THE THRESHOLDIANS

A Tri logy

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PART ONE

1. I'd like to start in the mid dle

1. Or here

Envision a rope bridge if you will, suspended *between* two cliffs, when detached from its anchor points it will fall limply into the abyss beneath it. A dispiriting prospect. It leaves me no choice than to climb down, fetch the planks and ropes myself and carry them back up for further inspection. Only to realize that it might not have been about the bridge, but about the abyss itself. It could be argued instead, that, the falling of the bridge into the abyss in-indicates this between the most adequately.

To deepen the understanding of such occurrences and to immediately throw away the neologism of betweens in all its mediocracy, I will instead replace it with the term *liminality.*

The term liminality has not been incorporated into the Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition), however it does include the adjectival form liminal.

1. Relating to a transitional or initial stage of process.

2. Occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold.

The word liminality or liminal originated from the latin limen meaning threshold. This signified marginal area, a manifestation at the border or in the middle of two points,exhibits a quality of ambiguity and disorientation.

In 1960 Arnold van Gennep's fathered his brainchild in his famous essay 'Rites of Passage' namely the 'liminal', identifying the transitional moments in many diverse small scale societies[1]. Van Gennep proposes that these transitional moments, in all their ubiquity, and the rituals marking and celebrating the individual or collective passage, all exhibit a threefold structure.

In the first part of the text I'll address the transitional attitude in certain processes, framing the - pre, liminal and - post as stages or phases[2]. Later on I'll explore the second description of the liminal which revolves around epoch duration or even as a permanent modus.

Before I start, I do feel obliged to take a step aside...

[1] Whereas rites of passages are found in all societies, their maximal expression is reached in relatively small scale, stable and cyclical societies, where change is wound up with biological and meteorological rhythms rather than those of technological innovations (P1 RITES OF PASSAGES).

[2] A phase or stage signifies the momentary attitude of the addressed liminal.

Although this text is regarding the liminal in all its modes of being, it does seem valuable to shortly address the necessary structure that enables me to even talk about the liminal, that is to say: the threefold structure and furthermore the general lack of thereof. It appears the two (fold) still reigns, particularly in - western - spheres such as: politics, philosophy, economics and culture. From Kantian Analytic philosophy concerned with dichotomies, or Hegel's dialectical philosophy; which relies heavily on contradictions and dualistic oppositions, even more so in day - to - day life where modes of struggle, competition and anta-gonism have been incorporated into the identity of many.

So, the two might still prevail, but I strongly believe that transition processes and the ensued liminality are sturdy enough to withstand the dichotomistic - dualistic way of viewing, as well as stretching and ex-emplifying the non-dualistic approach. I'm not writing a manifest to oppose and topple the 'two', I do however intend to point out some of these 'three' systems and the liberty they can offer us.

Onward...

Trichotomous

To illustrate the aforementioned threefold proposition of a liminal journey and the intended liminal state[3], I will work with the ritual act of baptism. More specifically the baptism employed by the Baptist church, which involves a full submersion of the individual rather than a mere sprinkle. The method practiced by the Baptist Church only approves of adult believer baptism thus rejecting the idea of infant baptism. This ensures the individual is aware of being subject to liminal forces, as opposed to the passivity of an infant.

The separation state or the pre-liminal, as Van Gennep calls it, consists of behavior symbolizing detachment and metaphorical death of an individual or group - forced to leave a fixed point behind. This might be a

[3] I'd like to address a state as a: relatively fixed or stable condition. Therefore addressing a state of transition should be able to addressed as a state, e.g. processes of boiling water or hatching an egg.

departure from community, peers, behavior, beliefs, positions or society in its entirety. Within the ritual of baptism the pre-liminal is concerned with the moments before the actual ceremony takes places, with the choice of conversion having already been made.

The intervening state or the liminal, transports the subject to the realm of liminality, an ambiguous formless state with few to no attributes of either past or coming state. Here a tabula rasa is created, removing any forms or limits that might have been taken for granted. The actual submersion of the subject is the liminal state in this example. Where the sprinkle of water might have illustrated the washing away of limits, and preconceived notions of the subject, the submersion also shows

the formlessness and suspension the normal baptism would not have.

Because of the destructive and transform-
ative nature of these rites and the hefty
ontological transmutation of the subject,
a master of ceremonies or 'elite' is often
required in the rites of passage. The masters
function as a spiritual guide through the
treacherous landscape of formlessness and
change. Here the performer of the baptism
fulfills this role.

The last state is the state of *aggregation or post liminal.* The subject now returns to a state of renewed stability and solidity, and has attained fresh insights and attributes which can be employed in the acquired position. The professed believer has undergone the ritual baptism and now re-emerges as something else, no longer an initiate, instead a full fledged member of a new society with its own set of rules and beliefs.

The threefold structure proposed by Van Gennep has now been addressed and illustrated, and with that knowledge we are able to dive into the liminal waters.

Once the liminal state has been reached, the subject is stripped of any conceivable differentiating factors, preventing any kind of dissociation from the rest of

the participants. This non-discriminatory mode seems to occur particularly in times of crises, such as the aforementioned state. The subjects are in between social structures, they have fallen through the cracks, it is here, in these interzones of social structure, that they become most aware of themselves. They are able to take distance; to review and asses.

