

Article

# Liminality, Postmodernity and Passion: Towards a Theoretical Framework for the study of 21st Century Choral Passion Settings

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**Abstract:** After more than a century of neglect of the form, over thirty major concert works with “Passion” within the title have emerged into the choral landscape during the past 50 years. These settings use diverse libretti, drawing from sources both sacred and secular; some of the composers of these works profess Christianity, some adhere to other religious traditions, and some do not profess any particular faith at all. Their only common threads seem to be their self-identification with the title of “Passion”, and their depiction of a story in which a particular individual undergoes suffering and death. The purpose of this article is not to analyze specific Passion settings but rather to explore the structural form and content of the Passion genre as a whole, and begin to develop an interdisciplinary framework for future analysis of this body of music, using the tools offered by the field of liminal studies. Additionally, this essay will explore how the concept of Postmodernism, both as it manifests both in Western culture and through that culture’s artistic and musical expression, might give some insight into the Passion form’s resurgence into modern musical thought.

**Keywords:** Passion; liminality; ritual; postmodernism; choral music; 21st century music

## 1. Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>, after more than a century of relative abandonment of the form, the field of Western concert music has seen over thirty major choral works composed with “Passion” within the title. Their musical styles are incredibly diverse, as are the libretti from which they are drawn. Many use the expected Gospel narratives, but many others relate the story of Christ’s suffering and death via an original text or set of texts. Some of the composers of these works profess Christianity, some adhere to other religious traditions, and some do not profess any particular faith at all. Some use the Passion name and form to tell the story of another’s suffering, leaving the Jesus story behind. Some end at the tomb; others depart from the traditional Passion ending and move forward into resurrection. Their only common threads seem to be their self-identification with the title of “Passion”, and their depiction of a story in which a particular individual undergoes suffering and death.

This unexpected synchronicity prompts one to question, first, why the Passion form is seeing such a resurgence at this point in time and space? And second, what in the Passion narrative speaks to these composers to such an extent that those who do not share the religious convictions of the Christian faith are still drawn to set it to music, and to the audiences of varied backgrounds who

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<sup>1</sup> In 1966 Penderecki’s *St. Luke Passion* premiered, followed in 1981 by Arvo Pärt’s *Passio* and, through the end of the 20th’ century, about a dozen more Passion settings. By contrast, since 2000, over 20 major works self-identifying as “Passions” have entered the repertoire.

receive them so enthusiastically? One route to addressing these questions, proposed and explored in this article, will use the tools offered by the fields of ritual theory and liminal studies to consider how the processes of identity-shifting and social transformation might situate themselves within the world of musical postmodernism, and how these two concepts may meet and interact within the structure of the choral Passion setting in the twenty-first century. This pathway of study requires an interdisciplinary approach drawing together threads of inquiry from the fields of musical analysis, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies.

This paper will first address the sub-discipline of ritual theory and anthropology known as liminal studies. The term “liminality”, first applied to initiatory rites of passage in the early twentieth century, has broadened significantly since its first uses by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner; it has since been adopted by sociologists, political anthropologists, educators, and scholars from many disciplines. Section 2 of this paper will attempt to give a brief but coherent overview of the field of liminal studies from its origins over a century ago through to the present, sketching out its trajectory from being a clearly defined moment or state in an initiation ritual process to its current much broader application in fields from religion to health care to the arts.

The application of liminal studies to music is still in its early stages, and it is generally applied more in performative settings than in the creation of a fixed or scripted work of art like a musical setting. However, the narrative of Christ’s passion, his journey to suffering and death on the cross, resonates very clearly with the liminal process as outlined by Turner, van Gennep, and the other scholars whose work we will examine. The sung Passion setting, a re-telling in music of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, has been part of Christian worship since as far back as the fourth century, growing more complex and including additional instruments and interpolated texts, the form reaching its pinnacle with J. S. Bach’s monumental *St. Matthew Passion* and *St. John Passion*. This article will not attempt to analyze in depth any specific passion settings, nor the genre’s development through history. Section 3 will, however, examine the overall shape and narrative arc of the Passion *form* through the lens of liminal studies, and outline the resonances between the Passion narrative and the classical liminal journey.

Finally, the fourth section of this paper will attempt to clarify the salient characteristics of Postmodernism—both the sociological phenomenon of its time, and the musical period following the structure- and rule-dominated era of mid-twentieth-century modernism—and begin to tease out the intriguing resonances between Postmodernism and liminal studies, by way of the choral Passion form and the resurgence of contemporary Passion settings in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Postmodernism, as a musical movement, released composers from the expectations and compositional values that had become entrenched in the work of composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen; it invited an abandonment of structure, a return to a new and reinvented approach to tonality, and an acceptance of the potential value of almost any type of music from any style, era, or part of the world. This freedom of the composer to move away from the strictures of the past, while still accepting and appropriating those elements of it useful to the composer, may well be a factor in the revival of the Passion genre after almost two centuries of neglect. This study will conclude with a brief discussion of how these three areas of study might intersect and dialogue with one another, and the implications for possible future music analysis of choral Passion settings.

## 2. Liminal Studies: An Overview of the Field

*Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols ... liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness... (Turner 1969, p. 359)*

The fields of ritual theory and liminal studies examine the way patterned behaviors and strategic manipulation of social situations have—globally and throughout human history—served to maintain social structure and assisted individuals to move in and out of different stages of their life’s journey.

The term “liminal” comes from the Greek *limen*, or threshold. It was coined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his seminal work *Les Rites de Passage* (*The Rites of Passage*, translated into English in 1960) to describe the three-stage journey through which every individual moving through a life-passage event must travel: first, the separation from their previous state; second, the “liminal” in-between phase; and third, the re-aggregation with the community, when the individual returns to take their place in society, now possessed of a new social identity and role (van Gennep 1960). Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process* (Turner 1969) took van Gennep’s work a step farther and expanded the “liminal” phase into a much larger and more detailed understanding, developing characteristics of the individual’s sociological and anthropological experience of this “threshold” place—characteristics which bear a strong resonance to the overall characteristics of postmodernism and how it manifests itself in musical performance, as will be discussed in the latter sections of this document.

