

# The Base Articulations of the Liminality Concept

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## Abstract

This study aims to clarify the meanings and the semantic articulations of the concept of liminality. The method used in the study is meta-analytic.

a) There is first achieved a historical reconstruction of the concept. The semantic nucleus of the concept is represented by the action of spiritual configuration of events by which individuals are introduced in a transition state from separation to incorporation. This existential event is theoretically approached by Arnold Van Gennep through the syntagm “rites of passage”. Subsequently, Victor Turner subsumes the meanings of the spiritual event of passage to a single-word concept “liminality” and talks about “liminoid” events.

b) Afterwards, there is carried out a logical-semantic reconstruction of the concept and there is concluded that the practical articulations of liminality consist in going over three stages of the process of liminality: the ambiguous state, the adaptation to new norms, rules and values and the pre-integration.

As illustration of liminal transition, there is presented the current mass media case in which there is mobilized the idea of persuading the consumers of media messages to adopt a behavior which represents a passage from lack of involvement to social, economic and political involvement/engagement. The conclusion is that a) the world and people in general, are in a constant process of passage, of change, b) that liminality constitutes an important factor of individual and social development, c) and that society is marked by liminality.

**Keywords:** rites of passage, liminality, liminoid, mass media

## 1. Introduction

The nuclear ideatic of concept of liminality was introduced by ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep in his book *Rites of Passage*, published for the first time in 1909. Based on Van Gennep’s idea, Victor Turner widened the concept of liminality and introduced a new concept that is correlated with the modern rituals - liminoid. A good example is when a religious holiday is taking place, for example the birth of Virgin Mary, people are going to church. Here, the rituals are facing liminality. But, after the church’s rituals are over, people are having a party in order to celebrate the Virgin’s name; this time, people are behaving through liminoid (Turner, 1982).

In our time, liminality becomes the bond that connects the media to the public. Mass media is creating rituals; they have the purpose to persuade the audience in order to create a new generation of people. To exit the threshold state, an individual must adapt to the new norms, rules and values in force (Warner & Gabe, 2004; Ivanova & Kudriavtseva, 2015). Depending on the media (news, soap operas, movie, and advertising), people have become more accustomed with the mass media’s rituals. Through media, individuals are put every day in the liminality state. Also, the sacredness of the communication is marked by the power of rituals.

## 2. Space of Liminality

Liminality is a concept that is described as a reflection phase in which the individuals are introduced in a transition state from separation to incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960; Van Gennep, 2011). In liminality, a person is transported in an ambiguous state named by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner “threshold stage”, where the individual is disclaiming his own self where he is dispossessed by what he had.

In the liminal space, the individual is confronting three stages: the uncertainty or the ambiguous state, the possibility to adapt to new norms, rules and values and the third stage is the pre-integration.

The uncertainty is maintaining the person on an unknown level, where his old self has vanished. Now knowing everything that is happening there, the person becomes more careful and aware about what he is saying. The individual relinquishes his past in order to pass the threshold stage. He is perceived as an equal with the other members of the community, but at the same time, the individual does not have any rights anymore. In the liminal stage, the ambiguousness of his own state is particularly reflected in his actions; this mix in-between space imposes to the individual to recreate himself (Thomassen, 2009; Beech, 2010; Thomassen & Balle, 2012).

The second stage is about the possibility of individuals to adapt to the new norms, rules and values of the new position. From the moment when the person is separated from his old self, he wants to evolve faster to the new position. In the threshold state, he integrates to the group with the role to accumulate information; the individual is marked by the knowledge in the group. The old self is facing a transformation in the new group. He must accumulate all the information that is generating the group's values, norms and rules. Here, he follows the group's rules. If the person does not observe the rules, he will be punished by the group. The person caught in the threshold stage will be conducted by a series of values after he passes the liminality (Ślusarczyk & Broniszewska, 2014).

The pre-integration is the last stage where the individual is almost prepared to exit the liminality. This time, he is changed; he has passed from ambiguousness and has adapted to the group's values, rules and norms. But before he exits liminality, he must have a satisfactory behavior in society.

