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THE SPACE OF “BEING BETWEEN”

Liminal space and its photographs

ABSTRACT

The article touches on the subject of space as a place, image and inspiration for psychological change. This is important for artists who are creatively observing and designing space so that they can create not only a place in the inner world, but also in the [outer] one. The art of designing and observing space can become a rite of passage (initiation). A ceremony in which the liminal space plays a central role – a place of transformation, waiting, being on the doorstep, in the transition between the present life and some new unknown form, “being in between” (betwixt and between). This is where the core of myself, my own self, my home in me, is revealed. Photography can become an image and assistant of the rite of passage, analogous to the process of psychotherapy. The article presents the author’s photographs of liminal space, which, by illustrating the threshold, “being in between”, “both this and that”, inspire the described “multi-point”, or rather “spatial”, perception of the world and myself.

KEYWORDS

integration phase; liminal stage; separation stage; liminal space; rite of passage; home; photography; quarantine; threshold; psychotherapy; seeing; Mircea Eliade; Arnold van Gennep; Waldemar Kuligowski; Richard Rohr; Victor Turner

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The space of “being between”

Liminal space and its photographs

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Space as a place/image of internal change

Space is not only a physical place, received and designed according to the rules of the outside world. Outer space is a mirror of inner space. Travel in the outer world inspires change in the inner world and vice versa.

The aim of the article is to explore the psychological importance of space. Does being in, observing and “crossing”, an environment support and reflect inner phenomena and, in particular, inspire and illustrate breakthrough moments – significant internal changes? This is important for artists who are creatively observing and designing space so that they can create not only a place in the inner world, but also in the [outer] one.

A. van Gennep noted the clear link between movement in space and the change in social status, the formation of identity. Such a process occurs, inter alia, in the rituals of passage (initiation)¹. The art of designing and observing space can become such a rite.

Rites of passage (*rites de passage*), mark a person's passage through the life cycle, from one degree to the next over time, from one social role or position to another, while integrating human and cultural experience with biological destiny: reproduction and death. This process is caused by spontaneous, internally stimulated, development of a person. As a result, the individual leaves the world of social interaction in search of truth, following an inner, more or less aware, voice.

The rites of passage consist of three stages:

1. exclusion, separation (*rites de separation*);
2. liminal, marginal (*rites de marge*);
3. inclusion, integration, aggregation (*rites de agregation*).

During the separation phase, the participants of the ritual separate from their community, are excluded from the group to which they previously belonged, and are deprived of attributes indicating the affiliation. They move away from everyday life, physically and symbolically.

The rite of passage symbolically depicts and helps to move from one phase of life and identity to the next, often by way of (using) physical changes of the place: the crossing of the border of a territory, moving, traveling, pilgrimage². Once initiated, [the traveler] starts the process of transition from a lower status to a higher one, "clued in" by isolation from the existing environment, relationships, and activities. [The traveler] dwells in a place of seclusion, a kind of hermitage, a sanctuary of his or her inner transformation. It was a place outside space and time, which made it possible to establish undisturbed contact with the supernatural order, with one's own soul, with

¹ Arnold Van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii: o bramie i progu [...] i o wielu innych rzeczach*, Warsaw, 2006.

² Arnold Van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii: o bramie i progu [...] i o wielu innych rzeczach*, Warszawa 2006.

healing³. Thanks to this, the traveler is in the liminal phase – in the aisle, the space between his or her previous and future identity and social life.

Liminal space

The narrow space of the limen, or threshold (from Latin: *liminen*), separates the house's two rooms, as well as the house and the outside world. It's a place to go in or start. Liminality in a psychological sense means being on the doorstep, in the transition between the present life and some new, unknown, form of it⁴.

The different stages of life are separated by thresholds, such as birth, maturity, marriage, parenthood, old age and death. They are often associated with, or symbolized by, the transition to another space, for example, with a change of residence, crossing a street, entering a house or another room in it⁵.

The individual is no longer in his or her previous state, but has not yet reached a new identity. The person is not who he or she was or will be, is in a transitional state: “no more – not yet”, “**being in between**”, ritual “suspension”, marginalization in which the person is outside society and beyond himself or herself, “me”, between the known and the unknown⁶. This is accompanied by an identity crisis because this person is no longer who he or she was, but is not yet who he or she is to become. The person has already died, but has not yet been born. “(...) This person in me goes further, goes

³ Victor Turner, *Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*, 1987, pp. 3–19; Victor Turner, *Liminalność i communitas*, [in:] *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej – kontynuacje*, ed. M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2004, p. 240–266.

⁴ Victor Turner, *Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*, 1987, pp. 3–19; Victor Turner, *Liminalność i communitas*, [in:] *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej – kontynuacje*, ed. M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2004, p. 240–266.

⁵ Arnold Van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii: o bramie i progu [...] i o wielu innych rzeczach*, Warsaw 2006.

⁶ Victor Turner, *Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*, 1987, pp. 3–19; Victor Turner, *Liminalność i communitas*, [in:] *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej – kontynuacje*, ed. M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2004, p. 240–266.

through it. When I ask myself, ‘WHAT IS THIS?’, without imagining any answer, it seems to me that the person in me should kill what I am (...) condemned to become a man (or something more), I must now die (for myself) and give birth to myself”⁷.