Turner accepted van Gennep’s three categories of life-passage or initiation rituals, but he took greatest interest in the second, “in-between” phase of life-passage rites. He focused heavily on this middle step, the liminal period, and more specifically on the qualities of the individuals who inhabit that state. He found that, in many cultures, liminal persons fit almost no concrete classifications; by their very nature they are “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969, p. 359), and thus symbol and metaphor become necessary for describing and mediating their state. The liminal state is often likened to death, to the womb, to being in the wilderness, to invisibility, and so on. Liminal entities are expected to be humble, submissive, passive, and obedient without question. Their obedience is not to another individual of higher status (for they themselves are not merely of low status; rather, they simply have no status at all), but to the authority of the entire community into which they seek entry. Even if this authority is represented by a single individual elder or “ritual master”, the person filling that role stands symbolically in the place of the entire social construct, not as a distinct individual. Of liminal persons, Turner says, “It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1969, p. 95) and that “they have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society” (Turner 1969, p. 103).

This lack of status often results in a close sense of kinship among those who enter into the liminal state together. Turner calls this state of connection *communitas*, out of which emerges a sense of group identity. According to Turner, society in general exists in two different states: the “normal” structured, hierarchical, differentiated state, and the undifferentiated state of *communitas*, wherein all function as a single entity, without status, structure, or hierarchy (though all in this state still function in subordination to the ritual elders or masters).

Turner likens *communitas* to the space between spokes of a wheel: The spokes themselves define the space between them, the space has to be there, but the space is only what it is because of the spokes (Turner 1969, p. 127). Everything about the liminal state plays into this structure/anti-structure duality: hierarchy gives way to radical equality, systems of nomenclature give way to anonymity, pride of position is abandoned for humility, and an individual’s right to speak as an individual is given up for silence.

The liminal state, and the beings and qualities inhabiting it, are almost always imbued with and bounded around by magico-religious qualities. This bounding is crucial, because if structure is key to society’s function, then any being or state existing outside of this structure is inherently dangerous; it must be circumscribed and kept distinct from those in the “normal” state. When an individual is to move from one life state to another, rarely do they move directly “up” or “down” from one social stratum to another. Instead, they must leave structure entirely and enter the liminal state of *communitas*, in order to then return to structure in a different state. Once outside of structure, there exist only these careful symbolic boundaries to prevent the liminal person from remaining outside the structural system forever, or attempting to break out of the structure entirely, thereby distorting or breaking the social fabric as it is currently preserved.

Liminal space, then, whether or not the ritual nature of its generation was deliberate and recognized, paradoxically functions to both maintain societal and social cohesion *and* provide an arena for generating even the most dramatic social change; and it accomplishes this, nearly always, while functioning at a level beneath cognitive consciousness. The late ritual scholar Catherine Bell, in her 1992 book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Bell 1992), gives a name for this quality of ritual: she demonstrates how rituals are embedded in “misrecognition” of their true purpose, lying “beyond the reach of a logical theoretical articulation” (Bell 1992, p. 115). It is this aspect of misrecognition that makes rational and rigorous study of liminality and ritual functions so challenging, because in whatever element of human socialization is studied, there is an unperceived under-layer beneath that which can be observed and quantified, and the hidden forces that function there are where ritual strategy and liminality can function most profoundly.

Moreover, even if societal norms or individual identities shift from one side to the other of this liminal space, this change from before to after is as nothing when compared to the difference between “normal” society and the anti-structural *tabula rasa* qualities of the liminal space itself and the *communitas* it generates. Ritually and strategically managed liminal space can effect transformation of an individual or an entire community—or, conversely, it can ensure that change does not happen and that every participant emerges firmly grounded in the social reality the rituals maintain.

The concepts brought into play by liminality have, in the decades since Turner first explored them, spread beyond the area of ritual studies into other disciplines. Secular cultural anthropologist Robbie Davis-Floyd has applied ritual theory analysis to a process through which a large percentage of adults in the United States pass at some point in their lives, i.e., that of participating in the birth of a child in a hospital. In her study *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (Davis-Floyd 2003), Davis-Floyd synthesized the works of many noted ritual scholars, drawing heavily upon van Gennep, Turner, and others<sup>2</sup> to create a list of characteristics of ritual in general, whether initiatory or otherwise. She defines ritual as a “patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of a cultural belief or value” (Davis-Floyd 2003, pp. 8–9), proposing that its workings are an integral part of human society in general, deployed with greater intensity in particular moments in cultural life. Ritual, she says, explicates its symbolic messages through often-rhythmic repetition. This repetition and redundancy have the effect of first achieving a sense of “cognitive simplification”, followed by a “cognitive stabilization”, in all participants, pulling each to the same highly suggestible mental level; this increases the ability of the ritual strategies to work on everyone, something far more difficult if participants approach the process in different mental and emotional states (Davis-Floyd 2003, p. 12). Davis-Floyd synthesizes the theories of numerous ritual scholars to draw out four particular strategic techniques often used to accomplish this goal of cognitive simplification: rhythmic repetition, hazing, strange-making, and symbolic inversion (Davis-Floyd 1994, pp. 323–40). These are frequently-employed strategies for this combination simplification/stabilization process: what is familiar is altered to seem strange and alien, what is normal is traded for the completely abnormal, and established symbolic relationships are turned inside-out and upside-down, all creating an environment of confusion and disorientation in which the participant has no reference points for expectation or normalcy (Davis-Floyd 2003, p. 19). The progress of the ritual will feel inevitable and unchanging, with a pre-determined order and progression from which there is no deviation possible. This progression of inevitability often leads to some climactic moment when the emotional experience of participants is at a particularly heightened state, and it is this climactic emotional moment that enables the cognitive transformation (and/or reinforcement of existing status) of the already unified and stabilized participants to solidify. These strategies serve to induce the state of *communitas* in the participants and ensure that the ritual process will not break out of its boundaries and risk the

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<sup>2</sup> Including but not limited to Geertz, Marcus, Fischer, Leach, Wallace, Needham, McManus, Moore, Myerhoff, and Malinowski.

destabilization of ordinary social structure during the dangerous period of anti-structure at the heart of the liminal process. They are not limited to particular method or medium but rather approaches that could apply across any number of disciplines.

