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Liminal Metamorphosis: Rite of being in the zone.

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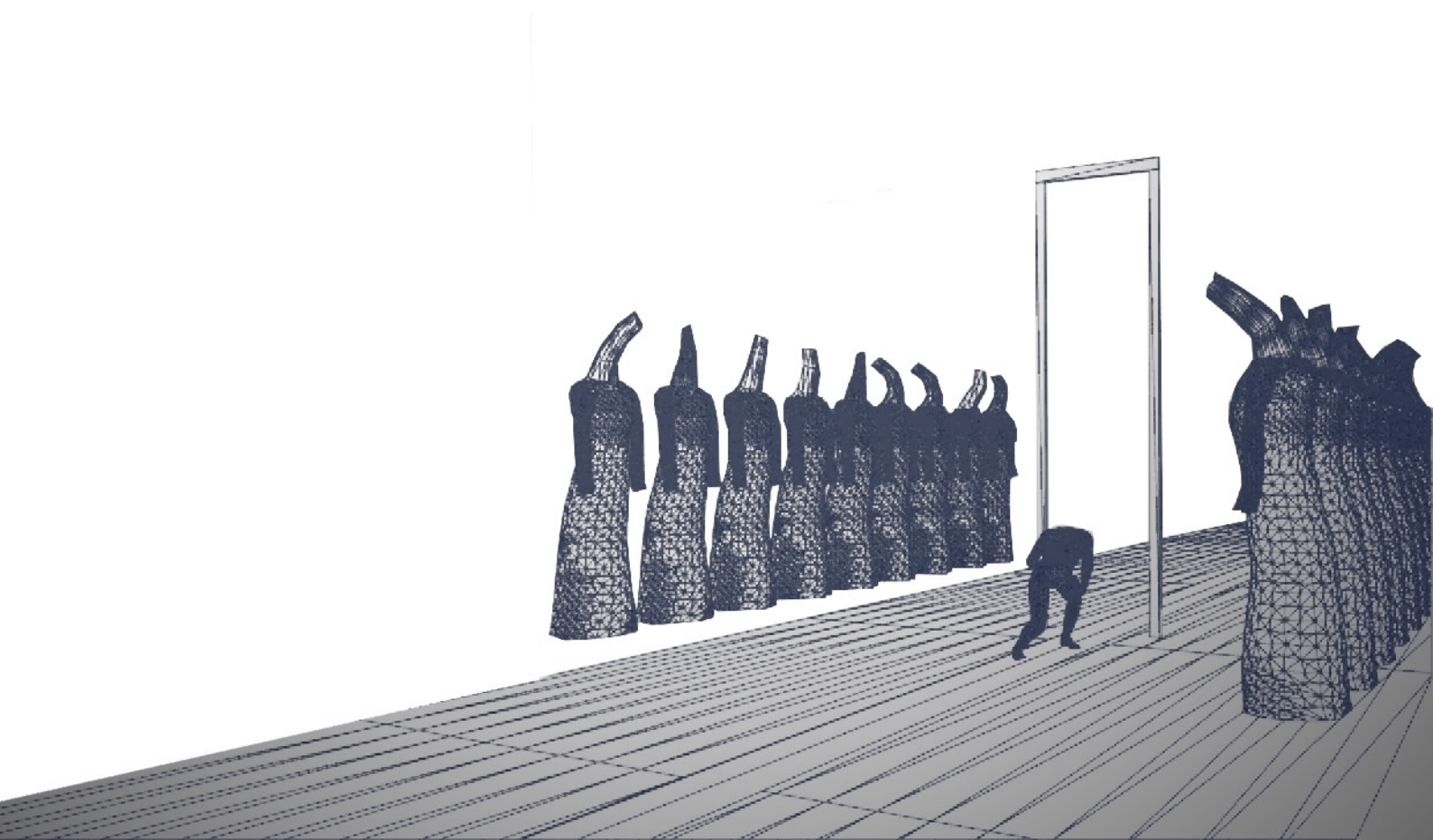
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To my mother and father

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Abstract

In his seminal work "*Rites de passage*" Van Gennep examined tribal societies' rituals in which a person's social or sexual status changes. He introduced a three-phase scheme of such transitions: separation, margin (limen) and aggregation. Further insights by Victor Turner, marked the second - liminal phase - as being of particular relevance in the studies of both tribal and post-industrial societies. Labeled as "anti-structure", the liminal phenomena pose themselves as a capsule of possibilities, which can influence the normative structures and initiate revolution.

More recent inquiries on the topic broadened the context and emphasized the role of liminality in cultural studies of large-scale societies and phenomena such as globalized economy, global wars and communicational systems.

Through the medium of performance and installation art, as well as the importance of the personal experience of liminality, the presented work aims to further explore liminal phenomena as the place of being "betwixt and between", as the borderline between two different structures, with particular attention to movement, threshold, and what Csikszentmihaly marked as "flow" or "being in the zone".

