

LECTURE NOTES

Liminality, Heterotopia, and the Ritual Journey

From the Eleusinian Mysteries to *White Lotus*: Performance, Threshold, and the Enclosed Female World

Performance Studies — Interdisciplinary Lecture Series

Ionian University, Department of Music

May 2026

These notes bring together six interconnected seminar sessions on liminality, heterotopia, ritual journey, enclosed female spaces, and contemporary tourism. Primary theoretical interlocutors: Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Richard Schechner, Peggy Phelan, Diana Taylor.

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Liminality and Heterotopia: Origins, Distinctions, Affinities

Succinct Definitions for Contrast

Liminality is a processual and experiential concept. It names the condition of being between — between social states, between identities, between one phase of a structured process and the next. It is fundamentally temporal and subjective: it describes what it is like to be in transit, to have left a defined social position without yet having arrived at another. Its primary register is phenomenological — the felt experience of threshold existence — and its primary context is ritual and social transformation. Liminality is always, in its original formulation, temporary. It asks: what happens to a person or group when they are extracted from normal social structure?

Heterotopia is a spatial and relational concept. It names a place — real, physically or institutionally constituted — that stands in a specific relationship of exteriority, inversion, or contestation to the surrounding normative social space. It is fundamentally spatial and structural: it describes how certain sites are constituted as outside, other, or counter to the dominant ordering of space. Heterotopia need not be temporary: it can be a permanent institution (the prison, the cemetery, the convent). It asks: what is the relationship between this space and the social order that surrounds it?

Key distinction: liminality is what you are (condition); heterotopia is where you are (place). A cemetery is a heterotopia but not necessarily liminal. A novice in ritual is in a liminal condition but may not be in a heterotopic space. The Daguanyuan (Grand View Garden in Dream of the Red Chamber) is both simultaneously.

The Genealogy of Liminality

Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957)

Van Gennep coined the concept in *Les rites de passage* (1909). He observed across an enormous range of cultures that rites marking social transitions follow a tripartite structure: separation (separation from the previous social state), marge (the threshold or marginal phase), and aggregation (reaggregation into a new social state). The middle term — the marge, from which liminal (Latin *limen*, threshold) is derived — is the key innovation.

Victor Turner (1920–1983)

Turner transformed van Gennep's schema into a fully developed social theory through his fieldwork among the Ndembu of Zambia. His *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) is the foundational text. His contribution was threefold: first, the detailed phenomenological analysis of the liminal phase itself; second, the concept of *communitas* as the specific quality of social bond generated in liminal conditions; and third, the generalization of liminality into broader social and cultural theory, culminating in his distinction between the liminal (collective, obligatory, central in pre-industrial societies) and the liminoid (optional, marginal, individual, characteristic of modern leisure and art).

Turner's later interlocutors — particularly Richard Schechner — extended liminality into theatre and performance studies. Turner himself, influenced by Dilthey, moved toward an anthropology of experience, where liminality became a quality of heightened subjective engagement with the world.

Communitas: The Anti-Structure

Communitas names the quality of social bond that emerges in the liminal phase among those sharing the threshold experience together. It is characterized by intense egalitarianism, an effacement of hierarchical distinctions, and a feeling of profound solidarity. Turner identifies three forms: spontaneous communitas (the immediate, unplanned experience of solidarity); ideological communitas (the attempt to formulate and institutionalize what spontaneous communitas feels like); and normative communitas (further institutionalization, at which point the original experience becomes increasingly remote).

The Genealogy of Heterotopia

Michel Foucault (1926–1984)

Foucault coined heterotopie in a lecture delivered in 1967 — *Des espaces autres* (Of Other Spaces) — to an audience of architects at the Cercle d'études architecturales in Paris. The concept was not published until 1984, the year of his death. Its philosophical background draws on the spatial turn in French thought of the 1960s (Lefebvre, Althusser), on Gaston Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* (1958), and on the existentialist-phenomenological tradition of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

Foucault identifies six principles of heterotopia: (1) all cultures constitute heterotopias; (2) each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within society; (3) heterotopias can juxtapose in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible; (4) they are most often linked to slices in time (heterochrony); (5) they presuppose a system of opening and closing that makes them simultaneously penetrable and hermetically sealed; (6) they have a function in relation to all the space that remains — either of illusion or of compensation.

