



TRANSITIONS SEMINAR NEWSLETTER 7

March 2023

Bimonthly, edited by M. Aguirre

The *Transitions Seminar* is a permanent initiative set up in 2019 by the LIMEN Research Group. It convenes approximately on a bi-monthly basis, online since 2020. It provides a forum for debate on liminality and related issues, and a research-training ground for PhD candidates, as well as functioning as a venue for the current *Transitions Project*. It is linked to The Gateway Press and the websites *LIMEN & TEXT*, *The Northanger Library*, and *The Janus Gate Project*.

<http://www.limenandtext.com/rst.html>
<http://www.limenandtext.com/index.html>
<https://northangerlibrary.com/>
<http://janusgate literature.com/>

OBITUARY NOTE

I have just learnt of the death of Isabel Soto, colleague and friend.

Isabel was a key pillar of the department of English Studies at the UAM since its inception. Even after she left for the UNED, she took enthusiastic part in the various liminality-oriented projects that we set in motion, was a founding member of the Gateway Press in 1999, and of the LIMEN Research Group in 2007. She was a passionate lecturer and researcher. Though she had been struggling with cancer for quite a few years, she proved resilient to the end; last she wrote to me (from her iPad, in late February), she was looking forward to watching *Derry Girls* and *Cunk on Earth* while starting a new round of treatments.

She leaves a void, in the profession as in friendship, but equally an example to us all. Rest in peace.

NEW PUBLICATIONS by members of the LIMEN Research Group

- Ineke Jolink
'Between Empathy and Apathy: Liminality and the New Diasporic Space of "Transnationality"'
The TRELIS Papers nº 11, available at
http://www.limenandtext.com/pdf/Trellis%2011_Ineke%20Jolink%20-%20Between%20Empathy%20and%20Apathy.pdf
- Manuel Aguirre
'Towards A Typology of Transitions'
The TRELIS Papers nº 12, available at
http://www.limenandtext.com/pdf/Trellis%2012_Manuel%20Aguirre_Towards%20a%20Typology%20of%20Transitions.pdf

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday 25th April,
at 10.00

Simon Pritchard (UAM)

will give an online talk on

**"Liminal Ethics:
The Doctrine of the Middle Way in the Fiction of Don DeLillo"**

ABSTRACT:

The 5th century Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna employed the concept of the “middle way”, an idea with a rich history in Eastern philosophy, in order to tackle a philosophical conundrum that has been confounding thinkers throughout the history of philosophy, both Eastern and Western. This is the problem of the mutually entailing ontologies of reification and nihilism. Reification, as Nagarjuna explains, is the process of imbuing phenomena with an essential, independent and ultimate nature. For instance, the figure of God is the reified notion par excellence; He is seen as an essential, independent and ultimate entity that explains the underlying purpose of the universe; the universe under his watch, therefore, is rich in meaning. However, when experience points to the absence of such an entity, the opposite extreme seems to be called for: the nihilistic view of the universe as being utterly without purpose and, therefore, devoid of meaning.

For Nagarjuna, the oscillation between these two opposing ways of perceiving the world comes in numerous forms and is the root of human suffering and our incapacity to live a good life. He argues that a perceptual shift is necessary for the alleviation of this suffering and for the living of an ethical life, and that this shift must be a forging of a “Middle Way” between these opposing philosophies. He states that any individual who succumbs to either reification or nihilism, or both, cannot live an ethical life. The way out of this quandary hinges on the attainment of altered states of perception that might facilitate the untangling of this age-old philosophical double-bind. This talk claims that the forging of this middle way can be expressed in more Western philosophical language as the enactment of a kind of liminal ethics.

Along the way, this talk will make reference to Don DeLillo’s novels, plays and stories which all feature various characters who face this very same philosophical dilemma in a variety of different ways. Perhaps the most recurrent narrative structure found in DeLillo’s work is the forking path, but it takes the form not of an actual path faced by his characters, but rather of a choice to perceive the world through either a nihilistic or a reified lens. The implicit challenge for so many of his characters is to reject these two options and, instead, to take up with the world in a manner consistent with Nagarjuna’s notion of the middle way. This talk will explore how, in perhaps DeLillo’s last great novel, *Zero K*, this challenge takes a form analogous to the series of philosophical debates currently taking place within the field of posthumanism. It will claim that the challenge for Jeff, its protagonist, and by extension for the reader, is to take the middle way in their perception of the posthuman era, neither embracing it uncritically, nor rejecting it entirely.

The talk will be offered via Zoom. It will last approximately 30 minutes.
As usual, you will receive a link one or two days before. Everyone is welcome.

RECENT EVENTS

Our latest **online** session took place on Wednesday 1 March at 10 a.m. via Zoom. Our guest speaker was Belén Piqueras with a talk entitled “Liminality and Potentiality in Postmodernist Narrative”. A recording of this session is to be uploaded on LIMEN & TEXT. A written version of the talk will be eventually appearing in *The TRELLIS Papers*.

THE TS WORKSHOP

The TS Workshop has convened three times so far (16 November 2022, 14 February, and 14 March 2023). This is a new on-site initiative aimed at reassessing the project and outlining new objectives. Our focus is currently on reaching consensus definitions of key terms: ‘dynamics’, ‘transition’, ‘system’, ‘instability’, ‘identity’, ‘textual studies’, ‘crisis’, ‘liminality’. A programmatic document is under construction. Our next on-site workshop is scheduled for Tuesday 18th April at 14.15 in room VIbis.312.

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