Introduction

In his seminal work „*Rites de passage*“ ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep extensively studied different rituals of tribal societies and based on his personal observations as well as available ethnographic data, he compared ritual forms focussed on structural similarities and presented a classification of all existing rites (Gennep, 1960). He distinguished the rituals which mark the change of a persons' social or sexual status from those which mark a transition in temporal passage (e.g. harvest, planting, New Year, etc.). In addition, he noticed that in almost every culture certain life stages like birth, puberty, marriage etc. are marked with a specific ritual and ceremony. The essence of all these rituals is a celebration of the process of *transition* – from one stage of life to another, from one social status to another and so forth. Rituals of passage are found in almost all societies, but tend to be more explicitly disclosed in small-scale, cyclical tribal societies where change is driven by biological and meteorological rhythms.

Considering them a special category, Van Gennep pointed out that any ritual of passage can be divided into three stages:

Separation

Margin (limen)

Aggregation (Incorporation)

In the first stage, the individuals (novices, neophytes, “initiands”) show behavior which marks the detachment from the previous status in social structure; inversion of relationships and social processes. In the second stage, the marginal phase, (marked also as “liminal phase”) novices enter in the phase of ambiguity, a kind of social oblivion where they are no longer pertinent to the old group or cast, but still not part of the subsequent one. They are “at once no longer classified and not yet classified” (Turner, 1964). Often during this phase names are taken from novices, they become anonymous and are forced to undergo a variety of physical and personality transforming torments. In other words, they are structurally invisible, deprived of

everything (social status, rank, clothing, property) and may be regarded as a “kind of human ‘*materia prima*’, as undifferentiated raw material” (Turner, 1964). The third stage, aggregation (or incorporation), marks the return of the novices in their new, well-defined position in social structure. The passage is finalized. The ritual’s subject is again in a stable state, and is expected to respect the pre-established rules and norms of their new social status and behave accordingly. In some cases the tripartite structure of a passage ritual can be duplicated – the second, liminal phase, can also be divided into three phases corresponding to the tripartite scheme (separation, margin, aggregation).

The spatial dimensions of a passage ritual were crucial for Van Gennep. He considered the symbols of transit zones like thresholds, doorways, portals etc. to be sacred and, in some cases, to be an object around which the whole ritual is carried out. The rite of passing through a doorway, between two objects or under something is to be considered as a “direct rite of passage by means of which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one” (Gennep, 1960).

Further insights, especially those of Victor Turner, pointed the liminal phase of a passage ritual (also labeled as anti-structure) as being of particular relevance for the studies of both – tribal/agrarian and post-industrial cultures. In his comprehensive contribution to the subject, he denotes the liminal phenomena or the space of being “betwixt and between” as crucial for the exposure of the very building blocks of culture. Through comparing how the liminal phenomena operate in tribal and post-industrial societies different relations to large-scale social changes can be drawn. He extended Van Gennep’s term of “liminal” to a much broader sense, arguing that the seeds of ideas and social changes can be linked to it; that the very notion of revolution can be related to the totalized liminal phases for which “the *limina* of tribal rites de passage were merely foreshadowings or premonitions” (Turner, 1974). In his late work regarding the Christian pilgrimage, Turner theorized how the liminal phase may become fixed and how in the monastic and mendicant forms of religion transitional periods might become permanent states (Thomassen, 2014).

Turner's research on the topic of liminality revolves mostly around the recognition of liminality as being strongly associated with human experiences, both culture – dependent and universal ones. He realized that to study liminality means also to consider the very roots of human experience. The liminal phase of passage rituals is strongly related to a personal experience of inner metamorphosis, which can be seen as an eternal process that every person is condemned to – nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is transformed (Brusatin, 1997). In this regard, the inner state of the individual undergoing the transition (through a ritual of passage) can be linked to specific psychological phenomena.

The concept of the "flow", elaborated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jeanne Nakamura, relates to certain extent to the experience of being in-between. In the status of "flow" the subject operates at its full capacity while being completely emerged in the current endeavor of the present moment. The concept implies a fragile dynamic equilibrium – a balance between "perceived action capacities and perceived action opportunities" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Although Turner considered "flow" to be part of the "structure" (in opposition to liminal phase as being "anti-structure"), he recognized its potential of mutating or liquefying the structural norms (Turner, 1974).

The aforementioned theoretical concepts will be further examined, interrelated and deconstructed in the course of this Thesis. Different relations will be drawn with the scope of explaining the theoretical frame that preceded the creation of an artistic piece, which is a central and integral part of this Thesis. Through a further investigation of liminal phenomena, symbology of thresholds, performative arts and personal experience, the creative process will be explained and the artistic work will be described and depicted.