In Victor Turner's 'Betwixt and Between' essay (1967), he refers to initiates or neophytes as an exemplary model for these participants within the cracks. Often transformed into sexless or bisexual, and regarded as a human 'prima materia'[4]. This example shows that the liminal period strips the liminal being of any possession; 'no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship, position, nothing to demark them

[4] Undifferentiated raw material.

structurally from their fellows'[5].
In addition to that: 'no sexuality' other than the one which is imposed. This bisexual or sexless sexuality regards others as having either full or no sexual possibility.

According to Turner all liminality must eventually dissolve, for it is a state of great intensity that cannot exist for longer periods without some sort of structure to keep itself in place. Furthermore liminality is the mid-point between a starting and ending point, and as such a temporary state. Either the individual returns to the social structure or an internal structure is developed in the liminal community - also referred to as *normative communitas*.

[5]   1967; Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage P.47.

Communitas refers to the unstructured state where all members are equal and a comprehension of togetherness governs - an effect of the liminal condition. When the communitas does not dissolve as a result of the individual's return, the normative communitas springs to life.

Whereas Turner might be headstrong with his apprehensions in regard to the liminal state as a fixed mode, professor of sociology Arpad Szakolczai has focused his inquisition toward the permanent liminal. In his article on transitory situations and transformative events Szakolczai states that when the final stage of reintegration or return does not eventuate after the liminal stage, the stage might be brought to a halt. "Liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes

frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular time[6]."

This one sentence encompasses all of what I will be focusing on in the rest of my text, and highlights the cinematographic allure these occurrences may possess. Again a a threefold structure is proposed, this time however addressing the types of permanent liminality coined by Szakolczai.

Szakolczai offers the example of mona-sticism. He conjures up the secluded monk residing in a hilltop monastery, devoted solely to the preparedness of passing on to the next life. It seems to be a training or study without a conclusionary test in this lifetime.
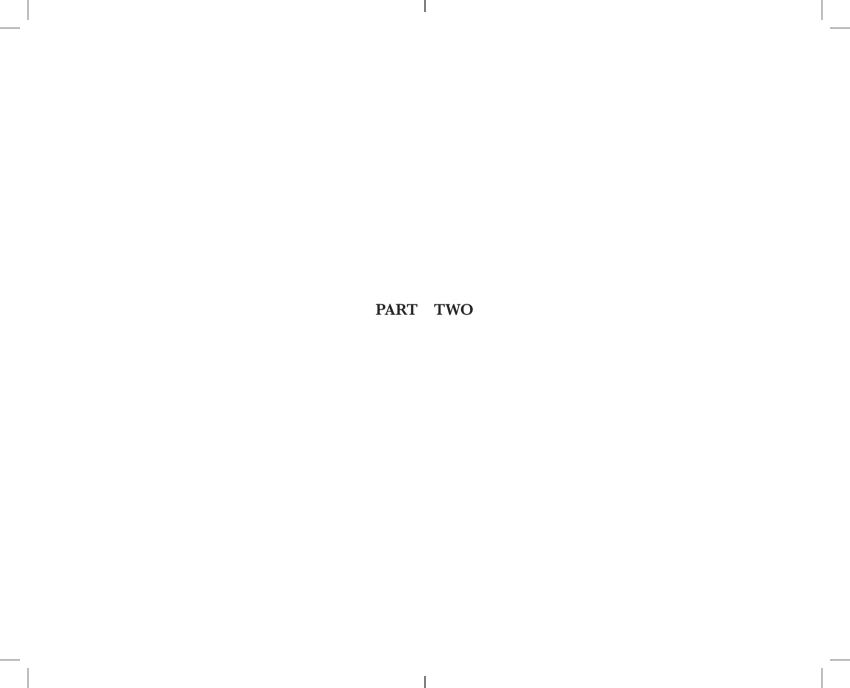
Being stuck in the liminal would be being stuck in what is representational of the second phase of Van Gennep. Szakolczai proposes the metaphor of a court society, a mode of preponderate ceremony and performed roles, dancing and dining end-lessly around one another; trapped in perpetual etiquette.

Lastly...

[6] 'Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events' Arpad Szakolczai (1):141-172).

When wars are labeled as liminal periods - perpetuated by mimetic violence - then the end of the war, the unavoidable disorganization that ensues and the reconstruction can all be placed into the phase of re-aggregation. It seems that this particular moment is specifically fertile ground for communism to grow by maintaining and feeding this entiment of suffering, revenge and national shame. These negative emotions obstruct the processes of recollection and growth and if this sentiment is sustained this mode can last for an indeterminate amount of time.

The monk, the court and the communist model exemplify this permanent liminality, but also present us with three different scopes, from individual to group to full fledged society, all with their own implica-

tions and apparent prophesied dangers. It seems important to note that the effect of liminality differs with scale and scope. Where a personal liminal experience is accompanied by an awareness of - in and - out (retaining the idea of a clear passage), the larger scale liminality is not accompanied by master of ceremony or clear direction, and thus a 'destination unknown' or 'left alone in the dark' motive occurs. As a result of the lack of destination and guide, the deductive, destructive and transformative force of the liminal could become dangerous. When self-proclaimed masters might emerge, guiding, perpetuating or diverting the attention of the formative process from the liminal and instead take the road of reflective and mimetic strife.

PART   TWO

Now that the foundation of the liminal has been laid down - a force which offers self reflection, transformation and indiscrimination - and some modes of non-fixed and fixed liminality have been proposed, it seems prevalent to address the lurking danger within the liminal period.

The threat lies predominantly in the un-knowingness of the liminal subjects. Accompanied by neither a ceremonial master or an X on their maps to mark their destination.