Turner himself shifted his focus away from liminality as an element of ritual to a broader look at performance studies and practice theory, and he later coined the term “liminoid” to express the dynamic of liminal-type characteristics appearing in non-ritual settings (Turner 1982). Danish anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen questions this choice, suggesting that removing the liminal from a ritual setting and allowing it to be more imprecise and performative does not take into account the ritual-like strategies and sequences which often occur in non-classic ritual settings (Thomassen 2009, p. 15). Thomassen, like Davis-Floyd, favors opening the discussion of liminality to a far broader set of circumstances while maintaining the key salient characteristics with which Turner introduced it to begin with (transitoriness, transformation, *communitas*, and often the presence of “masters” to guide the process), and widening the arena of research fields through which it might be approached.

Arpad Szokolczai takes this theory a step farther, examining several of Turner’s posthumous essays that link to the work of nineteenth-century psychologist and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey and address long-standing questions about the nature and structure of human experience itself. In these essays, he suggests, Turner’s goal was to “place the triadic, sequential and processual structure of rites of passage at the core of anthropology, overcoming Durkheimian classificatory logic...the solution is the recognition that the sequential order of a rite of passage is the structure of lived experience” (Szokolczai 2009, p. 147). This perspective takes liminality into a new realm with new challenges: First, if liminality permeates all personal and social change, how can its presence or absence be realistically identified? Second, and even more paradoxically, when all of society shifts, where is the sense of control or boundary? How can safety be maintained, and how can the space between the structural/anti-structural wheel-spokes keep their integrity, if the society itself is not functioning outside the liminal space to bound it? What governs transformation when the institution and its ritual masters are no longer outside, but are within the liminal space itself, undergoing transformation in *communitas* with the entire fabric of society?

Szokolczai, Thomassen, and political anthropologist Agnes Horvath have thus moved liminal studies into the political arena, using it as a lens to examine cultural and societal shifts worldwide. They place a particular focus on the question of liminality as key to the rise of Communism in Eastern Europe after World War II. All three scholars in various writings pose the question: what happens when liminality and *communitas* go wrong? What happens when the legitimate ritual masters are replaced by ‘trickster’ figures (Jung 1969)<sup>3</sup> who impede the progress of transitional liminal time and hold it fixed in place, and do not permit it to end (Agnes and Thomassen 2008)?

These scholars examine the mythology of the “trickster”—beings perpetually on the margins, never engaged in community, shadowy, and generally not to be trusted—against the tenets of liminality. According to Szokolczai, the trickster figure in an unmanaged liminal situation often attempts to usurp the role of the ritual master, thus perpetuating the “crisis” nature of the liminal phase and holding the community in the un-structured state indefinitely. Agnes Horvath examines this phenomenon in her article “Tricking into the Position of the Outcast: A Case Study in the Emergence and Effects of Communist Power” (Horvath 1998), analyzing the speeches of a particular Hungarian Communist leader through the lens of liminal theory. She demonstrates how the structure and imagery of these speeches, rather than their actual content or message, function to create and sustain the conditions necessary for extended maintenance of a liminal state among the populace.

Horvath’s work focuses heavily on how the reign of Communism represented, especially in Eastern Europe, a period of suspended or “stuck” liminality following the nearly global liminal period that should have come to a close following the Second World War. (Whether the liminal

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<sup>3</sup> The “trickster” is one of the archetypes found in (Jung 1969).

period was successfully negotiated by the rest of the non-Communist world is another question entirely, and one with which she does not engage here.) Horvath offers an intriguing case for liminality as an underlying principle for the emergence and staying power of the Communist Party during the twentieth century, as she analyzes the speeches of a single individual Hungarian Communist leader over a five-year period. She discovers that while the overall content of the speeches is unremarkable—disorganized, unsophisticated, incoherent, and needlessly repetitive—their *form* suggests an entirely different perspective. The speeches present uncomplicated emotional messages, repeated over and over in similar ways; these are overlaid with the pairing together of opposing images, e.g., discipline/freedom, obedience/democracy, suffering/comfort, in a manner at once both deliberately confusing and rationally unacknowledged (or as Bell might suggest, “misrecognized” (Bell 1992)). Horvath demonstrates how the overall process of these speeches can be analyzed as mirroring traditional liminal processes, but with a caveat: The difference in this case, she suggests, is that instead of using these strategies to move a society through the liminal journey into stability, the Communist Party’s unarticulated aim was to instead hold society permanently in the state of *communitas*, thus maintaining the anti-structure of liminal space indefinitely while attempting to give it the illusion of stability.

If, as Szakolczai suggests, the pattern first suggested by Arnold van Gennep as a template for ritual initiation is in reality the pattern for all human experience and identity-forming, it is a logical extension to expect that this pattern will manifest fractally in varied ways throughout human culture and history, including and especially through myth, story, and the arts. Thus we may return to the Passion story, and the choral tradition of its musical settings and performance, with a new eye for how this mythic journey of Christ manifests and echoes the process of liminality and transformation.

### 3. The Choral Passion as Liminal Space

*Whether dream or myth...in these adventures there is an atmosphere of irresistible fascination ... that which has to be faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious—though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality— makes itself known; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely empty of value ... the summons can no longer be denied. (Campbell 1973, p. 46)*

If we consider the journey of Christ through the Passion narrative, we can very clearly see the architecture of van Gennep’s and Turner’s constructs for ritual transformation echoed throughout the story, as well as elements of ritual strategy and function at work. Early elements of the “separation” portion of the journey exhibit themselves, not just in the Scriptural narrative, but in the traditional forms of the musical settings as drawn from the past. In numerous oratorio Passion settings, an interpolated choral introductory movement explicitly (in the manner of the opening movement of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, “Kommt, ihr Töchter”) or implicitly (e.g., Telemann’s many Passion settings beginning with chorales) takes this role. Even the insertions of a simple *exordio* in responsorial Passion settings from the sixteenth century and onward (part of the liturgical ritual) (Von Fischer and Braun 2014) could be said to function in this “attend and enter the story” role, as listeners/congregants are invited not simply to hear the story but to enter into the journey *with* Jesus. Similarly, though it is not generally proclaimed as part of the Passion itself but takes a pivotal role in the larger ritual of the Mass, the telling of the Last Supper connects the Passion to the central Christian ritual uniting Jesus (the one who undergoes the ritual liminal journey) with his followers: first his disciples, and then by extension all who share in the “communion” he instituted there. This is a clear ritual signifier that the liminal journey to be undertaken is more than observance of another’s passage but that it intends to include and thus transform all of Jesus’ followers as well.