Affinities and Tensions

The deepest affinity is structural: both concepts describe spaces or conditions constituted by their relationship to a surrounding normative order from which they are set apart. Both are associated with inversion, transformation, and states of possibility.

The main tension is temporal versus spatial. Turner's liminality is ultimately conservative: it temporarily suspends structure in the service of structure's renewal. Foucault's heterotopia need not serve any such reproductive function; the prison and asylum are permanent institutions. Turner finds in the outside something potentially redemptive (communitas, grace); Foucault sees a more sophisticated operation of the same power that organizes the inside.

Colonus, Institutional Heterotopias, and the Systems Model of Liminal Space

Colonus as Paradigmatic Liminal Space

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* stages the most perfect theatrical enactment of liminal space in the Western tradition. Colonus functions as a threshold site: between city and wilderness (Athens vs. the sacred grove), between life and death (Oedipus approaching his mysterious end), between pollution and purification (miasma to sacred transformation), between exile and belonging. Entry is forbidden then conditionally granted; speech acts (invocation, naming, supplication) alter the status of the space. Oedipus' disappearance is neither witnessed nor narrated directly — the space becomes an oracle of absence.

Colonus is not a place — it is a transition engine. It filters (who enters), suspends (between states), transforms (pollution to sanctity), and resolves in unobservable output. It is a ritualized oracle-zone at the boundary of ontology.

Classical and Archaeological Liminal Zones

Across ancient cultures, liminality is structurally embedded at the edge of the city. City gates function as controlled thresholds where rituals of entry and exit purification occurred. Necropoleis (cities of the dead) were always outside the walls in Greek, Roman, and Etruscan urban organization — a literal liminal zone between civic life and the ancestral realm. Sacred groves and marginal sanctuaries (Colonus, Dodona, rural shrines) were often located at boundaries, in ambiguous terrain.

Institutional Heterotopias: Salpetriere and Bedlam

The Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital and Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam) are both heterotopic (they isolate, classify, and display; they invert the norm of reason versus madness) and liminal (they house people in states of transition or ambiguity between sane and insane, social and excluded, self and other). They represent a modern transformation of an ancient pattern: the placement of socially ambiguous or transitional states at the edge or outside of normative space.

Liminality as Systems Architecture

Liminal places can be understood as operational zones in a system: the stable civic interior maps to a structured state-space; the outside to an unstructured or differently structured state-space; the liminal place to the interface layer where translation, filtering, and transformation occur. The city gate functions as a firewall and router; the necropolis as a cold-storage archive; the asylum as quarantine and exception-handling domain; the shrine as a kernel-space transition into privileged execution.

This model holds cross-culturally. Japanese Shinto torii gates explicitly mark the transition from profane to sacred. Chinese cosmological urbanism uses walls as cosmic boundaries regulating the

flow of qi. South Asian cremation grounds outside cities are sites of intense ritual transformation. Sufi shrines in Islamic cities cluster at edges and crossroads.

Central thesis: Liminal places are the interface structures through which a culture manages transitions between incompatible domains. Heterotopia names their otherness; liminality names their operational role as thresholds of transformation.

Victor Turner: Liminality, Communitas, and Enclosed Female Spaces

Intellectual Formation

Turner was trained at University College London and did his foundational fieldwork among the Ndembu people of Zambia under Max Gluckman and the Manchester School. His intellectual trajectory was shaped by two inheritances: from van Gennep's Rites de passage (1909) he took the tripartite structure of ritual transition; from Dilthey and the hermeneutic tradition he took an interest in experience as the fundamental unit of cultural analysis.