Passage in Space, Passage in Time: Thresholds and Experience

Depending on the temporal duration, liminal experiences (where liminality is applied to broader socio-cultural context) can be divided in those happening in a moment (sudden events, death, ritualized passage within a calendar like New Year, Harvest, sudden natural disasters etc.), those lasting a certain period of time (puberty, extended passages to manhood, wars, revolutionary periods, etc.) and those which can even extend to epochs and possibly life-span duration (designated Monkhood, religious fraternities, transgender, prolonged wars, enduring political instability, etc.). The temporal dimension of liminality is also related to the number of persons experiencing it at the same time – single individuals, social groups, whole societies or entire civilizations (Thomassen, 2014). Beside the temporal dimension of liminal phenomena, a spatial dimension of transitive processes is crucial for the study of ritual passages in both tribal societies and in modern ones.

Van Gennep in his "Rites de passage" dedicates a whole chapter to the territorial passage. He pointed out that territorial passages outline the general discussion of passage rituals (Van Gennep, 1960). The territories among people living in tribal societies were usually marked only by natural boundaries (stones, rivers etc.). The points of passage across these boundaries were highlighted by stakes, stones, upright rocks, and (in more complex forms) by portals, thresholds and statues. The installation of such passage points was often accompanied by rituals of consecration, and in many cases it was believed that these crossing points or gates are guarded by frontier divinities. Whoever passes the boundary is confronted with magico-religious sanctions. Indeed, the study of frontier crossings in many cultures reveals that the physical passage across the borderline by means of thresholds, portals, stones etc. was accompanied with different rituals of sacrifice. As pointed out by Van Gennep, the passages between two objects or "under something" is to be considered as

a direct rite of passage "by means of which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one" (Gennep, 1960).

Another interesting aspect related to the spatial dimension of passage rituals and liminality are the neutral grounds or zones. Van Gennep argued that, in contrast to modern border systems, the claimed territories among antique and indigenous people were surrounded by stripes of neutral ground. These neutral fields or zones (often being deserts, marshes or virgin forests) were sacred for the inhabitants of bordering countries. As a kind of a "no man's land" these zones were free for all the neighboring inhabitants to travel through or hunt. Nonetheless, once in the zone, the individual gets immersed in the magico-religious state of floating in-between the two worlds, which is strongly related to the actual liminal phase of ritual of passage (in the strict sense). The relationship between spiritual and physical passage is crucial – "A rite of spatial passage has become a rite of spiritual passage" (Van Gennep, 1960). The borderline zones as transitory places are difficult to categorize. Their neutrality renders them the most dynamic and fertile locations, and, analogous to the liminal phase of passage rituals, makes them a place of possible innovations where anything is possible. Borderline zones are interesting also on the micro-scale – if focus shifts from the big, colossal thresholds portals and arches to the smaller objects of passage like entrances to temples or even house entrances, the borderline zones shrink progressively until they disappear and become contained in the very thresholds and architraves of the doors and doorways. Nonetheless the sacred nature and taboo related to passage through doors and thresholds remain intact and it is not surprising that in many cultures special ceremonies accompany these passages (thresholds sprayed with blood or purifying water, sacred objects nailed on the architraves etc.).

In relation to boundaries and thresholds in a broader sense, it is important to mention the related writings of Walter Benjamin in his unfinished work "Arcades Project" (*Das Passagen-Werk*). Benjamin was aware of the importance of the experience of passages and liminality, and believed they became quite rare in modern times. He marks the process of falling asleep as one of the rare threshold experiences in modern times and points out human communication and interaction to be a source of threshold experience (Benjamin and Tiedemann, 1999). The terms of threshold and borderline are quite opposed in his reflections on the topic, since he labels thresholds to be a "zone of transition" which allows passage from one sphere to another while borderlines are nothing but a limit that tends to halt movement in one assumed position (Fornäs, 2002). In Benjamin's remarks, the threshold becomes "a crucial figure as a point of indifference/weakness that can turn into difference/power, a site of eventuality" (Mukherji, 2013).

Benjamin's remarks on the experience of a threshold states relate back to the observations of Van Gennep and Turner. The term *experience* is constituted of the notion of going through (-para) and out (-ex) – going throughout. The Greek word *peraō* relates experience to "pass through" (Mallory and Adams, 2006) which connects it to rites of passage (Turner, 1986). So the threshold experience is the experience "at its purest" – "To have grown poor in threshold experience is to lose the very capacity for experience" (Brand and Meis, 2002.). The essence of liminality is strongly bound to a special kind of personal experience. For Turner the study of liminality "was a study of human experience" (Thomassen, 2014). He argued that in order to fully comprehend and study liminal phenomena, it is necessary to include and understand the human reactions to liminal states and how these states play a role in shaping the human identity (Thomassen, 2014). Here Turner came close to the works

of Dilthey, his concept of *Erlebnis* and the hypothesis that human experience is not arbitrary and chaotic but rather a structured entity. Working on this idea, Turner concluded that the key is in “the recognition that the sequential order of a rite of passage is the structure of lived experience” (Szakolczai, 2009).