The “separation” moment of van Gennep’s tripartite form is advanced in the Garden of Gethsemane, in which Jesus goes away from his disciples to pray; he asks for the cup to be taken from him, but he also accepts the road set before him (“Not my will but yours be done”, Luke 22:42). That he

returns to his disciples and finds them sleeping highlights his drawing away from them all the further, and the three-fold repetition of this sequence both narratively and ritually reinforces this separation.

The moment in the Scriptural Passion narratives in which a threshold is definitively crossed, when the journey becomes inevitable, is the betrayal of Judas and the arrest of Jesus. Here the liminal process begins in earnest; Jesus' experiences moving forward reflect the same pattern of trials and increasing intensity as the classical depiction of any initiatory transformational journey. The precise sequence of events varies slightly from evangelist to evangelist, but in each of the four Gospels Jesus is betrayed by Judas,<sup>4</sup> the soldiers approach, the disciples attack, one cuts off the ear of the High Priest's slave<sup>5</sup>, and Jesus is carried off. In Matthew and Mark's account, the disciples' flight from the scene is explicitly cited. All four Gospel accounts contain Peter's denial of Christ. The gospels differ regarding elements such as the stripping of Jesus' clothing and the wrapping with a purple cloak, but all contain the literal experience of Jesus' "trial" before the authorities (the priests and/or Pontius Pilate).

The narrative elements of abandonment and "stripping" are typical of the liminal journey, and these can be witnessed in various tellings of liminal myths and ritual experiences throughout human history. We can see them in the goddess Inanna's relinquishing of her possessions as she moves through the gates of the Underworld in ancient Sumerian myth (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983); the tonsuring and habits of those entering religious orders of old, or the buzz-cut and colorless military uniforms of new boot camp recruits, operate under the same mechanisms (Davis-Floyd 1998).<sup>6</sup> Anthropologist Robbie Davis-Floyd's theories regarding cognitive simplification in ritual settings (Davis-Floyd 2003, pp. 8–9), noted previously, suggest that many of these ritual strategies analyzed as the "trials" of the liminal journey by Turner function more to effect mental simplification and cognitive reduction than to strengthen and test the initiate. Within the Passion narrative, we see these elements crop up with frequency: Peter's repeated denials, Jesus' repeated questionings, the beatings and mocking by the Roman soldiers, the strange-making and symbolic inversion as Jesus the condemned criminal is cloaked in royal purple and crowned with thorns (juxtaposed of course with the image of the King of all creation being mocked and killed like a common criminal, forming an ironic double inversion)—all of these elements function within the Passion story to assist the initiate, and likewise, Davis-Floyd would suggest, we who have already (ritually and narratively) identified with him, into a simplified and suggestible emotional state.

As the Passion narrative progresses from the trial before Pilate (and in the case of Luke's gospel, the trial before Herod), through the beatings and humiliation and the carrying of the cross, to the crucifixion itself, as the crowds' taunt Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40), the equalizing and *communitas*-engendering cognitive simplification laid out by Davis-Floyd and other strategy- and praxis-based ritual theorists continues and intensifies. Here the narrative continues to draw the participant in, "grind them down", as Turner would advocate (Turner 1969, p. 95), preparing them for the climactic moment of the liminal process.

At the moment of Christ's death on the cross, a curious thing happens from a liminal and symbolic perspective: we have established how the narrative works not only to tell of Christ's journey through liminal space but also to draw participants into the journey as well. At the moment of conscious release and unity with the Father ("It is finished" in John; "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" in Luke; in Matthew and Mark he merely "cried out" and "breathed his last."<sup>7</sup>), in all four Gospel accounts, the veil in the temple is torn, thereby in this moment of highest ritual intensity giving a powerful symbolic image of the destruction of the barrier between human and divine. At the same time, however, at this point in the narrative the listener/watcher is cut off from the remainder

<sup>4</sup> The kiss of betrayal is omitted from John's account.

<sup>5</sup> John's Gospel identifies Peter as the disciple with the sword.

<sup>6</sup> Davis-Floyd, in her analysis of ritual initiation processes, cites this phenomenon in her studies of ritual operation in societal settings, whether these situations self-identify as "ritual" or not. (Davis-Floyd 1998).

<sup>7</sup> John 19:30; Luke 23:46; Mark 15:37; Matthew 27:50, respectively.

of Christ's story; the remaining brief portions of the narrative re-establish the separateness of the now-dead Jesus from the living who remain behind, react to his death, and care for his body. While the Gospels themselves continue the narrative to its mythic and liminally fulfilled conclusion with the Resurrection and Ascension, the Passion narratives as set for liturgical use from the early Church through to the concert settings of the eighteenth century stop at the tomb. Even the most popular of the widely freely-composed non-Scriptural libretti (not intended for liturgical use), such as Rammner's *Der Tod Jesu* (set by many composers, including Graun and Telemann), the "Brookes-Passion" (a text by German poet Barthold Heinrich Brockes), and Metastasio's *La Passione di Gesù Cristo*, stop at this point. The remainder of Jesus' journey is not conveyed as part of the normative Passion story; the telling does not continue with the telling of his return with the gift of salvation, his triumph over death, the stone rolled away from the tomb and the greeting of the disciples by angels, his ascension to the Father, or his sending of the Holy Spirit. The universal connection to the remainder of this liminal path is abruptly severed in the telling of the Passion, denying a sense of closure or finality to those who had entered the liminal journey with him. This is of course one of the goals of the Passion proclamation in its place as part of Christian ritual worship in the context of Holy Week; the Church pauses at the tomb and waits before continuing with the next part of the story.

However, as the Passion moves away from church and into concert performance, and especially as it is being reclaimed by new and often non-Christian composers, this incomplete liminal journey needs to be addressed as its own phenomenon. How do composers negotiate the issue, and how does the postmodern perspective from which many of these composers emerge deal with the phenomenon of a highly structured narrative that, by its existence within the realm of liminal space-time, lives at the same time in a world of anti-structure? To further address this issue, we turn now to an examination to the manifestations of "postmodernism"—both as it emerges in contemporary thought and society, and as that emergence is reflected in the art and music of its time.