Waldemar Kuligowski, in his YouTube lecture,⁸ argues that the quarantine, the separation from the existing spaces of life, has become a kind of social rite of passage, has led us to the liminal phase between physical, social and psychological spaces. We are no longer who we were, we do not yet know who we will become. Recent changes in being in the physical and social space have become a social rite of passage – they have suspended us in a state “in between” before and after the epidemic.

Man no longer belongs to the “old” ordinary world, but is not yet a full participant in the new reality, so the normal rules of life must be suspended in his case. There are no previous social conditions; daily rules and restrictions disappear; the distance from normal terms of time and space is extended.

The liminal space is a place of change, a time of waiting and ignorance. “The threshold is God’s waiting room. Here we are taught openness and patience, waiting to meet the divine Doctor”⁹. Here the world of the sacred is revealed – the center of reality, space and the core of itself, one’s own self.
My home in me.

The building and settling of each dwelling always means, in a sense, the beginning, the new life, and every beginning recreates that original beginning when the light first lighted up above the world”¹⁰. „The home is not an object, a ‘machine for housing’; it is a universe which man builds, imitating the exemplary work of the gods– cosmogony”¹¹.

⁷ Victor Turner, *Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*, 1987, pp. 3–19; Victor Turner, *Liminalność i communitas*, [in:] *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej – kontynuacje*, ed. M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2004, p. 240–266.

⁸ http://uamfilm.amu.edu.pl/UAMowi/prof.Waldemar_Kuligowski.pdf, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfHx5eUg-6k>.

⁹ Rohr Richard, *Wszystko ma swoje miejsce*, Kraków 2005.

¹⁰ Eliade Mircea, *Świat. Miasto. Dom*, transl. by I. Kania, „Znak”, 1991, issue 12, p. 12–22.

¹¹ Eliade Mircea, *Świat. Miasto. Dom*, transl. by I. Kania, „Znak”, 1991, issue 12, p. 12–22.

Photography as an assistant to the rite of passage

The change of “me” occurring during the rite of passage is accompanied by a change of my view on the world and on myself. Photography helps me to look from different points of view, frames, perspectives.

Changing the point of view by confronting points of view

The photographer creating an image on the plane of the photograph has to select one point from which he or she takes the photo before taking the photo. The decisive point for the photo is the point of view, the light that falls on the subject being photographed, the focal length of the camera lens, the distance between the camera and the subject. If you change a factor, the image of the subject is changed. These changes can go so far that we may not recognize the subject being photographed.

Psychotherapy (photography) is actually a school of seeing – the ability to perceive one’s own problem, oneself and the world (photographed subject) with different sharpness, depth and distance. From different perspectives. In psychotherapy, not only changing the point of view to another is the cure, but rather the possibility and freedom to choose many different perspectives. Photography, which is precisely the art of looking from different perspectives, can – like psychotherapy – support internal change. In photography it’s about “physical” vision, in psychotherapy about the “psychic”. , in both photography and psychotherapy, the point of view is the material. If we change the point of view, “these changes can go so far that we may not recognize the subject being photographed” ... and oneself.

I am interested in this duality, two directions of perception – on the one hand as a physical process, on the other hand as a mental process, directed outwards and inwards. We see the world but always through ourselves. Looking at what is outside, we always look through what is inside us.

Changing the point of view on the viewing space

The point of view often changes and even one is aware of different points of view on a given thing. This helps, this expands the horizon, but still remains just a collection of diverse points, scattered, detached, uncollected. In one photo taken from one point of view you can see one picture of the reality, of one moment and lighting. Life, however, like a film, is composed of an infinite

number of photographs. Movement arises somewhat from their average, from the combination of space between them, differences between them.

The truth lies not so much in the change of a point of view but in combining different points into space – one ongoing process of asserting one's own being, the meaning of life, one's own direction of life and dying. Liminal spaces, when illustrating the threshold, “**being in between**”, “**both this and that**”, inspire the described “multi-point”, or rather “spatial”, perception of the world and oneself. The photographs I have created are a document of my outer and inner journey in search of such areas (both “outside” and “inside”).

Integration

This is the recombining of perspectives on the world and ourselves. The traveler enters the third stage of the rite of passage: the **integration**. It is the end of the journey. It is a return home and to daily activities. The journey is over. Participants are admitted to the new group together with their rights and obligations. Nevertheless, nothing is as it was before, especially travelers – they return to everyday life again, but already in a new form, as other people, with a new status. They are born again. What we know from the beginning is often the end,

What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

(...)

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

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EMPTY HOUSE

The “Empty House” is a series of analog photographs sized 100x70 cm.
They have never been touched up.

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The “Empty House” series, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Górska, analog photograph

Source: The author’s archive

An “empty house” is a contradiction,
because a house is a place where someone lives.
The combination of the spatial words “empty” and “house”
creates time.
The empty house is one that is waiting to be occupied.

Emptiness is not a place where there is nothing and no one is there,
but where there is space.....open for the future.



The "Empty House" series, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Górska, analog photograph
Source: The author's archive

The house is a safe place. Protects
by isolating a patch of space
from the open space.

I'm safe because I'm locked in my house.



The "Empty House" series, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Górska, analog photograph
Source: The author's archive

However, it is the gaps and openings in my cocoon connecting to the open space that let the air and life into my shelter.

Windows and doors to the world co-create my house like paintings hanging on the wall.



The “Empty House” series, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Górska, analog photograph
Source: The author’s archive



The "Empty House" series, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Górska, analog photograph
Source: The author's archive

What if there was no street behind the windows but a great endless sea? But there is! If we look from the inside, the outside of what is here and now is the infinity of possibilities.



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