 'performative leisure' might offer other kinds of communal possibilities. In other words we must not rule out the possibility of there being differing interpretations of devotional leisure by those who find themselves in the midst of an alternative kind of 'community' that makes it possible to think about absolute spirit home-experience in a different way. Clearly, though, in the case of 'performative leisure' which is a kind of devotional leisure practice that is not exemplified in hermeneutics, one is engaged in an effort of understanding that is not without difficulties since as we have seen there is the tacit assumption that devotion alone is the basis of authority.

So what 'community' is in this instance is difficult to say. Another way of articulating this, to paraphrase John Caputo (1997: 84), might be to express the view that the trouble with 'performative leisure' is that it is based on a kind of 'community' that is unknown to us since 'it belongs neither to the intelligible nor to the sensible world' of 'devotional leisure' exemplified in hermeneutics, in *skholē*. It is in this sense, as Plato would have said, "hardly real". That is, it is 'not a legitimate son of reason but is apprehended by a spurious or corrupted *logos*, a hybrid or bastard reasoning. [It] is neither intelligible being nor sensible becoming, but a little like both, the subject matter of neither a true *logos* nor a good *mythos'*. In other words, 'performative leisure' is situated too low on *skholē*'s conceptual radar to be taken credibly. In differentiating between *knowable* 'devotional leisure' activities that take place at society's centre and *unknowable* ones that do not, we can't quite bring ourselves to name 'performative leisure' as a devotional leisure activity or as a community of '*skholērs'*..

But what if we tried to understand the 'community' associated with 'performative leisure' in another way, as *khôra*, that 'pre-philosophical, pre-originary non-locatable non-space that

existed without existing before the cosmos' (Lucy 2004, 68), that is set beyond translation and can't be defined or explained but which provides a 'home' for all things? As Lucy explains, *khôra* is 'almost but not quite' the Ancient Greek word for "anything goes" which resists any attempt to pin it down conceptually owing to its 'textual drift' (Derrida 1995, 123). This begs two important questions: Where is the *khôra* (the 'home' for all things) that is 'hardly real' but is always on the move? Who are its inhabitants (those *khôrasters* who move from 'home' to 'home' without any difficulty since they choose to live in the absolute present)?

'Performative leisure' exemplifies the kind of openness suggested by the *khôra*, as a liminal in-between place, in a particularly interesting way, since it breaks with the tradition of 'devotional leisure' dramatically – or, at least, the ways in which its 'performers' (*khôrasters*) express themselves and their mutual sense of belonging in a way that differs dramatically from community in the hermeneutical tradition exemplified in *skholē*. By example, it brings to the fore the question of how these *khôrasters* relate to the freedom of their devotion – a performative union as it might be called, a gathering of drifting performers united in a common spirit that emerges in that 'shadowy realm called *khôra'* (Caputo, 1997: 93) as the intersection of the pursuit of risk in the hope of finding some kind of transcendence beyond the limit of everyday life situations and the approval of what might be described (very loosely) as a 'community'.

Foucault gave the name to this 'community' (unworthy of the name hermeneutic community) heterotopia. Too complex for rational interpretation, yet at the same time seemingly a *tabula rasa* for all individuals' desires, heterotopias are 'disturbing' for hermeneutics as they are traditionally practiced as *skholē,*

> probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'….[H]eterotopias …desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Foucault, 1970: xix).

Foucault (1984) identifies two main categories of heterotopia. There are the pre-modern heterotopias of crisis, otherwise known as 'elsewhere' places which tended to be relegated to the margins of modern societies. Foucault has in mind here privileged places such as single-sex boarding schools where young boys are taken through a sexual rite of passage that is neither homosexual nor heterosexual; sacred places such as pilgrimage sites; and forbidden places such as brothels. In assessing the ways in which these 'elsewhere' places have been transformed in modern societies, Foucault offers his second category of heterotopia, which at their most basic are the places of deviance, such prisons and mental asylums, where those considered 'abnormal' by the standards of modern norms can be spatially isolated.