#### 4. Situating Postmodernism

*Postmodernism can expand into a still larger problem: is it only an artistic tendency or also a social phenomenon, perhaps even a mutation in Western humanism? If so, how are the various aspects of this phenomenon—psychological, philosophical, economic, political—joined or disjointed? (Hassan 2001, p. 279)*

Postmodernism, as the expression of a prevailing cultural mode of thought, grew out of a post-WWII disenchantment with the tenets of Enlightenment-based modernism. It has proven itself unusually resistant to concrete definition or categorization, being called by turns "slippery" (Felluga 2011), "maddeningly imprecise" (Kramer 2002, p. 13), and prompting the hope that "it would disappear under the weight of its own incoherence or simply lose its allure as a set of 'new ideas'" (Kramer 2002, p. vii). Some scholars are skeptical of the entire idea of postmodernism or postmodernity; macro-sociologist Bernhard Giesen writes that postmodernism "bears the dust of the latest fad", believing instead that Western culture now finds itself not in a "post" modern state but instead in an inevitable third phase of the modernity which began with the rational turn of the Enlightenment and moved through Romanticism's subjective turn into the current cultural impulse to seek new certainties and existential terra firma (Giesen 2009, p. 240).

If postmodernism as a concept is challenging to define with certainty, then clearly the postmodern artistic expression emerging from it will be likewise; it is unsurprising that there is little consensus regarding its priorities or boundaries. Perhaps one of the more helpful perspectives on postmodernism comes from French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard 1989). For Lyotard, the rise of postmodern is connected to its rejection of the grand narrative or "metadiscourse", which for Lyotard was the defining characteristic of modernism. The modern, via its birth in Enlightenment thinking, would always value progress and development, with everything coming into existence through a grand narrative that develops over time. Postmodernism, then, represents a break in this ongoing sense of progress; instead of the meta-narrative, the micro-narrative

now takes over and becomes dominant as the “quintessential form of imaginative invention” (Lyotard 1989, p. 60)<sup>8</sup>. From an artistic standpoint, this concept of meta- and micro-narrative gives the musician a place to start examining what a “postmodern” musical perspective might look like: it frees this perspective from the concept of a metanarrative just as it frees the composer from writing in one, and allows for a much broader exploration.

Ihab Hassan, in his essay “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism” (Hassan 2014), identifies a series of oppositional distinctions between modernism and postmodernism that are helpful, from an artistic perspective, in connecting with an understanding of postmodernism’s salient characteristics: Modernism embraces a sense of form, closed and connected; postmodernism is anti-form, open and disjunct. Modernism embraces design and purpose; postmodernism, chance and play. Modernism is structured hierarchically, holding value in rationality and articulable truth; postmodernism is more likely to exist in anarchy, letting “truth” remain unspoken or be read only between the lines. Modernism values the whole, complete, finished; postmodernism is more likely to embrace the process more than its completion. In this way, according to Hassan, postmodernism separates itself from what came before it and reshapes both art and thought.

Hassan identifies indeterminacy and immanence as the two most crucial markers of postmodernism. The first, indeterminacy, reveals a “vast will to unmaking” everything Western culture and discourse once held as firm and unassailable; rather, postmodernism leans to discontinuity, rupture, decomposition. The second, the pull for “immanence”, he defines as “the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions” (Hassan 2014, p. 123) and thus connect to its environment in a different way. These two concepts are not dialectically opposed to one another, nor does one generate the other; they mutually generate one another, each creating a situation where the other is needed.

Jonathan Kramer, without referring directly to Hassan, identified in his article “The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism” (Kramer 2002) a total of sixteen characteristics often exhibited by postmodernism in music, many of which reflect Hassan’s more general theoretic concepts above. Kramer believes that postmodern music is generally not simply a rejection of modernism or its continuation, but that it “has aspects of both a break and an extension”; any sense that the past and present should be divided and bounded one from another is rejected. Postmodernism rejects barriers between “high” and “low” styles, questioning the mutual exclusivity of elite vs. popular values. By extension, postmodernism according to Kramer considers music as relevant to, not autonomous from, social and political contexts. Structural unity will not necessarily be valued, nor will holding a particular “type” of compositional technique throughout a piece. Postmodern music is often ironic. Technology as constitutive rather than assistive, references to or quotations from other cultures, embrace of fragmentation or discontinuity—all are fair game in musical postmodernism, an ethos that tends to welcome paradox and be skeptical of oppositional duality, not requiring a piece of music to hold a single meaning or ethos. Finally, for Kramer, postmodern music “locates meaning and even structure in listeners, more than in scores, performances, or composers” (Kramer 2002, p. 17).

Kramer sees postmodernism “not as a historical period, but as an attitude—a current attitude that influences not only today’s compositional practices but also how we listen to and use music of other eras” (Kramer 2002, p. 14). He echoes Lyotard’s assertion that the very nature of the postmodern must by definition be in some way a reaction to or against the modernism that preceded it. Thus for Kramer the breaking of the metanarrative for the micronarrative, the release of structural

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<sup>8</sup> Giesen would doubtless disagree with Lyotard here; for him, the descent into the micronarrative would be a symptom of the crisis of the second over-subjective turn of modernity, to be overcome by a reassertion of absolutes in the third. (Giesen, “Three Cultural Projects.”).

unity for fragmentation, and the abandonment of formula for chaos, themselves become the fabric of postmodernism simply by virtue of their rebellion against what preceded them.<sup>9</sup>

Neo-Romantic composer Robin Holloway, in his 1989 article about the shift from modern to postmodern music entitled “Modernism and After in Music” (Holloway 1989), similarly sets out a list of characteristics he feels are common to postmodern music in general, but from the perspective of the composer rather than the theorist. First, he notes that postmodern music takes advantage of the wide swath of source material available to composers who, like Stravinsky, wish to take advantage of “creative kleptomania”, including world and popular music as well as centuries of Western art music. On the opposite side of the same coin, the broad availability and use of music from every time and age has made it difficult for this time to develop a culture or “sound” of its own. “We are all chameleons”, Holloway writes, “everything is revival; and such superabundance of knowingness allows any previous style to be made to order” (Holloway 1989, p. 66). Finally, he sees nostalgia not as a negative or simply “anti-modern” retreat from anything new in the music of this era but as a source of great power and connection; in a time of violence and uncertainty, he says, “it’s where things are good—undestroyed, unpolluted, unabused. ‘Nostalgia’ is a burning emotion, fierce rather than enervating, purposeful rather than lazy” (Holloway 1989, p. 63). Modernism, he suggests, took us to farther horizons than we had ever traveled before, but at the same time it in some way severed our connection between past and present. The task of the postmodern, Holloway believes, is to re-forge that connection.<sup>10</sup>