Properties of the Liminal Phase

The liminal person or group is structurally invisible: extracted from their social position and not yet in a new one, they do not exist in terms of official social structure. They are often physically marked as anomalous. They are subject to rules that invert normal social codes. Crucially, the liminal phase is also the site of instruction: the novice is taught the sacred knowledge of the group. Liminality is structurally ambiguous but is also where culture does its deepest work, where identities are dismantled and reconstructed.

Turner and Foucault Together

Foucault gives the spatial and power analysis: the heterotopia as a real space that stands outside normal space, governed by specific regimes of entry and exit. His analysis asks how power produces space and how space constitutes subjects. Turner gives the processual and experiential analysis: what it is like to be inside the threshold space, what quality of social bond the liminal condition generates. Turner is more attentive to the creativity and meaning that liminal spaces generate; Foucault is more attentive to the power they exercise. For complex enclosed spaces such as the Daguanyuan, both frameworks are necessary simultaneously.

Chronic Liminality: A Theoretical Extension

Turner's model assumes liminality is a phase, a passage, not a permanent condition. What certain enclosed female spaces — the Daguanyuan, the harem, the Okoku, the convent — create is something Turner did not theorize: chronic liminality, a permanent threshold existence that generates communitas without the eventual reaggregation into normalized social life. This chronic liminality produces both the extraordinary cultural richness of these spaces and their tragedy.

Turner's distinction between the liminal (collective, obligatory, central in pre-industrial societies) and the liminoid (optional, marginal, individual, characteristic of modern leisure and art) is also crucial. The liminoid describes the liminal-like experiences generated by modern art, carnival, and performance. Live coding and networked performance art occupy precisely this liminoid space.

The Red Chamber, the Harem, the Okoku, and Western Analogues

The Daguanyuan (Grand View Garden) in Dream of the Red Chamber

The title *Hong lou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber) is spatially coded from the outset: the *Hong lou* connotes the inner female quarters of an aristocratic mansion — enclosed, luxurious, erotically charged, and fundamentally separate from the world of male social action. The actual site — the Daguanyuan — is a purpose-built enclosed garden-world created for imperial visitation and then given over to the young women and Baoyu. It has its own internal geography, economy, literary culture (the poetry club), hierarchy, and temporal rhythm distinct from the surrounding mansion.

The Daguanyuan satisfies all Foucauldian heterotopic criteria: it is real, enclosed, governed by specific rules of entry and exit, internally ordered according to principles that suspend those of the outer world, and condenses time — all of Baoyu's youth, all of the novel's emotional intensity. But it also enters liminal territory in Turner's sense: Baoyu is not yet a man, the girls are not yet wives, the social assignments of adulthood are suspended. When the garden is dissolved, the liminal phase ends violently, without the reaggregation that Turner's model projects.

The Ottoman Harem and the Japanese Okoku

The Ottoman harem at Topkapi — the Harem-i Humayun — was a community of hundreds of concubines, slave women, *haseki* (favorites), and the *valide sultan* (the sultan's mother), organized into a hierarchy of extraordinary complexity. The *valide sultan* could exercise effective regency power; the period of the *Kadinlar Saltanati* (Sultanate of Women, c. 1533–1656) saw women from the harem exercise major political influence.

The Okoku of the Edo-period Tokugawa shogunate was structurally similar: an architecturally enclosed world governed by an elaborate internal hierarchy, generating intense cultivation of female arts. Unlike the Daguanyuan, it was constitutionally impermeable: women who entered might not leave for decades. Both the harem and the Okoku are textbook heterotopias in Foucault's sense, and simultaneously permanently liminal.

Western Analogues

The standard claim that the West had no harems is largely an artefact of Christian monogamy as official ideology. Western functional analogues include: the convent and nunnery (the closest structural parallel — gender-segregated, internally hierarchical, with its own politics and erotic-mystical sub-cultures); royal women's households; the Byzantine gynaecium; the courts of royal mistresses; aristocratic girls' boarding schools; and the literary salon of seventeenth and eighteenth century France. Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion is, on this reading, a late-modern American harem with deniability built in.