In developing a more elaborate conception of this second category of heterotopia, Foucault's analysis suggests that these 'elsewhere' places must be understood in relation to the kind of society in which they occur. Where value-spheres fit snuggly into reality; heterotopias do not. In any society there are some people for whom the 'real world' does not resonate with their own experiences. Even though we are indoctrinated into thinking that 'this way, rather that that' is the right way to live, we tacitly know it is mistaken. In other words, the real world

robs some people of the kind of fullness of life others are able to find in normalcy. The ‘real world’ is for these individuals at once too much and not enough. What Foucault’s analysis suggests is that a sense of recompense for a life that is not being lived in the confines of the ‘real world’ leads people down the track of heterotopia: reality and rationality are not on their menus, since what they are after is an unmediated immediacy of something together out of the ordinary.

To this extent heterotopias tend to come to life in *pointillist* time, which means they are experienced as episodic. They constitute sequestered spaces which have their very own systems of ‘opening and closing’ that both isolate them from the rest of society and operate to exclude those who do not have the necessary credentials to enter. In so doing heterotopias, function by way of opposition; that is they have a tendency to unfold ‘between two extreme poles’. However, heterotopia offers spaces of compensation (rather than the illusion of utopia) and as such functions in relation to the way that its (deviant) populations understand they are imagined by the rest of society. In heterotopia individuals do not try to resist reality so much as escape it – and in so doing creatively find their own place in it.

Beneath the calm surface of everyday social reality flow strong and deadly currents. Against sad obscurity, against surrender to societal norms, against normalcy, heterotopia suggests desire for an alternative kind of knowledge, for another kind of determination, for ragtag unyielding life, the kind of worlds that provide expression and shelter for the ones who choose to escape meaning there. Heterotopias are a feast for anyone hungry for the otherness of ‘reality’. Their incumbents create spectacular spaces in which ‘reality’ itself seems to dissolve under the pressures of desire and we are left with individuals who shape-shift personalities as their compulsions are let loose. Whoever seeks out a heterotopia knows that once they arrive there, they will find a special kind of freedom in line with Sartre’s observation in *The Imaginary* that ‘every consciousness posits its object, but each does so in its own way’. ‘Community’ made to the measure of heterotopic social space is made for individuals first and foremost: what goes on ‘in aesthetic space, is, essentially, a *solitaire*. Whatever sharing there seems to be is incidental and purely superficial...’ (Bauman 1993, 178).

Let us have a look at an example of what I have in mind. In Blackshaw and Crabbe’s (2004) discussion of car cruising as a heterotopia familiar urban spaces metamorphose as two different ontological flows fold into one and we witness an exemplary conversion of an ordinary life into a form of theatre. Adapted from customary usage as ‘making trips by sea for pleasure’ into slang employ, cruising is the term used to connote either walking or driving around a locality on the lookout for quick and anonymous sex, or with specific reference to car cruising, which involves a number of other interconnected leisure activities and forms stylistic expression, but particularly the parading and racing of motor cars. Blackshaw and Crabbe argue that car cruising is a heterotopian leisure practice with its own kind of detached existence, of being ‘in’ but not ‘of the space it temporarily occupies. They also contend that car cruising is perceived by both cruisers and wider society as ‘deviant’ leisure activity as much without a history as it is one without a future and that car cruises are ‘communities’, whose inspiration tends to spring from the performativity of individual cruisers: they are both events for consumption and things to be consumed by. The affiliation found at cruises is not really one of friendship, or of a community proper, but one of symbiosis and its only glue is cruisers’ insatiable appetites to connect with like-minded others.

If cruises are not the 'real stuff' of conventional communities, neither are they institutions, nor even organizations. They are what Lash (2002) has called 'disorganizations', those more 'trivial' forms of social interaction, which constantly come into being and just as quickly break off, maintained 'until further notice'. As such, Blackshaw and Crabbe suggest that car cruising is made to the measure of heterotopia: a momentary stopping place more for gestures than consequences, of uncomplicated surface lives manufactured only for the time being, paraded in and for performative community aching to be credible. Cruising is merely about performing modified cars, performing bodies. Yet despite its apparent simplicity cruising is difficult to locate. First, in its disorganization the culture of cruising is dislocated in no place in particular; it is always on the move and the theatre for its performativity is always at an improvised stage set. Second, cruising is about the mundane rituals of displaying and checking out each other's motor cars and bodies (car cruising is scented with sex) and on the other hand it is centred on street racing. However, both these activities are closely related in the sense that each is about performativity: a hybrid world where the mundane quotidian of performativity – display, gossip and tittle-tattle – collides with the apocalyptic and spectacular performativity of street racing and