Holloway’s view of postmodernism’s impulse to seek new certainties and connections with culture, community, place, and time is almost a direct echo of macro-sociologist Bernhard Giesen’s analysis of the third of modernity’s three “projects” (Giesen 2009).. Giesen’s disdain for the term “postmodernism” has been noted; for Giesen, the phenomena commonly associated with postmodernism are themselves crucial components of modernism. The Enlightenment represented the “turn to the rational”; Romanticism, then, initiated a “turn to the subject”, a dismantling of rational assumptions, and a pushing of morality’s boundaries to their farthest extent. For Giesen, the third turn of the Modern era is “a new quest for certainties.” He writes, “The price of the bold venture to untie all bonds of universal morality and functional rationality is anxiety and anomie, a cynical retreat from commitment, and overall apathy...faced with such an abyss, the anchorless movement of disenchantment provokes a new longing for roots and for certainties beyond questions, debates, and deconstructions” (Giesen 2009, p. 245).

This summary of selected scholars’ approach to naming and describing the movement collectively understood as “postmodernism”, as well as artists’ and musicians’ views regarding how this movement plays out in artistic expression, may begin to give some clues to why and how the Passion story might be particularly evocative to postmodern composers. We have seen that postmodern music is largely defined by its complicated relationship with its own past; it reclaims its heritage as its own but completely renegotiates it. The very act of re-claiming this traditional musical genre from the past and re-shaping it into a familiar and yet new re-invention of itself is thus a quintessentially postmodern tactic—the very choice to *write* a Passion in the twenty-first century could be seen as a tendency toward the postmodern.

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<sup>9</sup> When speaking of the ethos of rebellion against and abandonment of the procedures and paradigms of the modern status quo, we would be remiss not to acknowledge John Cage and the pivotal point he holds in the shift out of modernism into postmodernism. Cage stands as an enigmatic figure in the modernist-postmodernist musical landscape; consensus holds him as a crucial catalyst between modern and postmodern music, though not all agree as to where he stands on the continuum. See (Bertens 1994; Hamm 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Kramer appears to take a polar opposite stance on nostalgia’s relationship to the postmodern from that of Holloway: “Nostalgia for the ‘good old days of tunes and tonality ... is not so much postmodernist as antimodernist ... An important first step in understanding musical postmodernism, therefore, is to distinguish it from nostalgic artworks.” He then proceeds to cite works by Rochberg and Torke, whom Holloway had classified in his lineage from modern to postmodern composers, as among those whose works are merely “nostalgic.” (Kramer).

In postmodern musical expression, there is no limit to the vast sound-worlds a composer may explore and utilize, and former boundaries between high and low, artistic and popular, here and there, are often defied or dismantled. When in 2000, as part of the “Passion 2000” project sponsored by Helmut Rilling and the Internationale Bachademie Stuttgart, Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov composed a *Pasión según San Marco*, he sought to express the Passion story through the eyes of the Latin American poor (Golijov 2002). His setting called for folk soloists, Argentinean percussion, and Afro-Cuban and *capoeira* dancers, supplementing the St. Mark text with excerpts from the psalms, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and Kaddish, as well as writings of Galician poet Rosalia de Castro. In 2008, Greek/Dutch composer Calliope Tsoupaki crafted a massive *St. Luke Passion*, drawing from her Orthodox religious background in sound and content and incorporating traditional Byzantine chanters, Palestinian vocals, and several Middle-Eastern instruments in the work, intermixing them with Western instruments and chorus. Brad and Doug Baillet, in the program notes of their 2014 *Gnostic Passion*, write that the musical influences on the work are a “collage-like melange of Stravinsky, Berlioz, Verdi, the Beatles, and the Dirty Projectors” (Baillet and Baillet 2014).

Another characteristic common to postmodern music, as we have noted, is the way former boundaries of structure, linearity, time, and narrative are similarly no longer accepted; they may be abandoned, fractured, or entirely re-envisioned. This is also made manifest in several of the new body of Passion settings: in Ēriks Ešēvalds’ *Passion and Resurrection*, set for string orchestra, soprano soloist, chorus, and solo quartet, the libretto is so free and non-linear that it barely constitutes a narrative as such, presuming the listener to be already familiar with the story. It contains no original textual material but quotes different sources and faith traditions (primarily Scripture and selected excerpted texts from the rites of the Orthodox and Catholic traditions); though some of the typical Passion texts are used, they are not employed in an expected way. Rather, this work forms a series of moments, scenes from the final two days of Jesus’ life on earth, which are loosely strung together to give the impression of the telling of the full story—which, in the case of Ešēvalds’ work, proceeds past the Crucifixion into the Resurrection. Chinese composer Tan Dun, in his *Water Passion*, begins his telling of the Passion not with the Passion story itself but with the baptism of Jesus, and he combines the Matthew narrative with scriptural interpolations and seven short texts of his own. Throughout his setting he incorporates themes and sounds of water: at the heart of his setting are seventeen sound-amplified bowls of water in the shape of a cross on the stage, and elements of movement and improvisation take key roles in the work.

Among postmodern composers, tonality may be embraced or dismissed to great extent, but it is rarely rejected or ignored as it was by modernist composers such as Boulez and Schönberg. The postmodern approach to tonality, however, seldom adheres to former eras’ concepts of functional harmony, though it may momentarily borrow from the harmonic structures of another era or even borrow passages of music entirely, or create its own systems of tonal organization. Interestingly, this element of freedom toward tonal systems can also manifest itself out of the above-mentioned incorporation of “folk” or popular musical styles and genres intermixed with more conventional Western “art music” compositional processes. For example, Tsoupaki’s inclusion of Byzantine chanting in her Passion setting brings with it the introduction of Orthodox micro-tones into the equal tempered system observed by the Western chorus and orchestra, and the traditional instruments and sonorities included not just in Tsoupaki’s setting but also those of Tan Dun and Golijov brought significant implications for the role tonality would play in each work. These are only a small number of examples demonstrating how postmodern cultural expressions can both break with and at the same time re-think their relationship with historical continuity; language and images from the grand narrative of the Enlightenment and onward remain, but they are significantly altered in their presentation and meaning and re-presented in a completely different milieu.

Considered side-by-side with ritual studies’ analysis of the nature of liminality, this summary of the salient characteristics of postmodernism, both in society and as it manifests in music, can be seen to have definite parallels with the movement from organized “normal” society to the undifferentiated

in-betweenness of liminal space. In the liminal world, time and space exist, but they do not adhere to the rules of linear progression of the outside world. Liminal beings are cut off from the narrative heritage of their social identity; through their liminal journey, they will have the messages of the transformational journey imprinted on them in different ways until their reemergence into society. While this can be accomplished by a complete *tabula rasa* erasure of all that had come before, it can also be accompanied by a puzzle-piece reshaping of the old “pieces” of existence into a new picture. It is also important to remember that everything in liminal space is symbolically mediated, and in the realm of symbol things do not necessarily mean what they appear to on the surface. Regardless of content, the symbolic ripping apart of the linear narrative of a people’s past existence and reimagining it anew, assimilating some aspects of the past while jettisoning others, is itself a powerful image for those moving through transformation.

The radical egalitarianism of postmodernism is, of course, evocative of one of the defining characteristics of liminality and Victor Turner’s state of *communitas*; in his study of liminal beings (Turner 1969, p. 97), he found that this sense of forming a new collective made up of all those moving through the liminal space together is one of the most powerful (and dangerous<sup>11</sup>) aspects of the liminal phenomenon. Drawn together by the journey they take together, all come to be viewed as of equal importance, with no hierarchy of one over the other. This sense of all ideas as being equally valid is of course one of contemporary culture’s war cries against the terror of postmodern “moral relativism” as opposed to “absolute truth” and begins to make plain the problems and dangers some elements of culture perceive regarding postmodernism as a whole. Viewed as a mode of thought, this terror could perhaps be reasoned with; viewed within the strategic and non-cognitive realm of liminal theory it must be acknowledged that this form of radical equality can seriously threaten the status quo and must, for those who value that status quo, be very carefully managed, bounded, and hedged. By extension, for those who have an interest in changing the shape, values, and priorities of the status quo, the journey into and through ritual and liminal space provides a vehicle to do so.

The postmodern shift in the artist’s relationship with the audience can be seen as another manifestation of the boundary-breaking radical equality of liminal *communitas*. Just as the breakdown of internal musical structure (and thus the emergence of a new anti-structure) can take place within the preservation of designated aural boundaries within a work of music, we also can see the expected roles and boundaries of the concert hall shifting. The audience is more likely to be seen, not as silent witnesses, but as active participants in the performance being generated, John Cage’s *4’33”* being of course the extreme example of this sort of boundary-bursting. Considered from the perspective of liminality, in this case the division between performer and audience is all but removed, and the audience is thus invited into the same liminal “state” as the performers, without hierarchy or differentiated status between them.

This blurring of roles and status between performer and audience can be accomplished in other, subtler ways as well. The historically normative concert hall has performers at one end of the room, raised or raked above floor level, and illuminated; the audience is separated from them, seated below them, and generally in darkness. As composers create works where this patterned norm is deliberately shifted, the symbolically mediated relationship between performer and audience is likewise changed, as in works such as David Lang’s *The Whisper Opera*,<sup>12</sup> Music on Main’s *The Orpheus Project*,<sup>13</sup> and even the current proliferation of musical “flash mobs” bringing performances to unlikely locales. John Luther Adams’ *Sila: The Breath of the World*, which premiered in July of 2014 at Lincoln

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<sup>11</sup> The danger to established social structure stems from the paradoxical power of liminal beings who, though they are in effect powerless and without identity or stature in liminal space, nonetheless have the power to choose whether to rejoin structural society; if they choose not to do so, or if the liminal arena is not carefully bounded, they have almost unlimited potential to take the anti-structure of liminal space into society’s structure and re-make or even un-make it.

<sup>12</sup> David Lang’s *The Whisper Opera* premiered in 2013 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

<sup>13</sup> Music on Main is a Vancouver musical organization led by David Pay, whose stated goal is “creating informal, intimate musical experiences” that take music outside of the concert hall. *The Orpheus Project*, a site-specific event wherein

Center's "Out of Doors" festival, sets five different ensembles scattered around a large outdoor area, with audience members able to move around and experience an entirely different perspective of the piece depending on where they stand. The proliferation of "sound installation art", by artists such as Maryann Amacher, Susan Philipz, and Brian Eno, not only removes the live performer from the performance but also irrevocably alters the image of "audience" from the seated-in-one-place spectator role that has long been the norm in concert-style musical performance. These public installations also subvert the role of intentionality in audience members, removing the concept of an individual *choosing* to attend a performance and instead setting up situations where listeners may wander unknowing into the midst of a musical event without necessarily deciding to do so. Again, this removal of hierarchy and unmaking of accepted social roles and positions is highly typical of liminal situations.

## 5. Conclusions

When approaching a study in which previously independent areas of scholarship are placed in dialogue with one another for perhaps the first time, it is inevitable that the interaction will produce many more questions than it will answers. The field of liminality studies itself is to all intents and purposes little more than half a century old; more recently, the pursuit of liminality as a phenomenon reaching far beyond purposeful ritual settings, particularly in the work of scholars like Catherine Bell and Robbie Davis-Floyd, has been taken up by varied disciplines, as scholars examine the ritual-like behavior and structures that seem to insert themselves into multiple layers of human social existence. This interdisciplinary study has attempted to draw together three threads of inquiry rarely combined and examined as one. The domain of ritual and ritual studies has primarily been in the worlds of theology and anthropology; postmodernism has generally been relegated to the areas of philosophy, literature, architecture, and the arts. Music of course has a home in both the theological and the performance-art worlds, but while "ritual music" is its own field of musical study within the theological realm, concert music has rarely been examined from a ritual perspective.