If the human experience is viewed through the prism of the three-folded structure of a rite of passage, then the precondition for even “experiencing the experience” is to abandon something, to interrupt the relations to the previous status and become some kind of *tabula rasa*. Dilthey makes a distinction between bare “experience” and “an experience”. “An experience” is something that stands out, “it does not have an arbitrary beginning and ending, cut out of the stream of chronological temporality” (Turner, 1986). These experiences, as Dilthey pointed out, have a processual structure and they go through distinguishable stages. They start with an evocative shock – the memories of previous experiences start to be revived by present shock. The next stage is finding a meaning in what has disturbed us, or to transform a mere perceptive experience into “an experience” (Turner, 1986). At this point the past and present come together – an encounter between the derivate of the old structural units of experience in relation to new ones. From the interaction between past experience and the new, current one, the relational structure labeled as “meaning” emerges. Here it can be seen how the very core of the experience, of “an experience” is formed in this middle phase of encounter, reconciliation, detachment and reattachment. A phase which is by its very nature liminal.

In-Between the Flow and the Art of Performance

Extensively studied by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the concept of the “flow” (also known as “the zone”) describes the mental state of an individual when being completely emerged into current activity. In this state, the distinction between self and environment fades, the individual is operating at full capacity. The attention is centered on a very limited field and the temporal dimension becomes distorted. Past and present are not relevant anymore, only *now* matters. The state of the flow, however, is fragile and relies on a dynamic equilibrium. To enter into “flow” means to establish “a balance between perceived action capacities and perceived action opportunities.” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Being “in flow” encompasses some key characteristics: focussed and intense concentration on the present moment activity, merging of action and awareness, loss of ego, distortion of time, experience of the activity is gratifying, etc. The term is frequently used to describe the sensation of existing in the moment, the state of extraordinary concentration and clarity (Woodward, 2015).

Although the “flow” concept was initially related to psychology of optimal experience and motivation in sports, its broader context was recognized by Turner and, to some extent, related to the liminal phase of passage ritual. In spite of considering the “flow” to have a structural value (as opposed to the liminal phenomena labeled as “anti-structure”), Turner recognized the potential of the “flow” to be a way in which normative structures could be dissolved or “liquefied” (Turner, 1974).

Being in the zone is a state where everything comes together and intersects. It is in a way a state of harmony and can be referred to as a state of grace. Similarly to the liminal state of passage rites, the zone or the “flow” indicate the transition from one state to another, but, at the same time, it is more

than just the middle state. Unlike the liminal state in passage rituals, the zone doesn't require a particular point of departure or arrival. Being in the zone lacks the formality of a ritual. "Crucially, the zone is a state in itself, which involves a transformation of consciousness and [...] it is a state of affectivity" (Woodward, 2015). The zone is strongly related with temporal dimension. It is a moment where past, present and future merge. The individual who is in the zone often experience the time dilatation to the point where the experience becomes almost timeless. Another important aspect of the zone is corporality. Although being in the zone sometimes involves a transcendental experience, it is also strongly rooted in physical perception of intense sensations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The studies of the flow and the zone by Csikszentmihalyi are mostly concerned with stages of flow recognition, those which anticipate flow, the flow itself and those who come *a posteriori*. This psychological and psychoanalytical approach deals with individual sensations and therefore considers the phenomena to be detached from social realm. However, by being related to liminality, the in-between-ness of the zone can easily be connected to the space between personal and social – the space where inner feelings meet with social world, while involving them both. The relation between the flow (zone) and liminality opens the field where an individual experience meets the collective one, where the private relates to the social.

When being in the zone, the social and psychic elements are interrelated in complex ways. Everything plays a role – from very personal feelings and inner worlds to the very body of the person who is experiencing the zone. Even the objects involved are part of the total image. Yet, as seen above, being in the zone has very much to do with the social realm as well. The audience or

spectators who are watching the process of an individual or a group entering the zone are also affected – “Witnessing a performance, which you could never actually participate in, because you lack any of the physical skills required, does not mean that the spectator is necessarily an outsider” (Woodward, 2015).

Here I would like to draw a parallel between the concept of the “flow” and art of performance which is of crucial importance for the following chapter. The interlacing of different cultures by the means of arts and performance can be traced back to ancient times (Fischer-Lichte, 2010). In the course of time, due to technological innovation which facilitated long distance travel, cultural exchange progressed exponentially as eastern and western cultures grew ever closer. At the turn of the twentieth century many Japanese and other Asian theater troupes travelled to Europe. The peek interest of European public for this new and exotic form of performative arts came with the tour of Otojiro Kawakami’s troupe starring his wife, Sada Yakko. The performances of Sada Yakko, especially those in Paris (1900), London (1900, 1901) and Berlin (1902) mesmerized the spectators, even the most skeptical ones. What is striking here, without going too much into detail, is that very in-between-ness that the public experienced – the state between “codetermining the course of performance and being determined by it” (Fischer-Lichte, 2010). Sada Yoko, an artist from a very different, almost alien culture provoked not only a strong emotional, but also a strong corporal reaction among spectators. In such cases, the oral explanation of a different *modus operandi* of the culture is not necessary or, due to language barriers, not even possible. Instead, in the performative act, the theater was realized not as an oral but as a physical art form. This fact rendered the coexistence and interrelation of two different cultures in the same place possible. Such coexistence gave birth to the experience which is both – spiritual and liminal to the extent where “the state of in-between-

ness into which the performance transfers its participants allows them to anticipate and experience a future wherein the journey itself, the permanence of transition, and the state of liminality constitutes the goal. What is here perceived as aesthetic experience will be experienced as everyday life in the future.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2010).