> the performativity of 'modded' kit with flashing lights, the resounding sound of smooth clutch plate, purring 24-valve engines, the nitrous blue squirt of purge kit, skirts, spoilers, six-speed gear boxes, alloys and burning rubber. Even the interiors of the cars [are] instruments of performativity: chrome floor plates, leather seats, bucket seats, and chain-mail steering wheels, wicked ICE with speakers blasting out drum and bass….It [is] a hive of activity. Drivers intermittently [rattle] about at full pelt. Groups and couples [assess] each other and each other's cars, admiringly, ears pricking up and eyes lifting only at the sound of a noisy 'Shaguar' zooming into the arena, whence a queue of attentive onlookers instantly [form], buzzing over the open bonnet. This cruise [is] quickly turning into a great river of an event and everybody [seems] irresistibly carried away with its flow (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004, 136).

This contrast of significance and absurdity, of the spectacular and the mundane, the public and the private is what, for its followers, makes this devotional leisure practice worthwhile. Car cruising, like all other heterotopias, is always a double: 'it belongs neither to the intelligible nor to the sensible world', but to that 'shadowy realm called *khôra'*, the 'home' for all things that is 'hardly real' but is always on the move. Car cruisers are also always a double. At the end of every cruise, few of these '*khôrasters'*, who choose to perform their cars and themselves in the absolute present, can remember what it was they were actually caught up with, apart from the pleasure or the emotion of the episode. Before we consider the implications of these observations for the relationship between self-realization and 'community' and how this connects with the issues of sincerity and authenticity in 'performative leisure' we must first of all clarifying a number of issues. In order to do this, let us first of all look at another example of heterotopia, this time at the 'extreme edge' of 'performative leisure'.

In heterotopia nothing is straightforward. Because hermeneutics is absent words have their own usages, and nothing is ever never quite settled. As we saw in the discussion of car cruising, make-believe is pervasive, often the custom. Leisure heterotopias belong to the 'communities' that create and use them. They represent alternative kinds of cognitive, social and moral space, emerging not from established imaginative traditions, but instead from the pursuit of mutual passion, pleasure and purpose, dignified and elevated by the ingenuity of their sense of invention and the centrality of this to the lives of those present. These leisure

heterotopia provide access to radically different existential possibilities, and thereby expand what is meant or could mean to be human, by giving reality to what 'the real world' cannot quite grasp, to what it wishes wasn't there, or to what it fears.

Dissolving the dichotomy of 'devotional leisure' and 'performative leisure': the example of urban exploration

As a final example, let us briefly look at urban exploration, the focus of Kevin Bingham's (2017) doctoral study, the devotional leisure practice he suggests has recently entered popular culture through the adventures of those like-minded individuals interested in the physical discovery of abandoned buildings, bridges, churches, graveyards, drains, power stations, subways and other man-made objects which are abandoned or off-limits. Urban exploration, Bingham suggests, is infused with a sensitivity to the environmental degradation found in modernity's fading cityscapes, whose haunted past not only excites urbexers' aesthetic speculations but also presents them with physical challenges – often risky and sometimes hostile – which they look to transcend.

Drawing on his own ethnographic research in UK, Australia and New Zealand, Bingham's thesis argues that, in attempting to transcend the urban environment in this way, urbexers are all trespassers in the sense that they cross the boundary of what is legal to occupy a deviant leisure space. But also, in the sense that they cross a creative boundary by turning themselves against both the shallowness and manufactured certainty of consumerism and the risk averse world of conventional climbing and descending (including outdoor education). In so doing the hope is that urban exploration will enable urbexers to reveal more depth in exercising their talents while also enabling them to establish an outcast identity. It is in this outcast role that urbexers long for respect and for acceptance and they pursue both uncompromisingly.