When the subjects enter the liminal state, real challenges are posed to their rational behavior. The highly emotive character of the liminal rite hinders the subjects to act 'rational' within this situation. Furthermore, all reality structures have dissolved and there is nothing to mirror one self to, resulting in confusion on how to act. In new situations we often resort to mimic what we see, assuming that such is the right way to behave. Because of this, mimesis and imitation are considered to be key features of the liminal state. The liminal state offers

thus a reflective attitude while also obstructing it.

This incapability of rationality does offer a speculative ground for (re)formative forces. The subject is an easy prey for the malev-olent, reminding us of the clown, jester and archetypical trickster. These figures are the embodiment of the carnivalesque and rely heavily on mimesis and imitation to asses, criticise and occasionally alter their sur-roundings. A structurally negative trait of these transitional beings is that akin to the neophytes they are stripped away of any ownership. They possess neither status nor kinship or rank, nor anything else to demar-cate them structurally from the rest. Whereas the neophyte is in momentary suspension, the effects of the Trickster's so called 'sacred poverty'[7] are permanent.

[7] Sacred poverty is a notation of the Trickster lack of rights of ownership. Examples could be having a house, a spouse or any other possession besides them self. The sacred poverty is also exercised by monks.t

Resulting in a total lack of any emotional ties to society and all that takes place in it.

As a marginal character to society, the Trickster will not and cannot be trusted. Being incapable of living in a community nor emoting a sense of communitas are both essential attributes to the Trickster. The insatiable thirst and hunger for more than food alone in combination with a lack of shame, mark them as exemplary characters of opposition. Their affinity with fantasy, tale-telling and humor function as tools for undermining and questioning norms and enable them to critique easily. At the same time it renders them characters that ought not to be taken too seriously.

When imagined in the liminal setting, the Trickster is able to reach its full potential, the inhabitant resembling its habitat. It is here that the Trickster might become a self appointed master of ceremony, the jokes and fantasy mistaken for charismatic and ideological behavior. Once placed in the liminal - the materialized world of the edge - the Trickster finally feels at 'home'. When this occurs and a position of power is granted to, or claimed by it, the Trickster will put all transitioning toward normality to a halt and instead perpetuate the liminal crisis as long as he desires.

By absence of any deeply felt - human - emotion, the Trickster functions as a common mirror and simultaneously a distorted one, and is able to do so without remorse. A mirrored surface materialized, as a hyper-superficial being. Through his

permanent state of exteriority he is enabled to think rationally in the liminal. Though it is not only the Trickster's nature that renders it a suited candidate for permanent liminality, it is also the mythic world that makes its existence possible.

Within the domains of art and literature, mythic characters are granted a permanence in character[8], unparalleled by their non-mythic counterparts. In myth, characters are personifications of certain consistent moral traits. Their behavior is directed by these traits, fueling their interaction with the world around them in accordance with their symbolic personality traits. Now I will address the Myth and its structures, and see what other liminal personae might inhabit it.

[8] As opposed to modern literature counterparts, where the tale might revolve around the personal development of the protagonist.

In 'A Hero with a Thousand Faces' from 1949, he lays down a structure that divides the mythological journey into a certain amount of steps, stripping the myths from its cultural variables and proposing an ubiquitous skeleton for the general Myth. He calls it *the Hero's Journey* or *mono-myth*. The attempt of Campbell to find a global alikeness has certainly been driven by the psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and, more prominently, Carl Gustav Jung. Jung's theory of the 'collective unconsciousness' matches well with the instinctive way of mythological heroic narration. So does Freud's analysis of Dream bears resemblance to the allegorical reading of the monomyth.

Before addressing the steps, Campbell notices a broader distinction in these tales, namely...

Departure

Initiation / descend

Return

The three phases show great resemblance to the earlier addressed threefold that Van Gennep proposed. Each phase consists of several steps involving a certain motion or effect on the protagonist or 'hero'. I will make use of a little heuristic device; reducing the 'hero' to a 'H' and the protagonist to 'P' the *hero protagonist* will henceforth be addressed as HP.

Departure

The HP resides in his or her status quo, often an uneventful, apathetic or un-happy time. Preordained for heroism or not, the HP inevitably receives the Call to Adventure; a request to swoop the HP away from its home and propel him or her onwards. Invited to embark on a quest of physical, emotional or metaphysical nature, the HP might respond in several ways, app-rehensive of the journey ahead or positively bouncing of excitement, ready to leave everything behind at the word 'go'. Where more often than not certain apprehension might be incorporated in the HP's response, or even an instinctive flat out refusal, these spasms of reluctance are labeled as Refusal of the Call. Followed by an inevitable Re-conciliation of the Refusal[9]. Once accepted the HP will receive some sort of Super-

natural Aid, this might manifest itself in an arsenal of protective enchantments or reminders of sagely advice.

When finally on it's way, the HP encoun-ters its first obstacle. Here the HP crosses over from the familiar into the unknown, here the HP reaches the Threshold and its Threshold Guardian. According to Campbell, the limit of the HP *life horizon* is represented here. Outside the reach of parental or societal protection the HP, it is now up to HP to step through the veil, into the unknown. Though, the Treshold Guardian might be dangerous, or demand certain prerequisites fulfilled before allowing passage.

[9]   When the call remains unanswered or is refused the story falters and sizzles out. The HP stays put and that's that. The refusal of "That Which Not Yet Is' becomes automatically an acceptance of 'That What Already Is' implying a defeat into mediocrity and acceptance; often opposite of what is considered in the HP's best interest.