Foucault did not treat the harem analytically, likely because: (a) he was writing before Said's *Orientalism* (1978) reframed Western scholarly engagement with such institutions; (b) his sources

on non-European sexuality were thin; (c) the harem was saturated in French intellectual culture with Delacroix-Ingres exoticism that a serious thinker would instinctively avoid. The analytical work was left to Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, and Leslie Peirce.

These spaces fit Foucault's model extremely well: they simultaneously represent, contest, and invert the society that contains them — the harem is the secret heart of the empire that the empire pretends is merely decorative; the Daguanyuan is the aesthetic refutation of the Confucian order that built it.

Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, and the Bourgeois Reconfiguration of Enclosure

From Spatial to Normative Enclosure

The enclosed female world of the Daguanyuan, the Okoku, and the harem is architecturally constituted. What Flaubert and Tolstoy do is to internalize this enclosure. The walls are no longer physical; they are psychological, social, and ideological. Emma Bovary is enclosed by the horizon of Yonville, by the shop ledger of Charles's practice, by the grammar of provincial marriage. Anna Karenina is enclosed by the marriage law of the Russian Empire, by the social code of Petersburg society. The architectural heterotopia has been replaced by a social heterotopia: the space of female interiority itself becomes the sealed and policed chamber.

The Aristocratic-to-Bourgeois Transition

The bourgeois transition dismantles the institutional female space in a paradoxical way. It promises liberation — romantic love, the companionate marriage — while simultaneously contracting female life to the nuclear family, stripping away the communal female culture of the aristocratic household, and loading onto the marriage bond an impossible burden of functions it cannot bear. The bourgeois wife is theoretically freer than the concubine, and structurally far more isolated.

Emma Bovary is formed by romantic novels — the aristocratic fantasy of passion — and deposited into a provincial bourgeois marriage. Her tragedy is the tragedy of a woman formed by one cultural system and placed in a social structure that renders those expectations systematically unrealizable. Anna's crime in Petersburg's eyes is not adultery per se — Oblonsky's infidelities are treated as comic — but the public claiming of a love that violates the social code of manageable hypocrisy. She refuses to remain invisible; she insists on existing as a subject rather than a function.

The Novel Form as Bourgeois Female Heterotopia

The nineteenth-century realist novel is itself a kind of heterotopia: the textual space that the bourgeois order creates to contain and process its contradictions. The novel is the space where female consciousness can be given full elaboration precisely because that consciousness has no legitimate public space in which to exist. Flaubert's free indirect discourse — inhabiting a consciousness from inside while maintaining ironic distance — is the formal equivalent of the heterotopic space: inside and outside simultaneously.

The shift from pre-modern to modern female enclosure: from enclosed spaces that contain women, to social systems that produce enclosure within women. The medium of constraint changes from walls and gates to norms, surveillance, and self-regulation — precisely Foucault's account of the shift toward disciplinary society.

Introduction to Performance Theory: From Schechner and Turner to Digital Performance

The Founding Moment: Schechner and Turner

Richard Schechner (b. 1934) is the central figure in the institutionalization of Performance Studies as an academic discipline. Associated with The Performance Group and founding editor of TDR (The Drama Review), Schechner insisted that theatre understood as a specific Western art form is merely one instance of a far larger category: performance, encompassing ritual, sport, play, political demonstration, everyday social interaction, and aesthetic performance in a continuous spectrum.

The theoretical alliance with Turner was formalized in cross-disciplinary workshops at New York University in the late 1970s. They developed jointly the concept of restored behavior or twice-behaved behavior: performance is always the re-doing of something, the embodied repetition of a strip of action lifted from its original context and re-performed. This applies to algorithmic and generative art: triggering a sample, running an algorithm, or driving animation from motion capture data all constitute restored behavior.

Key Figures and Contributions

Erving Goffman (1922–1982)

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) provides the dramaturgical model of social interaction: social life is organized as a continuous performance in which people manage impressions, maintain fronts, and navigate the distinction between front stage and back stage. For live coding, the question of what front stage and back stage mean when the performance infrastructure is itself visible is acute.

Judith Butler

Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993) distinguish performance (a discrete event a subject enacts) from performativity (the iterative process by which the subject is constituted through repeated citation of normative scripts). Gender is constituted in the performance, not something one has and then performs. For generative art: if a system produces behavior according to rules it did not choose, is that behavior performance or performativity?

Peggy Phelan

Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (1993) claims that performance's specific ontology is its disappearance, that performance resists reproduction, that once recorded it becomes something other than performance. This is the claim most directly challenged by live coding and networked performance, which are organized around the paradox that the performance is live and produced by algorithmic, reproducible, and distributed systems.

Diana Taylor

The Archive and the Repertoire (2003) distinguishes the archive (the material, reproducible record: documents, recordings, code) from the repertoire (the embodied, transmitted, living knowledge that exists only through bodies in practice). For live coding: the code is both archive (shareable, versionable) and a kind of repertoire (the practice is an embodied skill not fully captured in the code).

The Line from Artaud to Digital Performance

Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) insists that Western theatre enslaved to the literary text should become a total sensory event that overwhelms and transforms the spectator. The concept of the Theatre of Cruelty is not about sadism but about the intensity of direct, unmediated sensory impact. The line from Artaud runs through John Cage (who dismantled the boundary between music and environment), the Fluxus movement (which generalized the Cagean gesture into a radical questioning of aesthetic categories), and Allan Kaprow's *Happenings* (immersive, participatory, environmental events erasing the boundary between art and life).

The Digital Turn

Philip Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999) argues that liveness is not an ontological given but a historically constructed category defined in relation to mediatized forms against which it is positioned. There was no discourse of liveness before recording technology created the possibility of non-liveness. The visible code window in live coding is partly a device demonstrating that the performance is genuinely being generated in real time — a rhetorical and ideological construction as much as an ontological fact.

Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991) provides a framework for the genuinely hybrid assemblages of human and nonhuman agency in contemporary performance. When the motion capture system drives the animation and the algorithm generates the sound, the question of where performance agency is located becomes non-trivial. Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974) and the concept of the spect-actor address the participatory and interactive dimension with a political and ethical seriousness that much digital media theory lacks.

Pilgrimage, Solitary Wandering, and Consumer Tourism: From the Eleusinian Mysteries to White Lotus

I. The Collective Ritual Journey: Structure and Anthropology

The ritual journey is the spatial expression of Turner's tripartite structure: movement in space translates movement in being. The collective journey is distinguished from the solitary by the generation of *communitas*: the temporary dissolution of social hierarchies and the experience of horizontal solidarity. The rich and poor pilgrim walk together; the common goal transcends social difference. This ideal *communitas* always coexists with real hierarchies — it does not abolish them, it suspends them.

The Eleusinian Mysteries

The procession from Athens to Eleusis along the Sacred Way (approximately 22 km) is perhaps the oldest well-documented example of ritual procession in the Western world. The structure is characteristically liminal: the *mystes* leave the city (separation), traverse a spatially and ritually charged route with stations, bridges, and ritual challenges (liminality), and arrive at the Telesterion for the culminating experience — the *epopteuein*, the visual revelation that was forbidden to be described. Unusually democratic for the ancient Greek context: citizens, women, slaves, and foreigners were admitted (murderers excepted).

The Hajj

The Hajj is perhaps the most impressive active expression of collective liminal procession: millions of people, dressed in white *ihram* fabric erasing external markers of social position, moving together around the Kaaba, running between Safa and Marwa, standing at Arafat. The spatial structure of the procession re-enacts narratives — of Abraham, Hagar, the sacrifice — embedding the pilgrims in a cosmic narrative that exceeds individual life. Malcolm X's 1964 letter from Mecca describes the *communitas* experience with extraordinary precision.

The Canterbury Tales

Chaucer presents something more complex: pilgrimage *communitas* is destabilized from within. The pilgrims maintain, reproduce, and negotiate their social positions en route. The Knight, the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner — each bears their social identity as irresistible luggage. The journey does not transform them so much as reveal them. But the frame structure creates a space where different voices, genres, and worldviews can coexist and challenge each other. *Communitas* is not idealistic equality but a fluid field of social negotiation.

II. The Solitary Journey

The contrast with the collective journey is philosophically eloquent. In each of the canonical solitary journeys, *communitas* is absent; the self confronts the world without the regulatory framework of the ritual community.

Odysseus

Odysseus travels essentially alone (even when accompanied, the companions die one by one) and his journey is the reconstruction of identity through ordeal. The purpose is return: a fixed destination that is simultaneously spatial (Ithaca) and existential (the self recovered through experience). The structure is circular: separation — ordeal — recovered identity. Individual liminality without *communitas*.

Wilhelm Meister (Goethe)

The Bildungsroman as narrative form is the internalization of the journey as education (*Bildung*). Wilhelm moves through experiences, relationships, failures, and revelations that gradually form a self capable of maturity. The journey is teleological but with an open teleology — you do not know in advance where it leads. This structure — *Wanderschaft* as constitutive of human completion — is bourgeois individualist and deeply opposed to the collective liminal experience.

Lenz (Buchner)

Buchner's Lenz is the dissolution of the same promise: *Wanderschaft* without *Bildung*, movement in space as symptom of the collapse of subjectivity rather than a means of its development. Lenz's movement through the mountains leads nowhere; it is itself the proof that there is no longer a coherent subject who travels. Lenz is prophetic for the modern experience — the journey as inability rather than freedom.

III. Contemporary Tourism and Its Precursors

Roman Mediterranean Tourism

Roman aristocratic tourism to Greece and Egypt represents a well-developed precursor to modern cultural tourism: travel to Athens, Delphi, Olympia, the islands; travel to Egypt to see the pyramids and hear the Colossus of Memnon. Hadrian was a phil-Hellenic tourist to a degree that almost exceeds satire. Pausanias wrote effectively a tourist guide — a Baedeker of Greek antiquity. Roman tourism was characterized by the search for cultural legitimation through contact with an older, supposedly superior civilization. The distinction between tourism and pilgrimage was less clear than today: the Greek sanctuaries were still functioning.

White Lotus as Critical Analysis

Mike White's *White Lotus* (HBO, 2021-) is perhaps the most penetrating contemporary critique of consumer tourism as a phenomenon — remarkable for achieving this without ever becoming explicitly theoretical. Each season is set in a tourist paradise — Hawaii, Sicily, Thailand — and uses the resort as a liminal space that inverts the ritual function.

The resort mimics the structure of pilgrimage: separation from everyday life, stay in a sacred space (the white, clean, isolated hotel), promise of transformation. But the transformation never arrives, or arrives only as revelation of incapacity. What White demonstrates consistently: first, *communitas* has been replaced by competition — tourists compete for status, for experiences, for confirmation of identity; there is no common sacred goal that unites them. Second, the relationship with the place is purely consumptive: Sicily, Hawaii, Thailand exist as backdrop for the tourists' dramas. The locals are present as servants, objects of exoticism, or human material for the visitors' fantasies. Third, the resort creates a pseudo-liminality: the characters have left their everyday lives behind but cannot

leave themselves behind.

The resort is so painfully recognizable because the viewer knows — deeply and somatically — that the journey should have meant something, and does not.

IV. The Synthetic Spectrum

The full spectrum from most to least ritually integrated: Eleusinian Mysteries — Hajj — Canterbury Tales — Odysseus — Wilhelm Meister — Lenz — Roman Grand Tour — White Lotus. We move from journeys with full ritual structure, communal function, and promised transformation, toward journeys where structure erodes, community fails, and transformation is replaced by the consumption of experiences.

This does not mean the modern experience is simply a degraded version of an ancient wholeness — that would be a nostalgic schema. It means that the need for liminal experience and for *communitas* has not disappeared, but the institutions that housed it have been shaken, and consumer tourism offers to fill the gap without being able to do so.

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These lecture notes were compiled from seminar discussions, May 2026. For queries regarding the course, contact the Department of Music, Ionian University, Corfu.