This shared experience between the performer and audience is something remarkably similar to what the contemporary performance artist Marina Abramović refers to as creation of “charismatic space”, a shared experience between performer and audience where “some transformations of the audience into what we might call a “performance audience” take place, and there will be again a kind of bond between its members and her” (Danto, 2010). This commutual “charismatic space” or the shared “here and now” exists by means of intrinsic quality of performance art – its immediacy. In the example of Abramović’s 1975 iconic performance “Lips of Thomas” it can be observed how this shared space and time between the performer and audience is able to influence the performance itself. Confronted with the artist’s excruciating self-torture, a part of the audience decided to react. Abramović was removed from the stage and the performance was brought to an abrupt ending. Similar reactions were documented in performances of other artists (Joseph Beuys, Herman Nitsch, and Wolf Vostell, just to name a few). In all of these cases spectators actively reacted regardless of the absence of the artist’s cry for help. Spectators were stuck between two realms – the realm of ethical imperatives and the realm of artistic rules. They were captivated in another state of in-between, becoming, in a way, liminal individuals. One of the possible exits from this dissonance is to intervene on a very physical level and stop the performance. By doing so a spectator undergoes a transformation – he becomes a performer.

Abramović's performance "Lips of Thomas" (together with many other of similar kind) can be interpreted as political or social critique, as a reference to Christian symbology or it can be labeled as "post-Christian" or "...rethinking of the theological boundaries of contemporary thought" (Arya, 2008.). However, any plausible interpretation of the performance can be negotiated only after the act of performance has finished – the semiotic aspect fully develops *a posteriori* (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). In the course of performance interpretations are overshadowed by experience. Experience which is instant, imminent and different for each spectator. It causes a variety of psychosomatic sensations – from fascination, curiosity to anger, disgust, nausea etc. Experience is something which precedes the interpretation – "The central concern of the performance was not to understand but to experience it and to cope with these experiences, which could not be supplanted there and then by reflection." (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

Performance, seen as event happening "here and now" through its constantly oscillating relationships between subject and object, materiality and symbology creates a space of pure experience, where "objects and actions are no longer dependent on the meaning attributed to them" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). In this space of shared charisma and feelings both the audience and the performer undergo a process of metamorphosis.

As shown, the performative acts, especially those which include severe body sufferings engage public in a specific state of in-between-ness. The body suffering, however, never exists without the suffering of the mind. In the same way in which consciousness is bounded to the material body, "[...] pain is never merely physical; that is, it never exists in isolation from the mind" (Carlson, 2010). Moreover, pain resists objectification in language, it has no referential content

and in general it stands in opposition to language. Performative acts of pain actively destroy the language in our logocentric society. It brings the spectators to the *status quo ante* the language, to the sounds that human beings produce before language is learned (Scarry, 1985). This attribute of being "beyond" language underpins the transcendental qualities of performative acts and, by doing so, reinforces the spectators' position of in-between. They are captured between moral and artistic norms, between strong psycho-physiological reactions and reflection on the cause of these reactions. This state is in a way a liminal state and it can be related back to Turners concept of liminality. However, unlike the liminal phase in rituals, the transformation that the public undergoes during the artistic performance is (in most cases) reversible and it doesn't require any kind of social acceptance. The metamorphosis that the audience experiences, from spectator to performer, from a state of calmness to a state of physical and mental agitation and so forth, is temporary and usually it lasts for the duration of the performance act, or even less.

Related to aforementioned, the common in-between experience of the audience and the performer is by many means a liminal experience. However it is an experience which requires a certain balance between action and reaction, between intervening and not intervening and therefore it forms a "special" case of liminal phenomena (Abramović et al., 2007).

Bodies which are *there*

The co-presence of the bodies of performer and audience is a crucial and constitutive part of the performance (Abramović et al., 2007). According to Fischer-Lichte, the corporeality of the performance is perpetuated by the constant tension between two states – state of “being a body” and state of “having a body”. This tension enables the production of corporality in performance and provides the means to perceive such corporality. Both generation and perception of corporality in performance acts depend on the phenomena of embodiment and presence. In performance acts which include physical violence (like in Abramović’s “Lips of Thomas” or “Rhythm 0”) the artist brings forth individual corporality while performing “processes that embody their bodies’ vulnerability, their exposure to violence, their aliveness, and the resulting dangers and risks.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). In this regard, the phenomena of performer’s presence can be seen as that of an embodied mind, which is in a constant process of becoming, transforming and metamorphosing.