In the area of music, the interaction of musical performance and ritualized behavior is beginning to be studied on numerous levels, from examinations of how music functions to support or subvert ritual symbolism (e.g., [Foley 1995](#)) or build communal identity in contemporary religious ceremony (e.g., [Phelan 2008](#)), to studies of how the deployment of music in hegemonic power settings impacts the wider social order. Bruno Nettl's *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* ([Nettl 1995](#)) takes an interesting look at contemporary music schools using the tools of ethnomusicology and examines some of the ritualized aspects of higher education in musical fields. Some scholars are turning attention to the role of music in liminality and the role of liminality in music-making, many within the areas of ethnomusicological field studies: Irish scholars Helen Phelan and Caitríona Ní Shíocháin are studying indigenous music's connection to communal identity-building, Lynn Hooker ([Hooker 2007](#)) has undertaken a study of the social role of Romani musicians in Hungary, and Michael Bywater ([Bywater 2007](#)) has written about urban street musicians and their negotiation of public space within the context of social marginalization. Cathy Benedict ([Benedict 2007](#)) and June Boyce-Tillman ([Boyce-Tillman 2009](#)) have written on liminality in the context of music education, and Katherine Butler Brown ([Brown 2007](#)) and Stephen Cottrell ([Cottrell 2007](#)) have in their own way brought the conversation into our Western concert halls by attempting to assert that *all* music-making is in some way inherently liminal.

Still, the interaction of music studies and liminal studies remains in its early stages. There is as yet limited available published work in academia linking liminality and ritual transformation with the musical composition itself—that is to say, to music on the page, removed from the added dimension of performance and experience. This project has sought in its small way to address that lack: by examining

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the audience was invited to walk around and through various areas of the theater, was performed at The Culth in July of 2014.

the overall phenomenon of postmodern music from the perspective of liminal studies, exploring the clear resonances between them, and by examining the form and shape of the choral Passion setting, looking briefly at its re-invented approaches by a few postmodern composers. It has looked at the resurgence of the Passion as a serious genre of new choral music, and how that resurgence has closely coincided with the emergence of musical postmodernism as a dominant compositional force. As we have noted, the influences of musical postmodernism on the newly composed Passion settings of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have resulted in composers re-inventing the Passion form in intriguing ways. Liminality, we have seen how the Passion narrates an almost universal life-passage story in its depiction of Jesus' transformative journey to the tomb, echoing universal myths of sacrifice, loss, and transformation. The decisions composers make regarding how to interpret or tell the story, especially within the varied techniques and approaches common to musical postmodernism (and the patterns of social thought from which they grew), make this form an ideal template upon which to witness the overlaying of a ritual liminal process or journey upon a musical composition. The deep but freely negotiated relationship with which many postmodern composers consider the music and conventions of centuries past offers new and unexplored options for approaching a work such as a Passion setting, a form with its own rich history now being reshaped according to postmodern approaches.<sup>14</sup>

Also crucial is the concept that any instance of liminal space, whether or not the ritual nature of its generation was deliberate and recognized, paradoxically functions to both maintain societal and social cohesion and provide an arena for generating even the most dramatic social change. As we have noted, liminal space can be the matrix for either transforming an individual or group, or reinforcing the societal status quo to hold a community solidly grounded in an existing identity. A liminal space/time event entered but subverted by a "trickster" personality or idea can be derailed or shifted to new purposes and become suspended in an anti-structural state, not permitting the crossing of the threshold into the new state which the liminality was originally generated to bridge.

As liminal studies branch out and widen their scope, the question of what is or is not liminal is in peril of becoming as muddled an issue as that of postmodernism. Just as terms like "postmodernism" and "postmodernity" become enmeshed in conflicting definitions and perspectives, the concept of the liminal is at risk of becoming diffused and undefined, as its original role in ritual transition branches out into examinations of any marginal beings or power negotiation, political struggle, social upheaval, or in fact any time or place where normal hierarchical societal structure does not clearly and obviously function. Horvath and Szokolczai's "broken liminality" studies notwithstanding, this paper takes a position similar to that articulated by Thomassen (Thomassen 2009): that the extent to which liminality can be said to exist in time and space will be in direct proportion to the clarity of ritually defined progression in and through the space<sup>15</sup>, and to the value placed on transformation and change (or deliberate maintenance of continuity and stability) as articulated or unarticulated goals for the process.

One of course should not imply any actual *equivalence* between postmodernism and liminality, nor that the presence of some of liminality's salient characteristics in a piece of music necessarily means that the work in question traces a liminal process. Given the previous discussion of how society has progressed through modernism into the difficult-to-define period in which we now find ourselves, however, we must again return to Bernard Giesen and his "third project of modernity" (Giesen 2009): he suggests that all of modern Western culture is still working through its three "projects" of modern

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<sup>14</sup> This is of course not to imply that all postmodern music will of necessity be liminal, nor that the ability to *compose* liminally powerful works of music is limited to composers in postmodernity. Richard Wagner, for example, clearly knew and deployed mythic structure and liminal transformation in any number of his operas; it would be fascinating to explore how this liminal template might interact with various musics of various genres and centuries.

<sup>15</sup> Horvath's and Szokolczai's scholarship on "stuck" liminality in Communism stand as the exception that proves the rule, as careful ritual maintenance and perpetuation of the liminal state is what enables it to not end.

thought, resolving a crisis of identity with which we have been struggling through a century of world wars and widespread civil uncertainty. For Giesen, what our contemporary culture might view or label a messy postmodern period may be in essence a crucial step in our sociological growth. As with any sociological turn through history, it is inevitable that this striving will manifest itself in the artistic and musical expression of a people, whether the growth has progressed smoothly or gotten “stuck” somewhere in in-betweenness, looking for a way forward into new meanings and new certainties. Thus, striving to return to a path of healthy transformation into its next phase of existence, the artistic and musical manifestations of liminality we see in much contemporary music may play a significant role in that striving. The Passion form itself, especially in its postmodern rebirth into the body of contemporary repertoire, seems to be an ideal reflective matrix for this transformative process, one that invites both artists and scholars to question not only where we are currently situated as a society and a culture, but what may be the future goal of our transformation.

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