"One had better not challenge the watcher of established bounds. And yet - it is only by advancing beyond those bounds, provoking the destructive other aspect of the same power, that the individual passes on, either dead or alive, into a new zone of experience[10]."

Once the Guardian is thwarted the HP slides into the Belly of the Whale, an ambiguous place of fluidlike forms. If the Threshold Guardian guards the threshold, the Belly of the Whale is that doorstep.

[10]   A Hero with a Thousand Faces, Josepg Campbell, P.141

Initiation/descend

Arrived on the other side of the threshold the HP advances, further into the magical underworld, submitted to the Road of Trials, a period of challenges and test. A Meeting of the Goddess takes place, a meeting of unconditional and worldly love, similar to the archetypical love a mother might have for her child. A second 'female' figure is encountered, yet here the the woman poses not as exemplified love but as temptation namely the Woman as Temptress. The temptations she offers are earthly pleasures juxtaposed to the divine love received earlier by the Mother. After an Atonement with the Father, a male figure with the power over life and death who fuses the *super-ego*, *ego* and *id* of the HP, the Apotheosis happens, a physical death occurs enabling the HP to move beyond conflicting paths and reaches a a state of compassion and knowledge

required for the road back. Once all of this is attained the HP is able to achieve the Ultimate Boon. All the predating steps were prerequisites to attain it. The Boon might be a Holy Grail or an Elixir of Immortality.

Conventionally marked as the peak of the story, it's important to note that up until now the HP has been on a path of descend[11] and has now reached the lowest point of the circle. Ready to emerge, the HP is now at its 'halfway' point.

Return

In certain cases the HP might require a rescue mission, resulting in a chaotic and high speed dash know as the Magic Flight. Crumbling cave ceilings collapsing, or a new wave of enemies flooding out of a previously unnoticed passageway. This rescue by other powerful guides is called the Rescue from Without; a symbolic gesture of the world above offering help and encouraging the return of the HP.

'Society is jealous of those who remain away from it, and will come knocking at the door[12].'

After the rescue the HP crosses a Second Threshold. Where the first threshold crossing has been a symbolic death the second crossing is one of symbolic rebirth. Being thrown back into the world above, the HP has to survive the physical and

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[11]   Freudian Dream theory.

[12]   The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell, P.15

symbolic impact of the return to earth. The transcendental bliss that has been experienced before, now in the harsh daylight of the 'real' , needs to processed in new light. Master of Two Worlds is the follow up, an attained balance, where the material and the spiritual, the descend and ascend, the world of Inner and Outer come together. The HP can traverse freely now, to and fro the world's. By the mastering of conflicting forces of the mind. The HP reaches its last phase named the Freedom to Live, back at the beginning of the circle or rather spiraled above its begin point.

It should be mentioned that many exceptions can be found. The structure of the monomyth remains in many ways open for interpretation and even then deviations from the steps occur. It does offer us, if not an infallible predictability of Myth or man, a reading that not only questions the

ubiquity - something which can not be explained away through cultural transmission alone - nor only the significance of the story or Myth, but most importantly proves to be a relevant source adjacent to the liminal journey.

The threefold structure of the departure, initiation and descent not only exemplifies quite expansively the sheer transformative force that occurs in the part of initiation, it also offers certain molds for the inhabitants and habitats of the liminal and threshold.

I am especially intrigued by the sequential steps of the Threshold Guardian and the Belly of the Whale in the Departure phase, as they personify the liminal as well as shape its landscape. When the HP dives through the jaws of the whale, it finds itself in the Belly of the Whale or preferably the Womb of the Whale or the World Womb.

The womb functions here as an allegorical mid point between Life and Death. Furthemore the HP does not traverse further outward or onward but inwards instead, to be born again[13].

There are strong ties to the Biblical story of Jonah, who ends up in the whale's belly, submitting himself to divinity's whim whilst simultaneously acknowledging himself as a mortal being.

Though I do not want to dwell too long in the liminal habitat yet, as I will get to it in a later part...

[13]   This motion correlates with the passing of a worshipper into a temple - a metaphorical death occurs, shedding his secular character and then a metamorphosis is triggered. By realising its temporal nature whilst on the doorstep and is now in a place devoted to a divine transportative silence. In this sense the Belly of the Whale, the temple and the divine lands above, below and beyond are the same. It is therefore that most temples are secured by gargoyles or other representational statues or paintings of threshold guardians, warding off all who are incapable or unworthy for entrance.

The Threshold Guardian traditionally functions as a warden of the threshold, controlling the entrance and ensuring that only the worthy may pass. Where a more force centered HP might attempt to overpower the guardian, a HP who relies more on wits might attempt to bribe, evade, learn or sway the Threshold Guardian in allowing passage. Where many guardians remain stationary, this is not necessarily applicable to all. Many a time the Guardian might stretch his usefulness beyond a mere keeper of gates and becomes an escort, guide or even an ally.

Throughout the Greek and Roman mythologies Charon has had the leading role in regards to the crossing from Life to Afterlife. Charon transported the recently deceased souls across the rivers Styx or Acheron[14], it is here where he also lived. For Charon to allow passage into the realm of the Afterlife,

he required a payment in the form of an Obol[15],once the payment was completed and therefore his test was passed, Charon - in exchange - would offer his services as boatman to the Underworld. Mostly depicted as a grumpy yet not innately evil being, he reminded me more of a worn out office worker than a villain or friend. Charon, being the sole inhabitant of this liminal interzone, in between the most prevalent dichotomy of life, namely; life and death, puts him in a position of fixed liminality. Rendered mostly powerless, he seems nevertheless to be in the position to evaluate his potential passengers impartially and fairly.