### 3. From Arnold Van Gennep's Rites of Passage

The concept of liminality starts with Arnold Van Gennep's book *Rites of Passage* where he institutionalized the thought of utilizing the rituals to mark a transition in the social life of any person. Rites of passage are characterized by Van Gennep as "rites with accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" and they highlight every one of the progressions that a man is confronted with through life, including conception, puberty, marriage, parenthood and death (Van Gennep, 1960). Be that as it may, what is a transitional experience? Van Gennep found that some rituals in the world have the same experience or similar ones. A rite of passage is told to be a cycle ritual that marks a person's transition from one position to another. This movement shows up in each part of his life. Also, the rites can be incorporated in other part of life: from the social life to political, religious, economic and educational. Gennep clarified in his book how the rites of passages are composed. He denotes three stages in the rites of passage: separation, liminality or threshold and integration. The primary stage forces the person to segregate from his condition or gathering. After he repudiates his conviction, he enters into a liminal stage where all that he knows becomes questionable. The last stage is integration where the individual is returning to his normal life, yet this time he is changed (Van Gennep, 1960).

Liminality represents a main factor in the development of society. People who participate in this ritual of passage are facing a threshold state. The threshold state denotes that a person relinquishes the old habits and embraces a new life. A person who is in a liminal period is placed in an ambiguous state where his condition is put in an obscure state until he passes the threshold state. Here, in this state, all the entities are localized in an unknown location, they are neither here nor there (Panea, 2013). Arnold Van Gennep has developed his research on primitive tribes where he investigated the transition that people are facing in their society. Although the society is considered primitive, it has many rituals that consist in demonstrating the transition of a person or a group from a position to another. In the liminal period, the persons caught in the threshold state were regularly camouflaged as creatures and they would wear just segments of clothes. In the threshold state, they do not have any longer a name or a social position and their life turns out to be more equivocal. This separation from their life is represented in fact by their own metamorphosis in reaching a new position. Their behavior is considered to be humble; they must obey all the instructions because in case they do not behave properly, they can be punished. An interesting remark about the person in the threshold state is that he becomes equal with the others, Van Gennep said that: "neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism" (Van Gennep, 1960).

After going through the rites of passage, all individuals are symbolically reborn.

### 4. Liminality and Liminoid

Victor Turner established the liminality after Arnold Van Gennep's idea and it depicted the in-between status of initiates during rites of passage (Turner, 1967). Liminality is a part of anthropology. It can be found in each acknowledgement of human studies, beginning with social, political, and so forth. Our modern society is led by a progression of rituals that have the attributes to sort out a social structure in a way to create a transition in-between status. The rites of passage are represented by an initiation, a transition between past and future. In every part of our life, we are compelled to participate to them. So, in these two stages, the between and betwixt form, liminality is created by rituals (Negrea & Teodorescu, 2015; Voinea, Negrea, & Teodorescu, 2015). In

liminality, members are turning out to be closer to what they are thought to be to the general public and have the likelihood here to evaluate their self. Also they can reflect about the changing state and changes that they are facing on this threshold. Through liminality, society is creating itself. Victor Turner translated liminality with every one of the viewpoints: theater, riots, limit crossing, instruction, history, political gatherings, and sexual orientation. Liminality does not have an exact form because it offers multiple signs that are interpretable in many different ways (Turner, 1969; Rowe, 2008; Joodaki & Vajdi, 2014). It may be questionable, but it does not have any significance. The concept of liminality is a product of rituals' process; they cannot have a reaction without each other. Liminality is functioning as a tool in all the aspects of the society's rituals.

The concept of the liminality can reach a true modification or transformation of a person facing the transition from a status to a next one. Our modern society is characterized by a huge gathering of blended societies; everything that a man or a gathering does, it is constrained under liminality. In spite of the fact that Victor Turner recommended that liminality is not conditioned by politics, the liminal concept is truly based on power. And how is the power obtained? Through politics. That implies that the capacity of liminality is maintained through politics too.

In liminality, an individual is reborn spiritually. His death integrates the new self to the society after existing in the state threshold. In the last stage of his transformation the integration, the person will have numerous obligations and his own particular appearance must be legitimately the same with the others'.

The society is coordinated by rites of passage. In every aspect of life, people are conducting their self to a threshold state in which, here, they are having the chance to pass from a place to another. Based on the fact that rituals can be seen so often, even in modern times, it means that they create society. Even the cultures can be different from a society to another, they share the same state—they lead their life in liminality with the reason to change or to evolve (Turner, 1957; Civelek, 2015; Budica, Busu, Dumitru, & Purcaru, 2015).