The corporality of the performance is not necessarily produced and perceived exclusively by a visible transformation of the artist’s body by means of self-torture. The body can be presented without being directly physically manipulated. It can be merely given, present in the moment of time, simply being *there*. Body which is just there, enclosed in dangerous silence. And it is this lack of action and lack of any explanation that raises the cloud of craving for attribution of meaning and symbolical significance. Bodies that are simply *there*, in all their integrity are threatening and peculiar at the same time. Being *there*, also referred to by Elkins as “thereness”, is an attribute which highlights the presence of the body as a subject and of the body as an object. It preserves its innate value; “... a heightened sense of the object itself, clothed in the perfect mute eloquence of its essential nature” (Elkins, 1999).

The temporality of the performance piece directly implies the temporality of bodily (co)presence. Eventual objects or requisites used during the performance are the only physically palpable remains of what had happened. Nonetheless, the performance can continue its existence through documentation (photos, videos, text...) by means of "presence in absentia" (Jones, 1997), challenging the established rules of art critique, and questioning whether or not it is possible to "experience" (and if yes, in what way) a performative act without witnessing it in the moment of its enactment.

Putting things together: one installation and one performance

As previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, the constitutive part of this Thesis is the conceptualization and production of an artistic piece. This chapter has the aim to explain the artistic process which preceded the creation of the artwork, to describe and illustrate the artistic piece itself and to draw connections to theoretical concepts thoroughly explained in the course of the paper. The role of all previous chapters was not only to provide a theoretical grounding to the work, but also to show that an artistic piece, regardless of the medium, is a fruit of interwoven spheres of theories, personal aspirations and cognitive processes regarding the translation of theoretical backgrounds into something visual and palpable. It is in a way a form of kinesthetic learning with a constant shift from practical to theoretical and vice versa. This is important to mention, as artistic research doesn't necessarily collide with the scientific one, and, in this regard, they can interact and feed into each other.

"Liminal Metamorphosis: Rite of being in the zone." is therefore a Thesis constituted of two, equally important parts – the written part and the actual artistic work which has a bipartite structure – it is a spatial installation with a live performance acted out inside the installation.

One installation

In a given space and given time, eighteen mannequins are hanging from the ceiling – nine on the right side and nine on the left. They are perfectly aligned in two rows of identical height and length. The mannequins are facing each other – nine from one side face the nine on the right side. All of them are decapitated. The necks are abnormally prolonged and slightly bended, each neck differently. This is the only characteristic that renders the mannequins

different. In all other aspects, they are the same – same size, same white color (figure 1; figure 2).



Figure 1. 3D model of the mannequin; frontal, perspective and side view.



Figure 2. 3D model of mannequins and doorway; perspective

They are facing and challenging each other. Their reciprocal gaze creates a tension where meaning is suspended. As decapitated bodies they are just *there*, in all their integrity and dangerous silence. Their long, decapitated necks suggest a struggle to see what is on the other side. It seems as if these mannequin bodies kept extending their necks in a desperate attempt to see what is on the other side, to see beyond their counterparts. However, at the same time, the counterpart group did the same – trying to see beyond. This desperate attempt ended up with heads falling of the mannequins' bodies.

The mannequins are dressed. Nine on the left side of the room are wearing blue dresses and nine on the right side are wearing white dresses. Altogether, the dresses are identical, the only distinction is the color. The space between the mannequins, exactly at the middle, is occupied by a big metal doorway dressed in gold (Figure 2.).

The two distinctive colors of the dresses divide the space into two parts and the mannequins into two groups. In relation to the aforementioned theoretical concepts, they represent two different worlds, or two different normative structures. The space in the middle is empty with only the big doorway standing in the middle. The whole installation takes the shape of a passage hall. The position of the door is crucial – instead of being positioned parallel to the position of the mannequin row, as a symbol of a “passage” from one group to another (analog to the rites of passage of Van Gennep), the door is positioned perpendicular to the orientation of the mannequins (Figure 2.). It is exactly in-between, on the border between two worlds. Its position marks an invisible borderland, and, by passing through it, one remains on the verge. The door leads from one state of liminality to another. The whole installation is in strict balance and motionlessness. The central placement of the doorway, like

a pointer on a scale, expresses the perfect balance.

One performance

In the given space and given time, the performer (the author of this Thesis) steps at the beginning of the borderline between the two rows of the mannequins, body aligned with the doorway and straightforward gaze (figure 3.). The sound composition starts. The performer starts slowly moving towards the doorway, lowering the body, head and hands with each step. By the moment he reaches the doorway, the body is in fetal position. For a moment the performer's body is motionless right at the threshold of the doorway. The motion continues as the performer crosses to the other side, and the same movement continues, but inverted; performer gradually moves backwards, straightening the body with each step. Once the end of the path is reached, the body is again in upright position (figure 4.). The performer is gazing towards the place he once was at. The sound stops. The performer leaves.