As Arthur Schopenhauer proposes the importance of withholding, isolation and rejected courtesies as a prerequisite to being truly insightful and knowing, so it seems that Charon easily fits into this mold, ren-

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[14]   The notion of the river as liminal environment or 'ecotone' is a recurring theme in many tales of afterlife crossing.

[15]   A certain type of greek coin

dering him more than apt for the job. The fact that Charon is perceived to be one of the few Immortals that never stops working[16], might seem insignificant but surely is not. His professionalism lies in dispassion, and dispassion is a strong asset when in the position of analyst or inquirer. 'For justice delivered without dispassion, is always in danger, of not being justice.' (Quintin Tarantino, The Hateful Eight)

Adjacent to Charon there is Offero, similar attitude and profession but with a strong more Christian savor to it. Offero also resides at a riverside and while not owning a boat is still able to transport travelers over the river. As a gargantuan, Offero simply carries his passengers on his broad shoulders, being boat and ferryman in one.

The aforementioned guides or ferrymen are part of a larger ubiquitous phenomena which recurs in many tales about the journey to the afterlife. In all of these tales the crossing takes place over a body of water accompanied by a guide or boatman[16].

These guides or escorts are responsible for the relocation of the newly deceased and are traditionally called *psychompompus* from the Greek[17], or as we call them now: *Psychopomp*. The role of the psychopomp resembles that of the master of ceremony, guiding the fragile state of the soul which has left its original mold but did not yet reach its destination.

The mythological characters that function as Trickster, Threshold Guardian or psychopomp are not the only examples in mythology referring to liminal personae. So far the liminals addressed have either felt at home in the liminal state or resided in it. Moreover it is also probable that certain

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[16]   Opposed to hedonistic and reckless behavior of most other Greek and Roman divinities and immortals.

[17]   Meaning 'guide of souls'

mythological characters instead of residing, have attained certain practical liminal traits. Like Blodeuwedd;

Blodeuwedd had an affair with Gronw Pebr, the Lord of Penlynn, together they plot to murder Lleu. Blodeuwedd slyly finagles information from the naive Lleu on how to neutralize the protective conditions that safeguarded him up until so far. Since he cannot be killed by day or night, nor indoors or outdoors, neither riding nor walking, not clothed nor naked, nor by any lawfully made weapon. He reveals that when a tub is placed at the shore of a river, and an arched roof is built, properly constructed out of reeds. Then a goat had to be fetched and only then, with one foot on the goat and the other in the tub would Lleu be vulnerable. With this information she arranges his death.

This snipped of story about Lleu, from Welsh mythology, stretches the parameters of what a liminal personae could be. His enemies are forced to rethink their common instinctive and binary approaches resulting in a non-binary solution to effectively kill Lieu

Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, transitions and passageways, was honored especially when one would embark on a journey. This two faced god, with one he viewed the past and with the other the future, essentially becomes a meeting point in a dichotomy. His governance over journey and materialized journey's, such as hallways, will be addressed in the following part where I aim to address the liminality is not person-ified but inhabited.

PART THREE

Becoming familiar with liminal entities, I have to acknowledge that it is their reliance on Myth that has enabled them to spring into life. Myths possess the capability to contain and exemplify certain notions and traits that cannot exist elsewhere. Soon I want to tread away from the fictional and archetypical characters and start drawing some attention to places of the real instead.

These places appear to be dipped in big
vats of glossy lacquer, polished and brushed
up, roughly managing to reflect their sur-
rounding equally semi-glossy surfaces.
Broomed and cleansed and cleaned by apt
and able cleaners with several powerful
bleaches and other more arcane detergents.

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They are stained by years of thick smoke,
coloring the once white into a gritty beige
and no-so mint green. An epoch of sun and
bleach has managed to wash the room from
any modernity and has instead, become a
timeless place which would be hard to call
appealing. Yet no one seems to care about
that.

Both the *scrubbed* and the *smokey*, as bleak and formulaic as they may appear - or even are, they do share an attitude of traces which are not seen by the eye (immediately). Monitored and kept, they are often considered as empty or traceless places. This poses a problem when seen through a prototypical *detective novel* lens.

The detective exemplifies the civilized society, each proponent instrumentalized and containing - a hidden - significance. In the world of the detective, a sensible consciousness governs. This can is only possible when produced by a creator who is not limited by the world he or she writes about. Every element is instrumental[18]. The prototypical detective, once arrived at the crime scene, will scour the premise for potential visual clues and when all are collected, applies a method of deduction to to reconfigure the murder mystery.

[18]   As in the world of Myth.

Now however, the detective faces a real obstacle. Traces are either not visible - or worse, are not even there! The smooth surfaces are wiped clean and the detective cries out helplessly:

"I might as well try to solve a murder mystery right under a waterfall!"

A rather just comparison of the prototypical detective wouldn't you say?

However problematic for the detective, it is in these places we catch this distinct scent of liminality, not sensed elsewhere. Filled with a miasma[19] that practically buzzes with potentiality. Miasma is hard to grab however. Before addressing this mist in such places, I'll draw some parameters to identify them.