The peculiar visibility-invisibility of urban exploration allows this. At a remove from the synopticon world of consumerism and the panopticon worlds of organized climbing and descending, urbexers seize the freedom to experiment off-limits. Liberated from the market and the normalizing gaze of the climbing and descending professions (e.g. mountaineering, potholing and caving councils and associations), with their formal affiliations and codes of professional conduct, urbexers not only give a new name to the practices associated with climbing descending but also to each other (Kevin's 'Boyz' go by the names of Box, Ford Mayhem, MKD, Rizla Rider, The Hurricane), and together push the limits of the dominant morality.

When one the 'Boyz' lifts the manhole cover and plummets down the drain into Sheffield's sewer system a sense of falling quickly gives way to an alternative ontological flow and the everyday one disappears. He is transported elsewhere, into a place that is hidden but familiar, and which facilitates a personal quest for meaning. Now other things matter. The sounds of fetid water dripping and the dank smell in the air. The circumstances of the 'Boyz's' removal from one world to another is felt as fantastical; existentially, their situation is a familiar one, but real in a different kind of way. Each one of them now feels radically of a place, at one with the aesthetics of abandonment and the others who inhabit it with him; everyone else here sees the world the way that the rest of the 'Boyz' does and revels in the smells the self-same way that they do. For each of the 'Boyz'' it isn't only the world that is now recognizably his, but also his body is too: this miraculous metamorphosis, out of his everyday body and into another version of that same body which is still his but in this alternative reality is *really* his. The world of urban exploration the 'Boyz' find themselves in is still the world as we know it,

except it isn't the same, because it is uncanny. It is *khôra*. It is a demonstration of freedom, an incitement to emancipation.

To paraphrase Caputo (1997, 94), urban exploration, in common with many other devotional leisure practices, takes *khôra* off the streets and provides it with a home in the holy family of devotional leisure, somewhere between the intelligible and the sensible, aesthetically evocative, just as much relying on its performativity for its formal qualities as well its craftsmanship contributions. The 'Boyz' are *khôrasters*- *skholē*rs *extraordinaire*. Under-imagined urban spaces act as metaphors for the parts of themselves that urbexers are not prepared to supress or ignore. In other words, urbexers set out to explore the other side of the urban environment and, by extension, the other side of themselves rather than to take either for granted. One half of the urbex character is charged with a sense of theatricality typically found in the pursuit of intense moments of experience and the performativity of daredevil exploits which together make urbexers feel 'real' as individuals and gives them their own personal urbex identity; the other half, charged with the need to join in, to gain the acceptance and respect of other urbexers. Sincere and authentic urbexers, Bingham's thesis suggests, instinctively understand both processes.

To borrow an expression from Judith Butler (1990), it is in its performativity that urban exploration 'generates that which it names'. This is not to say that someone who declares 'I am an urbexer' does at that moment become an urban explorer. In saying 'I am an urbexer' someone may be at the beginning of the process of the social recognition of a new status, but saying 'I am an urbexer' is not being an urbexer. In Austin's terminology (1975) accomplished urban exploration requires its own 'felicity' conditions. The statement 'I am an urbexer' requires that three verification conditions be met: 'authority', 'sincerity' and 'authenticity' of commitment in subsequent urban exploration exploits.

First, urban exploration is known by the fruits it harvests. To be officially entitled to call themselves an 'urbexer' someone must achieve the preparatory conditions of urban exploration. That is, they must act in a way that leads to them being officially *authorized* by the rest of the urban exploration community. Second, in saying 'I am an 'urbexer'' someone must also mean what they say, believe it to be true *sincerely*. In this regard, individuals must not only be genuinely grateful in acknowledging their acceptance in the urban explorer community, but when required must also be prepared to offer instruction and guidance that is of true benefit to other 'urbexers'. Finally, becoming an *authentic* 'urbexer' means meeting the essential condition of urban exploration. This involves being obliged to the promise that urban exploration presents; that is, to make a promise is to say 'yes' to urban exploration, to make an affirmation, a social commitment to a community. You can't just say 'I am an 'urbexer'' and leave it at that. The words are not enough. It is not enough to say, 'I am an 'urbexer'' – you must live your life as an 'urbexer'. Needing to become an 'urbexer' is the essential condition of what an urban explorer is. In this regard, and just like surfers, urbexers are in love with storytelling – just as they take photographs of their exploits and share these on the internet, they also tell each other tales about their exploits. Their shared devotional leisure practice and their community is honed in this retelling.