In our modern society, rituals are turning into an action more solid than we might suspect. We participate to them even we don't know or comprehend them. Turner suggested that in modern life, rituals are not a choice, instead they are representing a cultural obligation and because of that, we cannot be a part of society if we are now allowing ourselves to participate to the rituals. Every individual in the society participates. The modern rites of passage involve every individual in the society. Be that as it may, Turner mirrored the development "liminality" and recommended that for our modern culture it is more satisfactory to name the stage liminoid. This new name of the concept embraces our society. Modern life is developed with numerous social exercises: theater, workmanship, literature, music, games and others (Turner, 1982; Smarandache & Vladutescu, 2014). All these activities are representing in fact a form of transition from a status to the next. In each circumstance of our life that incorporates our wishes to pass or integrate in a social club and turn into a member, liminality shows up, or how Turner referred to our modern times—liminoid. So, in this case, in order to participate to a social form of our society, we are passing through the liminoid (Dima, Grabara & Vlăduțescu, 2014).

The different between liminality and liminoid is that the first is based on Gennep's traditional cultural perspective and the other affects only the pre-modern society. How can we recognize these two ideas in the event that they mean the same? Even in our modern society, liminality exists in light of the fact that conventional society has not vanished. For instance: a religious occasion is commended by the individuals in a traditional way, so this implies that liminality is occurring here. In any case, after the profound activities of the religious occasion is accomplished, frequently there follows a gathering where individuals are celebrating in a modern way; here we discover the liminoid stage. Our society is made by the modern and traditional routes that people grasp.

### **5. Liminality through Mass Media**

Liminality can be seen as an approach in the media production and media consumption. The space between mass media's content and the public's attitude is facilitated by the thought of media consumption. In this case, the viewer can be seen as a dynamic member, additionally as an eyewitness in the rituals created by the media. The viewer is put in a liminal stage where he becomes a member of mass media's activity. Rituals of mass media incorporate different types of clothing or position, through that they force a sufficient conduct/behavior that corresponds with the general population (Coman, 1994; Coman, 2008; Smarandache, 2015).

In the media, there are two important events regarding the news: the ones about accidents and the others about ceremonials that are celebrating order. The rhythmic media broadcast produces identical messages that generate symbols every day, which are presented by one or two person—they are the TV presenters. These items of news presented are also considered rituals because they have the same behavior and reach the messages in the same way. Through TV, we are put under coordination of mass media; we become closer to the media's action or, even, we can say-addicted. Our time is managed in order to be a part of this ritual. The entire series of the media: news,

soap operas, movies, commercials are represented in fact by the threshold stage for us. Here, we don't live in our reality; it is metamorphosis in a virtual one. When we are watching TV, we are deprived of our values and become in a strange way equal with the others. The liminality in the media has a specific time. It depends on how long the soap opera or the news lasts.

This result of watching TV is in fact a rite of passage. Every form of media is a ritual and we are facing the liminality from the moment when we watch TV. These rituals created by the media are consistently creating liminality. In fact, all the cultural experience that people are confronted with is actually represented by rites of passage. Liminality is turning out to be more present; TV is a standout amongst the most critical elements that force the individuals in the liminal period, yet in an advanced manner (Voinea, Busu, Opran & Vladutescu, 2015; Wyslocka, 2015). Mass media has a series of events that are categorized in three forms: Contest, Conquest and Coronation. Every one of these structures is generating rituals, but in order to become rituals, they must have the backing of the media. The mediatisation influences the ceremonials to become rituals. A coronation will always be a ritual, but a conquest and or a contest are depending straightforwardly on the mass media's influences.

Professor Mihai Coman had his own research in light of the change that Romania endured after the fall of communism in 1989, where in the following 2 years the nation was in breakdown. Riots, street demonstration, different meetings influenced negatively Romania's solidness (Coman, 2008; Vlăduțescu, 2013). An essential certainty is that mass media was the one that persuaded and influenced people's opinion through the appearance of news. This transitional period or liminal state was imposed by mass media.

The media phenomena is producing and making the liminality in our modern life. The liminality or the liminoid as Turner proposed for the modern society is a reliable thing that is dominating the society and has the power to create new minds. Passing through liminality, individuals are returning to their life changed, but not for long time because TV creates an everyday threshold stage where the general population is isolated from life again and again.

## 6. Conclusion

Liminality has become more than a simple concept. Starting with Arnold Van Gennep to Victor Turner and to our times, liminality is conducted by a series of rituals in political, social, economic, religious life. Maintaining the idea of Van Gennep, Turner suggested that liminality is not just a ritual for primitive tribes, it exists in our society too (Turner, 1995). Mass media divides our society that generates for its public a threshold state everyday. All the things that mass media is creating, starting from news, movies, soap operas and advertising are representing in fact modern rituals. A contest will not be seen as a ritual if mass media is not supporting it. That means that mass media introduces its audience to the liminality, in a state where they become equal, but unknown about the situation. When people are watching news, they are entering in a liminal space.

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