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The “sacred time” of the liminal phase: New perspective on rationalization in guidance

Anthropologists have described the middle, liminal phase of ritualized transitions from one social state (status, role, etc.) to another focusing on the characteristic *sacrum* aura that transcends time and space, in which a person becomes different. This narrative stems from guidance-oriented interest in such a “sacred” exceptionality, where duration is suspended, hierarchy vanishes, along with any established order that usually regulates social life. What significance, for guidance, can such knowledge, actualized through analysed narratives, have? Through the analysis of research material derived from three biographical studies, the text describes liminality-related experiences of *Erasmus* exchange students (*the Erasmuses*), city residents affected by the history of their city (*the people of Gdańsk*), and homeless persons (*the homeless*). The study demonstrates that the liminal time is present in the memory of the narrator-participants and that it has shaped their identity strategies for many years (as in the case of the people of Gdańsk), or has been dividing their world into two contrasting spheres (as in the case of the homeless), or has made them dependent on the liminal state, as in the case of Erasmus+ beneficiaries. The following description has been developed from the perspective of guidance and is accompanied by questions on the experience of a general threshold in which a counsellor and guidance hold a specific place and significance. The significance – its “point(lessness)” – is manifested through following the “educational” feature of the analysed statements; the issue of learning from liminality. The studies relating to guidance and learning in the situation of suspension, involving the order based on social inequalities, which are the primary source of social problems, may lead to conclusions further grounding the hope – not only in terms of pedagogy and guidance – for a more shared, better world.

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This narrative involves a kind of research-oriented re-visiting, since I analyze my old narrative material derived from my empirical research conducted in 2006–2013. Such a methodology of re-visiting constitutes an ethnographic technique consisting in a review of qualitative data based on new goals and research problems (Bura-woy, 2003, p. 674). The technique itself varies depending on the type of sources

that are revisited. We can distinguish, for example, such re-visiting based on a biography, place, institutions, etc. It has been universally used in anthropology and is now becoming increasingly popular among sociologists and scholars from other disciplines (see Burawoy, 2003). Due to open and globally accessible (through the Internet) archives, such approach has become more and more popular in contemporary, broadly understood social sciences (Mauthner, Parry, & Backett-Milburn, 1998; Bishop, 2009; Filipkowski, 2015). The approach suits me well, but I am no purist when it comes to applying it. The re-visiting that is presented in this narrative is my third research experience of that type (Mendel, 2017; 2018), each of which has been an expression of an increasingly free application of the idea of a second, differently-oriented analysis of the research material collected on an earlier occasion – rather than a strict adherence to a methodology that, in fact, is purposefully unspecified, guiding the researchers without actually binding their inquiry (see e.g.: Burawoy, 2003; Filipkowski 2015). The research framework of my re-visits is always determined by a different research problem, and their common principle consists in using a second-hand – i.e. used at least once before – qualitative research material.

The ‘second-hand’ narrative material in this case derives from published research, thus below I extensively quote from these publications (Mendel, 2007; Mendel, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Mendel, 2013). The first of these studies was done in 2013, based on bibliographical material collected from students who participated in the student exchange program *Erasmus* (hence I refer to them as the *Erasmuses*). These travelling students offered narratives of their study visits, describing a state of liminality, characterized by timelessness, or being in time that anthropologists defined as sacred. The second study, in the order adopted in this text, was done in 2010, when we analysed the identity of Gdańsk-inhabitants, constructed by means of biographical narratives (*the people of Gdańsk*). Our point of departure for these stories was the history of a small street and a square called “Pohulanka”, which in 1946 was the site of a spectacular execution of those who had brutalized the prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp. Even though both the street and the square grew wild with plants, over time the memory of the event – formative for the people of Gdańsk – has, paradoxically, taken on a form of collective ignorance and denial. The sacred time, emerging during ritualized behaviour aimed at survival in extreme conditions brought about a selective memory work. It continues and is still present in the narratives of the research participants, who learned the ways of forgetting – as Marc Augé (2009) dubbed them – from their former life in liminality. The third study that provided the material that turned out to be of interest for this research was conducted in 2006–2007 (*the homeless*), enabled a description – based on biographical narratives – of homelessness heterotopies, which according to Michel Foucault are characterized by a suspension of traditional time. The homeless, living in conditions of liminality, offered images of a “pivoting” *sacrum*, the time that – while remaining “sacred” – also sanctified their Agambenian “bare life”.

Organization and the aims of analysis

Apart from description of a “sacred time” and “sacred places” in biographical narratives that I extracted from the material collected during the above studies, here I wish to pursue an aim that is important mainly from the counselling point of view, which I see in line with the concept of guidance put forward by Alicja Kargulowa (2005). I am interested both in its grounding in the pedagogical perspective offered by the author, and in an emphasis placed on its distinctiveness from co-counselling. Kargulowa perceives guidance as a more temporary process, in contrast to counselling which is more long-term and, in terms of perspective, organized around the practice recurrent analysis of specific problems, repetition (Kargulowa 2005, pp. 36–46). I agree that guidance concerns people who – in general – are able to cope with their life problems, and is a “social event that consists n temporary action perfecting the behaviour of individuals or groups through the advisor’s participation in solving the problems faced by those that seek their advice” (Kargulowa 2005, p. 197). Thus, the advisor’s role focuses on assisting the person seeking advice in more effective achievement of their goals, often within the framework of their long-term activities (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2005, p. 132). Summing up, in relation to my previous positions on the definition of guidance (Mendel, 2016), I understand it to be temporary action addressed to individuals and groups oriented towards perfecting solutions to problems identified by them. It is an action that is undertaken in response to a more or less specific needs of people who seek advice (Kozdrowicz, 2003, pp 319–320). I agree with those experts in the field who emphasize the informative-instruction character of guidance (Kargulowa, 2005; Kozdrowicz, 2003; Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2005). It is not a therapy nor resocialization. It assists those who can assist themselves, and who – by looking for opportunities to make this process more effective – use what the advisor has to offer.

This is the approach that I apply in the analyses presented in this text. I make my point by stressing the present challenges faced by guidance that will enable it to meaningfully react to the contemporary conditions of a life in crisis, when the sense of crossing beyond a threshold appears as necessary both for individuals and for groups, and smaller and larger communities. By highlighting the statements relating to learning from narrators’ own condition of “being in a liminal space”, I relate educational aspects of liminal conditions, meaningful for the narrators and for the social dimension of their experience, where advising action seems to have its present and future significance. It will thus be an attempt – grounded in the perspective of guidance – of reconstructing this experience. I am interested in how the narrators-participants dealt with liminal situations and whether they sought advice. This has been expressed mainly through questions that will hopefully find answers in the re-reading of the narratives, oriented towards guidance.

Ritual „sacred time”

In line with the orientation of my analyses – looking for “sacred time” in bibliographical narratives and for educational aspects of its experience by narrators – their subject matter is liminality (from Latin *limine* – a threshold). Crossing over a threshold, an experience that is always in a way difficult, is usually ritualized in cultural practices. Rituals can be seen as a universal cultural common good that enables survival in difficult states, including those in which survival seems impossible (Gennep, 2006; Turner, 2010). They suspend normalcy – including the ordinary time – conjure up the *sacrum*, “sanctify” what happens within it, i.e. most generally, forays beyond typical behaviours, inadequate for the state that is being experienced and not providing a solution to it. The ritual creates an opportunity to be productive, as a sacred exemption; an exception protected by the presence of *sacrum*; the excess that takes place beyond time and that serves as a threshold, the crossing of which will enable a return to a better normality. This brief description of liminality is inalienably characteristic of all ritualized practices, of every ritual.

I wish to point out that I understand rituals – just like anthropologists of organizations – as collections of symbols, not only objects or devices, but also specific acts, performed more or less systematically and linked together by specific, difficult situations (see e.g. Kostera, 2003, p. 168). In particular, because of the special nature of my research problem, I assume a classical interpretation of rituals – following Arnold van Gennep and Victor W. Turner – referring to liminality and highlighting their meaning as culturally universal transitions (Gennep, 2006; Turner, 2005; 2010). In van Gennep’s rites of passage theory developed by Turner, which involves – as the those authors say – all domains and areas of social life, we always deal with three phases of a ritual passage from one status to another; from one role to another, “from one state to another”, from one world (cosmic or social) to another (Gennep, 2006, p. 36). In short, subsequent rites, phases of every ritual – felt more or less as liminal, and in fact liminal in nature – can be represented as follows: 1) pre-liminal phase – exclusion from the present state (separation), 2) liminal phase – period of marginality, transience, 3) post-liminal phase – inclusion, involving adaptation to the new status, role, entering into a new state and new world (Gennep, 2006, pp. 36–37). We can ask whether assistance from the Other is always necessary in such process? Is guidance indispensable?

In rituals, as I mentioned, there is a marked presence of *sacrum*, but it is not a universal category, but one that manifests in specific situations (Gennep, 2006, p. 37). While explaining this category, Van Gennep distinguished between the status of a traveller and highlighted the specificity of *sacrum* in travelling. He stated that a person who lives in his or her house, within their clan, is in fact staying within the *profanum*. The reality of *sacrum* is accessed when they set on a journey and find themselves as foreigners in the vicinity of an unknown place (Gennep, 2006, p. 37). However, such “sacralization” is not an inherent condition of a traveller. There is

a phenomenon of “the pivoting of the sacred”, changeability that stems from changing one’s place in the general community. Everyone who experiences such changes [for example by making themselves familiar with the new place – MM] can observe this pivoting and where they once saw *sacrum*, they may later see *profanum*, and *vice versa* (Gennep, 2006, p. 38). Since such changes disrupt social life and individual life, van Gennep emphasized the ‘blessed’ function of rituals, constituting – as I mentioned – a common good, pointing out to their goal, which consists in limiting the negative impact of the “pivoting of the sacred” (Gennep, 2006, p. 37).

“Sacred time” within liminality is the time of forging unusual communities; creation of atypical ties, which do not rely on hierarchy that is a mark of social structures, because hierarchy vanishes in these circumstances. Turner based his description of such communities on his research on the individual and social experience of a liminal state, sacred through exemption from the existing orders. Turner wrote that liminal conditions and people living through them eluded classificatory network, which usually sets a place for states and positions within a given cultural space. Liminal beings exist neither here nor there. They are located in-between positions set and ordered by the law, custom, convention and liturgy (Turner, 2010, p. 116). The moment in which they exist is the moment “in time and beyond time”, combining the sacred and the profane, unity and fraternity (Turner, 2010, p. 116), within a temporary disappearance of ranks and differences (liminality is characterized by the fact that it does not last...). For Turner, the community that exists within the vanished structures of subordination and power was *communitas*, and he juxtaposed it with the society – *societas*, which will have rebuilt its structure in the final phase of the ritual (Tokarska-Bakir, 2010, p. 19). *Communitas* thus constitutes an unforgettable lived community of individuals, who experience the happiness (and sometimes the unhappiness) of freedom while exempt from routine orders and disciplines; a community of people equal in status, as they have been temporarily stripped of status (or for a while have only rudimentary status) (Turner, 2010, p. 117). Such an unforgettable experience lived in “sacred time” must manifest in diverse forms of individual and social self-expression.

My analyses allow me to confirm one of the ways in which they manifest, i.e. as part of biographical narratives. The impulse to rely on them in counselling or guidance comes with the helplessness of an individual and the assistance from an advisor, who – by accompanying the individual in their peregrinations through their biography takes on a role of a “competent operator”, and by constructing the advice – helps the individual to achieve liberation from the experienced problems. In this particular case, the impulse came from the researcher.

Rituals that help go through liminal experiences, accompanying positive and negative sides of the phenomenon of pivoting or *oscillation*, may be likened to *oscillators* – generating movement, frequencies, that help an object retain balance while it moves alongside the pivoting – oscillating *sacrum*. I describe such a ritual later, demonstrating through narrative excerpts how they transported narrators to places

such as symbolic and material home, familiar and temptingly safe, to spaces lurking with the freedom of the *communitas*, there and back again – from *communitas* to *societas*; back to the structure from the lack of structure, from place to space that – familiar and domesticated – is no longer a space and becomes the traveller’s place, home, regardless of where it is located in material reality¹. The participants’ narratives demonstrate how they coped in liminal situations, how they familiarized themselves with places and how they lived through the moments which were “in time and beyond time”, combining the sacred and the profane, the unity and the fraternity they validated.

The Erasmuses – new space-times: fascination, adaptation, contemplation and self-analysis

In all the narratives presented by the students and lecturers participating in the study, while they reported on the transformation that occurred due to their travel, there was a topic that emerged towards the end of the narrative that related to the ritualization of the change of place; a ritualized transition from the state of “being at home” to the state of “being away from home”. In the context of van Gennep’s work, it was very interesting that the participants never spoke of just one Erasmus-program journey, and their efforts to repeat the experience took on a ritual form, becoming a condition of the education traveller’s identity. The narrated liminal states and the rituals that accompanied them indicate an addiction to such experiences. *Pivoting* is seemingly beneficial and the next journeys, as a way to leave behind the *profanum* and rejoin the *sacrum*, constitute a desired activity.

This could be explained in such context by another reference to Turner’s reflection on the *communitas*, as discovered by the anthropologist, shaped under the influence of Van Gennep’s thought. The desire and such persistent repetition of the condition of “being away from home” among the participants taking part in the Erasmus exchange program, may constitute their desire to achieve freedom afforded by the *communitas*. The language through which we distinguish two categories that appear here: the place and the space, comes from Yi-fu Tuan (1987). According to this renowned scholar of the phenomenology of space, within a subject’s life we can see two dialectically bound, enmeshed approaches to reality. One is expressed through attachment to “places”, the second in a desire for a “space” that is associated with freedom. Approaching it (for example through travel, as I mentioned following van Gennep) soon results in the subject’s action aiming to domesticate it. A domesticated space becomes a place and is no longer a challenge. However, once the subject finds him or herself in a place, grounded in a place – he or she feels “set” and pines for space, which – again – lures him or her by promising freedom.

¹ Here I use the categories of place, space and domestication derived from concepts proposed by Yi-Fu Tuana (1987), to which I shall return later

Transition from place-to-place can thus be understood as changing places, but also as a Tuan-style game of space-place that plays out within the subject. The similarity to the theory of ritual indicates that the game is being played within the formula of universalized cultural practices. I resort to categories of space and place to say something about these practices in relation to the educational dimensions of being in a liminal “sacred time”. I thus become sensitive to the significance of the pivoting or ‘oscillating’ movement, connected with the mobility of the *sacrum*, with its changeable *loci*.

The “sacred time” in *communitas* is the title for the reconstructive description of ritual practices (presented below; in motion: from place to space), based on a few selected fragments of narratives, but I would like to point out that, except one, in all the statements there emerged the theme of striving for space, remaining in the state of journey, i.e. experiencing changes of place, being “away from home”.

From “sacred time” to ordinary time, from *communitas* to *societas*, is the title of the next section, which presents a description of the space – place movement, created from excerpts related to a ritualized “wandering around the city”. They can be understood as the second phase of the ritual, which consists in gaining familiarity with a space, seen as creating a new place, making it its own and safe, “domesticating” space. This phase, however joyful and carefree (as it is usually described by the participants), happening with the lightness resulting from the disappearance of a structure in a liminal state, inevitably spells the end of *communitas* and – in line with van Gennep’s “pivoting of the sacred”, a return to structure, to *societas*, to ordinary time and ... home.

“Sacred time” in *communitas*

Małgorzata, a trainee English teacher, described how the ritual worked – as a pivot for a certain community where belonging was predicated on the constant pursuit of space. Within the theoretical take on ritual, it might be an expression of longing for the “liminal being” state that makes *communitas* possible. Małgorzata and her friends form a kind of diaspora that constitutes itself within this experience (a *communitas* community, scattered in the *societas*, and always ready to travel). Małgorzata, like Róża, Alina, Justyna, Marek and others, associates them with identity work and in her narrative, defines herself through her need to move²:

as far as that traveling is concerned, I don't know, may it is the question of my personality that I... not that I'm not attached to the place, but I don't have such a need to live in Poland, to live in the UK (...), I feel the need to move, to go to India, Japan (...). I have lots of friends who graduate, complete this course and leave, spend half a year in South America, moving from one country

² While quoting from the participants I render, as far as possible and useful, the stylistic, lexical and grammatical form of their narratives.

to another, teaching English there, earning a living, someone else is in China, a friend is planning to go to Japan now, right, another friend is now working there as a teacher...it gives me such a feeling that I can go on, that it is a start to something more, then “I’ll decide what’s next. Elsewhere, the same student explained belonging to such a community with her upbringing: It looks like that: “I’m a daughter” of a sailor, so travelling is in my blood, I can say so, I’ve been travelling since my earliest childhood and because my dad used to be a sailor, he always insisted that I learn English.

Perhaps the same factor was at play in other narratives, which, however, did not represent it in any way that I could notice it.

Justyna explained this, often adding: *this is my urge to learn, already being there.* She blamed herself for having such an urge, an unbridled cognitive curiosity and presented her educational explorations in new places also in such terms. She had a sense of not doing what she had wanted, even though when she was abroad, she kept herself very busy, teaching children, hiking (she describes herself as a tourist). She thought, however, that she would have a little more time there than at home, that this will allow her to develop all her interests in the context of this different place. She has been doing all of this, but when it happens in a situation where she is chasing a clearly “diagnosed addiction” to travel, she can never achieve satisfaction and serenity; perfection is never fully attained, pursuing it constitutes a goal in itself. The pivot, as a ritual of the “calm” opening of a space, of making it familiar and of creating places, only to leave them for the next opening space, can act as a balm for a hurried subjectivity. In this passage, one can see how helpful these ritualized practices are, for example, when one misses one’s family, left at the “starting point”. Justyna told me about the liminal phase, in which – literally and figuratively – she was “cut off” from the world, which served her well:

for a long time, during the first months of my stay in particular, I did not use the Internet, just to be, like, completely cut off, to really benefit from all that was there. Everyone was wondering how I could not miss my family at all, and I’m quite close to my family, so it was also unimaginable for most of my friends and really, they could not understand how it was possible that I lived like this, that I cut myself off and just didn’t miss [them]. And in the meantime it looked like I was just busy getting to know this rhythm of [these] places, I was there only for four months – after all, I had to see everything, to go everywhere, so that was how it happened.

Coming back to the soothing function of the rites of passage, it should be added that having a goal – a dream, an ideal – is what brings calm and gives strength to overcome adversity. It gave the traveller “wings” – among the eleven participants, most of them had such far-reaching goals. Justyna said:

as far as my expectations are concerned, they are so general – broadening my horizons, as if approaching this ideal from my childhood to study through travelling by experiencing everything.

I also find explanation in the narrative by one of the academic lecturers, a scholar of religion:

I think I'm looking for, apart from such basic things that I need to live, and in which I function, like where to put my head, where to take a shower, where I can eat, yes, we all sooner or later need to look for that and our life revolves around it, we have to eat something at least twice a day and lie down once in a while, get some rest, take a shower. But I think I'm getting into new situations, it's because of my character, I like to visit new places all the time, if I'm going somewhere all the time, it's because there's something I need to find in them, experience, maybe visit someone – but I know there are people who go on vacation to the same place over and over again. I wouldn't even think of going to the same place, I have to explore new areas of reality and it's not about forgetting the old ones, but I have a feeling that out there, something new will help me see a new aspect of my own life.

The condition of this narrator's life is a constant change of place (*I like to visit new places all the time, if I'm going somewhere all the time*), moving around, as a result of which – as the quote suggests – the author has a sense of gaining better self-knowledge. In the “away-from-home” happiness of belonging to liminal beings and *communitas*, it is possible to speak of an experience of depth. Turner confirmed this by juxtaposing numerous binary oppositions, as features connected through the opposition of *communitas* vs. *societas*. The list includes (apart from the expected: ‘transition-state’) also: ‘holiness – laicity’, ‘sacred knowledge – technical knowledge’, ‘continuous reference to mystical powers – periodic reference to mystical powers’, ‘acceptance of pain and suffering – avoidance of pain and suffering’, ‘humility – pride stemming from social position’, ‘no selfishness – selfishness’ (Turner, 2010, p. 124–125). It can be assumed that many of these features of liminal existence within the *communitas* of travel may have been tempting for a scholar interested in theology, who saw Christ as one of the wanderers.

Ewa, who at the time studied Art, described her experience using the language of constant movement, as if she were creating a sequence of mimetic representations, geographically spreading, extrapolating a ritual. It happened – more or less – following the scheme: departure (leaving familiar space – place) – arrival (entering space, making it familiar transforming it into a place) – departure (leaving the place). Even though these spaces and places were sometimes diametrically different, the ritualistic scheme worked and, at some point, managed to abstract the sublime space, the universal space of one's own subjectivity, the free identity of “Ewa-within-space”, constantly domesticating it, and thus dreaming about the next “Rotterdams”

or “Warsaws”. The boring, small town of Delft, which she initially had said she hated, sensing her overpowering grounding in it, which occurred when Delft entrapped her with its all-encompassing tininess; next, the escape to the crowded, tempting anonymity of the space of Rotterdam; finally, Warsaw – a universalized space of freedom, freedom from place. Everywhere she went, Ewa repeated an internalized ritual. She felt wonderful in its liminal phase, feeling *communitas*.

The space itself... she said, emphasizing the sacrum of her experience, in Rotterdam I just felt foreign, because I live in the city, but there is no, there is no comparison, to be honest. It's just that the sheer number of people is amazing, and the signals that were there, I was a little bit overwhelmed, tired, and I felt a bit alienated, feeling that I don't take part in that life somehow, that I just walk around, watch, try a little bit, using my own pace, then a different pace, and only after a year, I started feeling good there. Before that I said: No, not Rotterdam, it's so tiring. No, I don't like it, I don't like it at all, and it was only after a year that I noticed that I liked being there (...). I wonder, when came to Warsaw, there close to the station, but only close to the station, there were a lot of foreigners, and I felt as if at home then, after a whole year in the Netherlands, because it was normal for me, that it is so, that it is like this on the street, well, [people] from all over the world just pass me by (...). When I came to Warsaw, I thought that before, I would have felt lost. I used to feel like this in Warsaw when I was leaving the [railway] station, for example, there was a sense of chaos, there was traffic. Now, I got used to such a city. Maybe the traffic is not the same as in Rotterdam, but near the railway station, somewhere in the very centre of the city, that's how I got used to it anyway, I guess, I just got used to it, and [before] it used to be something very strange for me. Of course, Rotterdam is not my place either, no, but you know what, I liked this pulse, this rhythm, and yet here I had more of the space itself.

Next, Ewa “pivoted”, describing – as if perversely – her attitude to Delft, which she did not like:

I don't know, I think maybe in Delft it was more like that, although, you know, it was so beautiful in some way, or familiar, close to me by its beauty, so moving, sometimes just too much, it was powerful. I couldn't, I just thought that somebody was fooling me, that somebody was trying to trick me, that there is no such thing. In this way, it was so familiar to me, close to me, but not in the sense of the atmosphere of this place. Maybe I was just stealing some buildings for myself, or stealing some places, no, just because they were mine, because they spoke to me like that.

Ewa's narrative shows her as a person whose lives by “moving”, unable to “sit still” in one place, she hates growing roots:

That's why I decided to go to Rotterdam now, because I can't imagine being frustrated there that there is nowhere to go. There's not so much going on here either, but I can come up with something, like a ride to Gdańsk or something, and there I wasn't trapped in some way in that village, I didn't even live in Delft, I had to commute there, but it was ten minutes ride by bike, that wasn't too crazy.

This was actually the same Ewa, whom I had previously described as an exception among those who were in pursuit of constant travel – because she expressed the change as follows: *there I found out that, gosh, I was fine at home, it was not boring, but I missed something, that people are more important than the place.* These words seem to make the whole point, generalizing the experience of a long break from “place” to the freedom of “space”; the end of the path that the ritualized behaviour described above have turned not only into a space-time that was bearable for Ewa, but which have also shaped her readiness for structure, for entering into an order of *societas*. The excerpt quoted above seems to conclude the statement of an autonomous subject, taking up the challenges of space and, at the same time, an agent creating places. The subject's position and, consequently, the way in which the subject experienced the “pivoting” have changed. Such pivots may support identity work by rendering the subject autonomous. What is guidance and how does it work in these conditions? I will revisit this issue later in this text.

From “sacred” to common time, from *communitas* to *societas*

In each of the analysed excerpts there was a theme of wandering around the city to make it familiar. The wandering was marked by the pivoting *sacrum*. I will quote several excerpts describing such wandering.

Aleksandra, a student, talked about how she made a city more familiar by wandering around, which would not be possible without a bus. Here, the bus plays the role of a symbolic vehicle, ritually moving her from space to place, from the unknown and free – into the domesticated, familiar and enclosed, due to the sense of security that she creates. The wandering constitutes an educational activity and research; Aleksandra learned by wandering and analysing the reality. At the end of the quote below, she emphasized her amazement at the world that she had been studying, a curiosity that had been driving her cognitive inquiry. First of all, however, she talked about the vehicle:

I liked to take the bus and observe (...) You could really feel more at home. (...) There is really a lot to see fantastic surroundings, the fact that you can travel and take a train, after an hour you are in Bruges, in Lueven, these are also places worth visiting, worth seeing, because time has stopped there. Renaissance and medieval buildings have been preserved, and there are also things that we will not see here, that is in Poland, because they are not there. There are definitely

more such historic buildings preserved there. There is also Art Nouveau. Some places were fantastic. As for the places, which were also incredibly surprising for me, together with a friend we found that the Belgians have such a strange habit, first of all, they do not close their curtains, but it is not only Belgians, they do not close them at all, so that when you pass by, it is difficult not to look into someone's kitchen or living room, and you know, on the one hand it attracts the eye, it is hard to resist, and not to take a look, and on the other hand you feel stupid, because somebody is sitting there lounging on the sofa, you know, drinking a beer or something else. That's one thing. And second, they're doing fantastic exhibitions in the window sills and it was so shocking for me – “the best” things they have, because they display such different kitschy porcelain animals. For example, someone there had a picture from “Grease”, surrounded by flowers, on a golden background, next to it some dwarfs, some hideous glowing bugs and all this together, all together, on the inside of the windowsill (...). And another thing is that you often couldn't figure out what is what, for example, the hairdresser looked like a florist, because the shop was full of plants and basically there was no information about it being a hairdresser salon, there was a nail studio ad somewhere displayed in a window, and there were dresses and other wonders. And again, these terrifying dolls, with just one eye – again, it was supposed to be a hairdresser, yes, “Paris look”, and from what I remember, there were such terrifying dolls, such as – oh mother – from ancient times, in dusty clothes, terrifying and absolutely not encouraging. And that looked so provincial, right in the city centre, next to the super salons of, I don't know, fashion designers, Dries Van Noten, where you just have one dress on display, and you walk around these things so carefully. Such interesting juxtapositions, I wonder where it comes from.

Alina, a teacher, in her wandering around the city – which transformed the city from space into a place, a domesticated space – used her own bicycle as a symbolically meaningful means of transport. She said: *I felt settled there like (...) I had a bicycle (...). When I had such an unmarked bicycle (...) a bicycle without the rental sign.* This ritualistic vehicle helped her to make the space familiar and make it her own place, where – without the sign of the rental company – not only her bicycle, but also she “dissolved”, becoming like the surrounding space, which thus ceases to be – can no longer be – “unknown, strange, alien” and thus “holy”. The *sacrum* escapes with the familiarizing. Alina, in this pivoting aura, thus constructed herself in the following way:

I like to be anonymous, I like people around me, but I don't..., I would be so burdened having to say “good morning” to everyone, to talk for a while, just because you have to. It tires me a lot. When I move somewhere, I do not make friends, I want to be an element, but without... without a network, without relations. And when I am somewhere, not the place someone suggested, someone's

favourite place. I prefer... prefer to get to know someone's view, because otherwise, I would have only my own. And when I am somewhere else, I ask [people] where they like to go, after all, this is their city. Where are the cool places? In this way, I want to recreate this way of seeing this place through... through these people. I also like, when I go out with friends here, it's also nice to see the Tri-City from the perspective of someone from Gdynia, someone from Sopot – where they go, what music is there (...). I do not have mine. I'm afraid that if I have mine, I will miss all the rest.

Such an identity construct made by Alina resembles the “free electron”, without a network of connections, which she does not want to weave, so as not to lose “something”. What is it? The ritual theory suggests that the fear concerns the miracle of the *communitas* achieved in liminality, and resulting in the narcotic, addictive presence of the *sacrum*.

For Ewa, familiarity was achieved through wandering around the city, which, if done in company, gave her a full sense of domestication:

Kasia came to visit me, we went on walks, she was afraid, I say, listen, you know, it's just dark, there's nobody there, let's say some backstreets, you know, I mean, I felt very safe, because there, nothing could have happened for sure, no. But Kasia, for example, reacted as if we were in some forlorn place, some kind of, you know, forgotten by all, somewhere at the end of the world, gosh.

Wandering around in search of one's own places is a kind of tactic chosen by Karol to gain familiarity with the new space of an academic. A little like the “ordinary people” described by Michel de Certeau (2008), