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Expanding the Threshold

THE FIRST POSTGRADUATE SEMINAR IN LIMINALITY STUDIES

**UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID,
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The First Postgraduate Seminar in Liminality Studies

The First Postgraduate Seminar in Liminality Studies is born in light of the UAM's foundational role in the study of liminality and text. By this point in 2018, several decades of work have gone into the project of redefining what was once referred to as 'marginal' or 'marginalized,' stressing instead the idea that such texts reside rather in the in-between, in the limen. In this vein, the concept of 'liminality' was adapted from the anthropological writings of Van Gennep and later Turner to discuss the domain of literature. The discussion has evolved over time to focus on liminality in text at a variety of interdisciplinary levels: at the level of genre, semiotics, linguistics, spatiality, subjectivities, art form, technology, and so on. This project is born with the object of potentially filling the intergenerational gap that exists between established academic research groups on liminality and text such as the ISLT, and younger generations of potential scholars who seek to take their initial steps into this specific academic research field. Therefore, we present this first edition with the intention of planting the seed for the prospective development of an enduring research seminar, in which students from different academic levels - ranging from final undergraduate years to postgraduate and doctoral level - are welcome to participate.

The 2018 Seminar: Expanding the Threshold

The concept of the threshold has been given a position of central importance when it comes to studies in liminality. Its basic definition as “the floor of an entrance to a building or room” (Cambridge Dictionary) in itself calls for a revision of the concept in order to encompass the full potential that this in-between space has to offer when applied in the context of an expanding diversity of research fields. Pioneers in the metaphorical use of the concept of the threshold were ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep and anthropologist Victor Turner, upon whose theories much of the present scholarly literature on liminality has been built. The purpose of this project is to quite literally expand this threshold, to continue examining this liminal space which is generally ignored in favour of the two adjacent and more established spaces which stand on either side of it. Upon close examination, the threshold that emerges between, for instance, two literary genres, or two notably differentiated concepts - such as image and text - often contains elements shared with the spaces which comprise it, while at the same time displaying significant differences which thus allow it to acquire its own solid liminal status. The threshold may sometimes spring from the process of a smooth transition between two similar adjacent spaces - and therefore be barely noticeable - but it may also emerge in the process of a more problematic transition or within the meeting-point of two markedly distinguished spaces. Recalling previous studies on liminality and text, some examples of relevant thresholds would be liminal genres which have emerged from the combining of two previously distinct ones (the Gothic as a merging of medieval romance and popular folklore, the graphic novel as the merging of image and text), liminal subjectivities (as emerging in

thresholds of culture, technology, race, gender, class, etc.), liminal spaces (borders, virtual reality, purgatories), and that elusive boundary between reality and fiction.

Keeping in line with the general parameters established above and with the emphasis on postgraduate-level contributions, invited participants are welcome to give a talk of up to twenty minutes on any of the ample variety of topics in which the concept of the threshold may be engaged. The conference already counts on keynote addresses from two experts in the field of liminality studies, as well as the expected presence of several others whose expertise will enhance the debate which will follow each contribution. At least ten minutes will be scheduled for debate after each twenty minute talk, and thirty minutes will be allotted after each keynote address. This seminar is indeed designed to promote discussion amongst all participants in response to each contribution - it is conceived of with the literal and figurative use of a round table in mind. As the overall aim of the seminar is to establish the presence of emerging scholars in the field of liminality, providing a groundwork from which to continue the development of the field here at the UAM, the focus is to create an atmosphere of cooperative scholarship out of which the liminal project (in an individual and collective sense) can continue to expand.

We encourage potential participants unfamiliar with the existing literature on liminality to browse the summaries of previous seminars devoted to the subject: see <http://www.northangerlibrary.com/gateway.asp>. The seminar is currently foreseen to take place over two days in the last week of April (sometime between the 23rd and the 26th). While participation in the seminar is by invitation only, due to the number of interested speakers we are asking for confirmation of interest as soon as possible, as well as submission of an abstract by Thursday, March 15th.