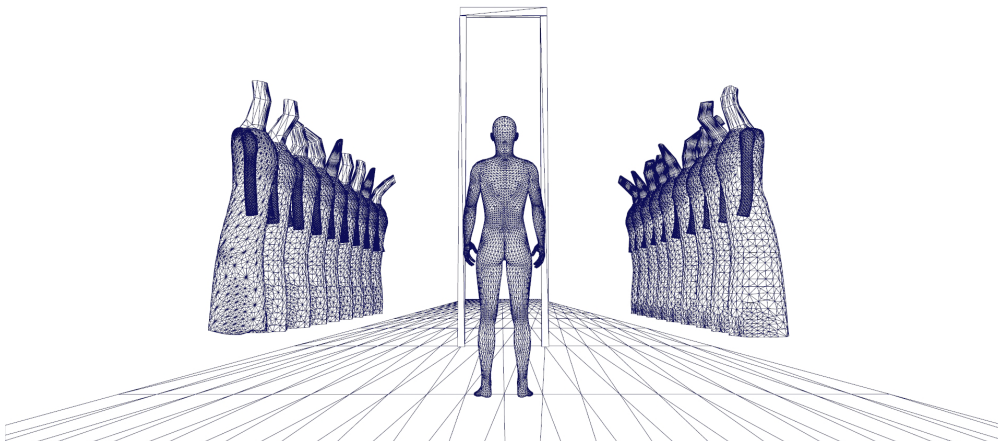


Figure 3. 3D model; starting position of the performer; front view.