Architecture in essence functions as a dichotomous power structure of division; inclusion and exclusion and additionally interiority and exteriority. This division is made to clearly differentiate the wanted from the unwanted circumstances such as otherness, strangeness, or unplanned-ness which are preferred to reside in the sphere of exteriority. Alternately it includes certain circumstances in the interior such as security and predictability. Though this division is never fail proof, it does shed some light on favored conditions concerning place. Furthermore the identification of the known and its relation to self, seems to automatically render the outside as unknown and alternately *other*.

The divisional tendency (interiority vs. exteriority, known vs. unknown and self vs. other), is one I urge to reconsider. These primarily western dichotomies undermine

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[19]   Though not the lethal one that spreads the bubonic plague through aerial transmission.

any form of additional or alternative thought. This does not only apply to spaces but to its residents and visitors too. The re-proposition of space and place as a potential intermediate, hopefully transformative or even liminal site, led me to a traditional aspect in Japanese architecture. Namely the *engawa*, which is basically a strip of floor surrounding the exterior house. The engawa is located underneath windows, doors and storm shutters-essentially wherever an entrance or exit could take place. Seen as an intermutual element by surrounding the private residence. The engawa facilitates a spatial moment here, where visitor, stranger or any unknown might converge with the resident, both positioned on equal[20] footing.

If the exclusion of the unknown has been fundamental to architecture and thus also to city and society shaping, then it should be fathomable to create areas where the

unknown is not shun aside, but rather engaged and nourished. *Heterotopic* spaces as Foucault calls them, are non-hegemonic places intended for otherness. Originated from the ancient Greek prefix - *heteros* ('different, other') combined with the - $o\overset{\circ}{v}$ ('not') and - $\tau\acute{o}\pi o\varsigma$ ('place, passage') ending up in something meaning no-place.

These places have strong ties to the liminal, as they are neither here nor there and are as physical as they are mental. In Foucault's 'Des Espaces Autres' the example of the mirror is brought up. The mirror-an object that shapes a relation to your own image as well as a carrier of an non-existing one. The duality is aptly illustrated here as the mirror becomes here a middle ground for self and other, real and unreal and so forth.

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[20] Where the porch is often regarded as the western equivalent of the engawa, the porch is used as place to sit, eat and entertain guests-indicating an attitude of ownership and territoriality. It is therefore just stretching the interior to the edge of the porch, opposed to the dispossessed and fluid character of the engawa.

Many variants on the heterotopic spaces spaces have sprung into life such as the: *heterotopia of deviation* which is concerned with the placement of individuals deviant from the governing norm such as prisons, asylums, rest homes or cemeteries, heterotopia of time which is placed in and out of time-like museums, *crisis heterotopia* being spaces that separate and are often of momentary nature, where life defining activities occur such as the honeymoon in a hotelroom, or the boarding school far away from the bustling center, and lastly the *heterotopia of ritual* which is involved with isolated spaces that can only be accessed through symbolic gestural behavior and permission, such as a sauna or hammam.

But most importantly the heterotopic space or ideally *heterotopia*, could function as a haven for otherness, possessing the accesibility and order of public space whilst simultaneously incorporating the true unmasked-ness of the private realm. This remains in the realm of hypothetical space, something unattainable for now and as a result of parameters set at the start of this part I will not wander any further. Instead I'll address a historical place similar in attitude to the unattained heterotopia.

In ancient Greek cities, a rough patch of bare rock is often incorporated in its layout, referred to as *Areopagus[21]*. This appointed place - often at a high point in the city - was left untouched, as if not to cultivate that which was closest to the sun. Devoid of any foliage nor man-made construction, it became centreground and sacred place for the geists of the other. If the city was build on principles of civilized ratio or *logos* then the Areopagus remains a place of the non-civilized and non-logos.

[21]   Translated to 'big chunk of rock'.

The earlier mentioned etymology of the heterotopic space resulted in no-place. The - no or - non seem to be important in understanding these places. But first place -- before non.

When an anthropological place is described as a small village, consisting of a quaint little bakery, two cafe's where the townspeople congregate when it gets dark to share stories and more importantly gossip, a place of religious devotion such as a temple or church, the crooked houses surrounding this temple or church, the fields where their food is grown and harvested, a centred monument commemorating a historical relevant event of the area, whatever that might have been, their specific way of pronouncing the vowel - e as {ueh} and the custom to reuse the tea bags more than once, then the *non - place* would be driving down the interstate past the village, only to stop at a gas station where you can - if you squint your eyes a bit - see the top of the temple or church, locating it through the layout on the map which is pinned on a pinboard next to the entrance. When looking at the post card rack littered with old cards depicting the town as a *hyper happy ville*, you see that the cards are glossy yet sun-stained, partly blurring the card by the merciless shine.

''If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place[22].''

22   Non Places, Marc Auge P.63.

A piece of logic I find hard to disagree with. Marc Auge proposes the term non-places in his book 'Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity'. Non-places are places of transience, mostly involved with passing through or otherwise related to purchase and relaxation.
The encounter of the non-place, does not possess the same cultural, personal, sexual or social historical weight than the place does.

These anthropological non-places are routinely introduced through the written word: 'Watch out: slippery floor' or 'Toilets this way' and often negates the need to visit them. This representational effect the word has on the addressed place is often sufficient. When visited however, these spaces turn out to not only be represented through, but invaded by words as well. As a result of the non-personal and textual engagement with these places, a distancing effect occurs that renders the visitor anonymous and further-more disposes them of most responsibilities. As by a deity, they are guided through these spaces alone, though an echo of the guide - text - remains. The master of ceremonies might be disembodied, but is still in attendance here.