Conclusions

In the interregnum that got underway in no uncertain terms in last few decades of the twentieth century our relationship with enchantment changed irrevocably as many people began to awaken to the new sense of existence associated with the art of living. This marked

the onset of an indeterminate historical period when it seemed that *everyone* now felt it was within their grasp to begin the search for some overarching narrative for their lives. It was also argued that as a result of the shift from solid modernity to liquid modernity leisure emerges for many people as source of enchantment, a kind of spiritual practice, what Sloterdijk calls anthropotechnics. Using this metaphor Sloterdijk suggests that the art of living is less a plan of action than a practice. It is about living your life in a certain way, which enables you to render your life meaningful or simply delight in it by putting it on display.

Twenty-first century men and women are artists of life who have to make themselves up; they also as a result have to make themselves at ‘home’. One of modernity’s most ‘homely’ terrains is leisure – not just because it may offer us a personal fulfilment, but because it is a ‘home’ with a social dimension which brings with it a sense of belonging and obligation to the wider social context that makes it possible. In other words leisure is the most ‘homely’ of modernity’s ‘homes’ because it is not only an *experience* but also an *activity.* It was argued that devotional leisure ‘homes’ are communities that take the form of either value-spheres or heterotopias. While the former provide ostensibly permanent ‘homes’ for those who pursue the meaning of life through ‘devotional leisure’, the latter provide temporary ‘homes’ for those are more concerned with the manner, the style in which they live their lives, which is ‘the most significant quality of truly alive persons’. The resulting ‘felicity conditions’ are advantageous to individuals and the leisure life-worlds they share with others since they know that their devotion can provide them with access to the immediacy of that compelling attribute of ‘watchableness’ *and* the opportunity to give their lives a ‘density of meaning’, without relinquishing either.

Perhaps the most radical conclusion to be drawn from this thesis is that devotional leisure is actually the art of living. Like all other works of art, the art of living is also always a double; it is shaped by *khôrasters* and *skholē*rs following two approved and practised life-strategies: this of *felo de se* aesthetic design (aka performativity) and that of *immortalis* interpretation (aka devotion). The former is a strategy geared towards revelation and the latter is a strategy geared towards conservation and restoration, of adapting new art forms from older ones. Some devotional leisure life-worlds may play one up and play the other down; but *all* devotional leisure life-worlds deploy these two strategies. The former is positioned as an individual attribute and tends to surface spectacularly, but it is not fundamentally personal since all those who practise their devotion together have the potential to share in its achievement. The latter is positioned as a collective destiny, but it also serves as a vehicle fit for personal fulfilment.

To borrow one last insight from Nietzsche (1954), someone who follows the path of devotional leisure, who becomes a personality, who is not only able to disrupt and transform established life practices by turning their own life into a work of art, is someone who is also able to achieve a reconciliation with the impermanent world. This ‘tragic’ individual is a *skholē*r-*khôraster* who is able to combine the dispositions of ‘devotional leisure’ and of ‘performative leisure’, who is able to sustain tough ascetic practices as well as imaginative aesthetic ones in their leisure while knowing that this combination of effort cannot in itself guarantee any desired results. This is because the secret of the meaning of life is unknowable and in the theatrical world of performativity ‘nothing is unimportant, because everything is important’. However the individual in question will have at least have the compensation of serving as a double, a go-between, a mediating figure, a cultural intermediary for the leisure

life-world that provides the conditions for the freedom of them and their culture. These two kinds of devotional leisure practice, which appear mutually exclusive and not always easily reconciled with each other, are perhaps best considered as aspects of a third endeavour, which I will call simply devotional leisure.

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