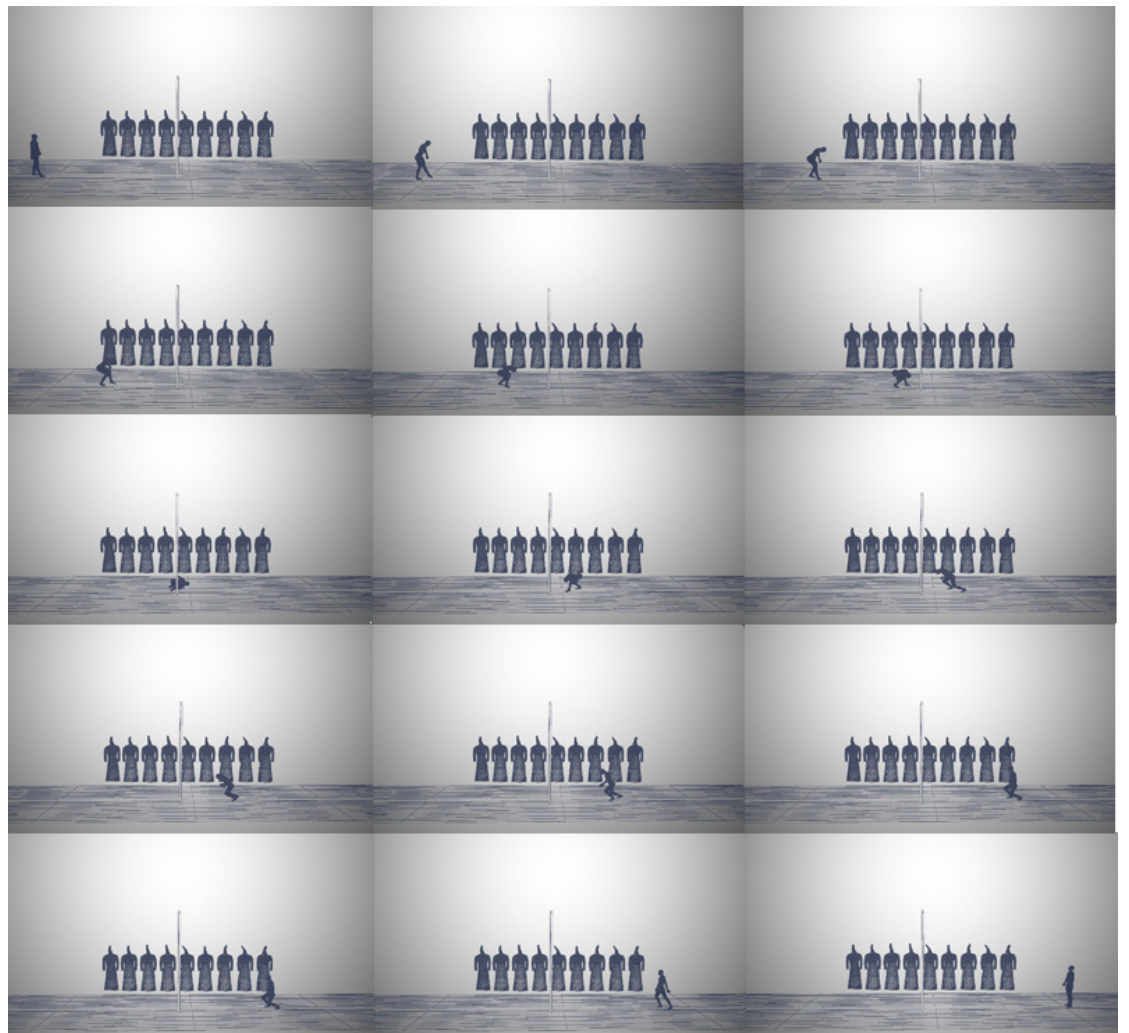


Figure 4. 3D model; movement of the performer during performance; side view

The mutual gaze of the mannequins forms the x-axis, the doorway (together with the direction of the movement) forms the z-axis and lowering and uplifting of the performer's body form the y-axis. This tri-axial action reaffirms the spatial totality of the work (figure 5.).

The turning point of the performance is the moment when the performer reaches the doorway. As mentioned before, the walking path from the beginning to the end is borderline and liminal. The walk is a ritual of passage, and the door offers nothing but the prolongation of this seemingly infinite liminality. The end point of the path becomes the reversed starting point. The doorway, alluring at the beginning and disappointing at the end, is a mirror of one's own self-projection. It becomes a portal which brings you right where you came from. Although functionally useless, at the moment, that slight split of a second when the body crosses the doorway, something does change.

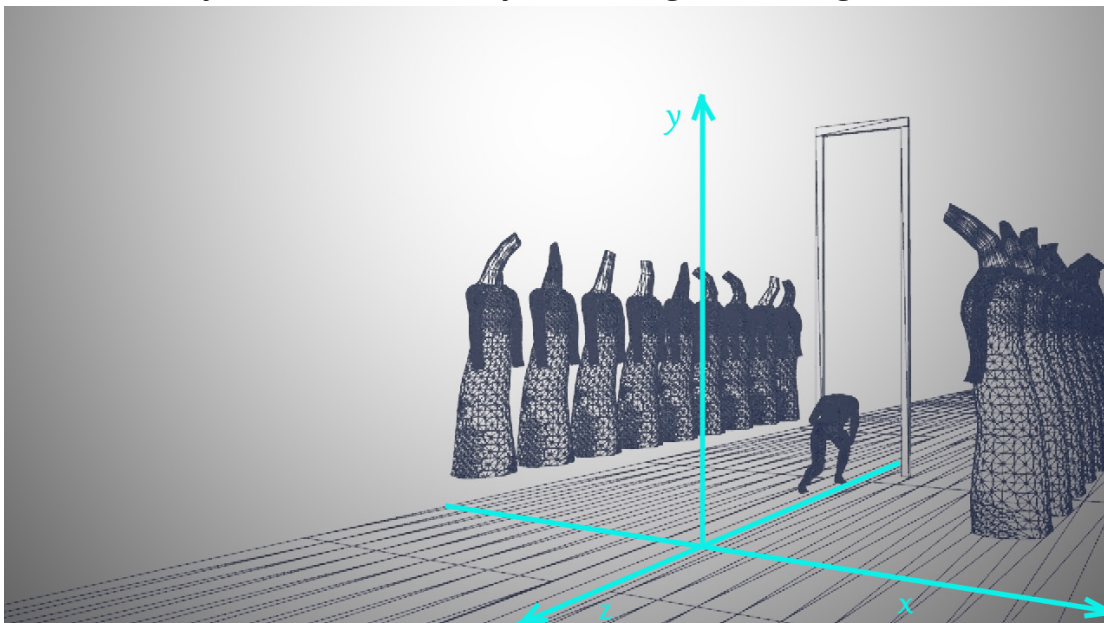


Figure 5. 3D model; 3-axial action of the work; perspective view

Conclusion

Since the introduction of the concept of liminality at the beginning of twentieth century by Van Gennep, with significant contributions of different researchers later on, the term gained a much broader context and it became an important concept in sociological and cultural studies of post-modern era. From Turner's definition of liminal phenomena as a state of being "betwixt and between" to the more recent interpretations where liminal are considered the periods "of uncertainty, anguish, even existential fear; a facing of the abyss of the void" (Horvath, 2013), the term rose to a large-scale concept where even the whole *modernity* is marked as being perpetually liminal.

The present thesis examined some basic aspects of the concept, drawing different parallels between them with an accent on a more artistic approach. The examined theoretical concepts were related to the sphere of performance art resulting in the conceptualization and realization of an artistic piece composed of one installation and one performance.

Considering the complexity and vastness of the liminal concept, especially in relation to the time of ever growing IT technologies, networks and globalization, it is clear that the space for further research and insights is considerable, especially in regard to global wars and economy; but also seeing liminality as an peculiar incubator of freedom where new, radical and subversive ideas might be born.

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