This exercise of distinction of place and non - place remains a hypothetical one; to conjure up examples completely devoid of any relational or historical identity remain challenging when applied to actual places.

"Our ideal ought not to be a world without frontiers, but one where all frontiers are recognized, respected and permeable, a world in fact, where respect for differences would start with the equality of all individuals, independent of their origin or gender[23]."

[23] Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, P.14/15.

This assessment of the frontier offer a constructive and non-discriminatory re-evaluation. Campbell exhibits here an emotive sensibility in regards to the threshold and its potential, describing in similar word and tone the effect of the liminal and its desired communitas. These *accepted frontiers* so to say, have a deeply agnostic flavour to it. They are acknowledging and respecting opposing belief systems while simultaneously remaining receptive for other non-grand narratives or other non-included truths. By doing so, it becomes possible to depart from the stationary viewpoint and to attain mobility, now enabled to circle around the issue at large.

'Accept' however, offers us semantically three distinctly different modes of doing so.

3.A : to <u>endure</u> without protest or reaction <accept poor living conditions>

3.B : to regard as proper, normal, or <u>inevitable</u> <the idea is widely accepted>

3.C : to recognize as true : <u>believe</u> <refused to accept the explanation>

Where *3.A* is defined by the word endure, implying a certain degree of suffering, and when applied would result into an assimilation to the dominant or governing force. Thus rendering itself inappropriate when positioned in relation to the quote by Campbell. Neither does *3.C* give an apt impression; by imposing an absolute -and therefore excluding any other form of- *truth*, it attains an opposite attitude when related to the accepted frontiers. Therefore *3.B* remains, the middle one, still inhibiting a normative involvement of *3.C*, yet refuses to see itself as the sole proprietor of truth and therefore enabling alternate options. *3.B* is neither a capitulation of certain conditions nor a rejection of anything that doesn't match with the 'believed' absolute truth, inhibiting that sought after mobility and fluidity of the liminal.

Frontiers and thresholds function thus not only as a non-place per se, but also as an alternate and self aware zone of mobility and therefore non - binary reassessments.

Whereas I have regarded these non-places as figureheads and conceptual models of political and societal issues, they in many ways lack the brute transformative force that occurs in the liminal - crisis - moment. Yet force is not required when time is not an issue. These spaces are instead possessed by a more subtle mode of liminality which I will address in the last part of the text, by example of the hotel lobby and its personnel.

Siegfried Kracauer has served - like Auge - as a key figure in carving out meaning from the mold of the non-place. In his essay 'The Hotel Lobby' from his book 'The Mass Ornament' in 1927, he proves to be more capable in locating the inherent magic in

places such as the hotel lobby.
Auge offers us a fundamental understanding of this concept, yet is clearly concerned about the non-place as a byproduct[24] of hypermodernity. Kracauer however, as cinematographic theorist and ex-architect was able to use the lobby as a metaphor for everything that happens outside of it, while is simultaneously able to address the endless self mirroring which occurs in such spaces. Resulting in success by not reducing it to a mere figurehead or example but instead acknowledging the hidden layers of the hotel lobby.

The interior of the lobby consists not solely out of lounge chairs and coffee tables, its personnel is included too. Receptionist[25] and bellboy alike are just as present, wearing masks of feigned politeness that enable them to see, yet restrict them to speak and reduce their faces to sketch - like copies of one

another. Their repetitive and distant pro-fessionalism is echoed by their surroundings rendering them as mere generic regularities.

"The visitors in the hotel lobby, who allow the individual to disappear behind the peripheral equality of social masks, correspond to the exhausted terms that coerce differences out of the uniformity of the zero[26]."

[24]   Or symptom.
[25]   So is the front desk manager reminiscent of the threshold guardian, admitting or rejecting you to the new and unknown ambiguous places occupied by the liminal. Even escorting you to your room, where he or she momentarily attains the role of the ferryman.

[26]   Siegfried Kracauer, The Mass Ornament, P.181.

Though the role of guest is most common to us and we are aware of an imposed anonymity , it is not only anonymity, but dissociation as well, that is encouraged when entering. Leaving behind any governing laws and conventions of the outside. Not so distant to the effect a temple might have on its visitor-dropping their non-secular identity and whilst indoors reducing oneself rendered secondary to the laws of the temple's reining entity. Thus Auge poses. that while in transit or liminal one becomes nothing more than what one does. Traveler, passenger, *believer*. Many variables are momentarily disposed to become one with activity and surrounding.

This momentarily reduced mode of being promotes an alikeness - to all who enter - and is strengthened by a customary silence. Though silence is not obligatory, it implies a consideration of equality through an

unspoken mutual understanding of safe-guarding this status quo. This safeguarding however does not arise from mutual chivalry, but instead from a instinctual strategy of difference elimination. The silence becomes a force of abstraction, enabling an easy blend with the respective dominating environment. A break of silence would be an

'Abolishment of the semi solidarity of the intermediate spheres[27].''

27   The Mass Ornament, The Hotel Lobby, Siegfried Kracauer, P.182.

The visitor has sofar been subjected to distancing effects, anonymity, dissociations of the outside and has now become silent. It is here the subjected sojourn is able to access a mode of receptivity, open to - desired - re-propositional freedom of thought. Though no ontological trans- formation is triggered, it does provoke the subjected individual to engage in certain self reflective activities.

It would be false, however, to assume that the allure of the non-place is derived from the characters that dwell in it. The lobby and its overarching label of the nonplace seem to be extremely vulnerable to a presence of absence. The lobby remains elusive in function and architecture, it embodies the middle ground of inside and a outside of culture. A place where no personal nor public law are completely applicable. The appearance and interior

therefore play a presumably big part in its animation. This governing general aesthetica in many hotel lobbies and waiting rooms has been a symptom of the standardization of materials and production[28].

Furthermore, its calculated general aesthetica has been adopted and reproduced through- out the world. By doing so, the proximity of the geographical place is blurred. If all hotel lobbies around the globe do look alike, then any seen hotel lobby in isolation could be located anywhere on that globe, rendering them as known and close or as unknown and distant as possible. Thus the equality, place- lessness and togetherness as results of the liminal condition seem to not only apply to a subjected participant but to (non-)places as well.

[28] Another influence might have been the attempt from the 40's to let hotel lobbies resemble the interior of a home. Rebranding the hotel as a second home.

'If the easily overlooked locales that reproduce social relations acquire a mythic dimension through the naturalizing force of repetition, then he works against this process by reading them as so many ciphered communications[29].'

These mythic dimensions are created supposed endless repetition. Where the archetype is the embodiment of the endlessly repeated, a collection of all the minor differentiations of a major aspect such as the different acts jealousy or love might trigger. So does the mechanic and professional actions promoted by the non-place's general interior generate this attitude of *mythicality*.

"It is the setting of those who neither seek nor find the one who is always sought, and who are therefore guests in a space as such- a space that encompasses them and has no function other than to encompass them".

29   The Mass Ornament, The Hotel Lobby, Siegfried Kracauer, P.181.

This purposiveness which has apparently no real purpose at all, resembles the hollowed out characters present in prototypical detective novel. The lack of aesthetic and functional urgency -when taken out of their original context - has reduced them to an unreal and purely formal entity. It made sense in relation to its surrounding context - the novel or the visit - but now, outside of it, it becomes a shell. Hollowed out exterior matter.

Here the aesthetic qualities of these places comes back in. The residue of their general aesthetics, echoes itself endlessly in the lobby. With a ...

'... disinterested satisfaction in contemplation of a world creatin itself, whose purposive-ness is felt without being associated with any representation of purpose[30].'

30   The Mass Ornament, Siegfried Kracauer, P.177.

The self referential attitude of the lobby, becomes its own border. Signifying its own emptiness as the ouroboros; a never ending echo of itself. It appears as if the place can only attain autonomy when latched onto something greater[31] or other.

And where the attitude of the hotel lobby is an empty aesthetic shell, so becomes the silent individual, who visits the venue, a nameless gheist. Thus surrounding becomes the archetypal space while visitor is turned into a generic entity. Place and visitor have both rendered themselves to semantic categorical matter of empty symbols.

It seems now that everything has been reduced or rather compressed to *surface*. A dispiriting prospect still. The prototypical detective and Auge are both crying out loud I'd like to cling on to. By stretching the two-dimensional to a *hyper surface* and thus

renewing three-dimensional spatiality, where readability and narrativity[32] are regained or even enhanced. Like the flatness of a tv screen or the layered surface of a book's binding, or in the Belly of the Whale, all introduce not only a horizontal mobility, but one of verticality or even a freedom of mobility into depth.

The liminal has proven to be a slippery subject. Neither opaque -thus hindering us to discern the liminal from its surrounding -nor full transparency -therefore ruling out the possibility of outright undetectability-the liminal instead, turned out to be reflective. Affected by its surroundings, yet autonomous in its essence.

The dependency on its surroundings, was only of brief concern to me in my inquiry to the liminal and its innumerable molds. What did concern me however, was the

[31] Like the temple latching itself onto a divinity, or a castle in need or royalty. Without it, the place becomes an decorous shell without a snail and can therefore will often be only seen as an exterior living a past time.

[32] Where the supermodernity, whom Auge addressed, eliminated any form of narrative and personal identity, Kracauer proposes that instead it signals 'a histrionic multiplication in a deluge of space, time and event.'

supposed inherent flatness the liminal - from the mimetic behavior of the Trickster, the high gloss of the postcard at the tankstation, the dispassion of the ferryman or the shiny surface of the coffee table - seemed to consist of.

It seemed to me that this surface, or rather the two-dimensional still governed. The dichotomy returns. The threshold clung on to the flat strip under the door. Back to the mode my subject initially had managed to refrain from name two-foldism and codependency. Surface, superficiality and flatness.

Yet where a surface technically offers us two modes of viewing - up to down and front to back - the realisation that even these seemingly inherent dichotomistic structures can and ought to be pulled and stretched to a renewed state of hyper-surface or

alternately three-dimensionality, I find truly liberating.

Imagine the abyss again. But this time imagine it flooded with water. Filled all the way up the brim. It now appears to be a vast and perfectly flat surface. Yet we can concur that such an assumption -based on its appearance- is unsound in more ways than one.

And it is here, back in the transformative fluidity - or just water - that the liminal manages to not be just the suspended rope bridge, or the abyss itself, but instead moving through it. Filling up the abyss and engulfing everything in it. Now, flooded and fertile, the liminal has reclaimed its three-dimensionality, its depth. Flowing through the once barren abyss, the liminal is able to swoop up all it meets. And all which has been swept up will be transported and changed.

An inspiriting prospect I'd say.

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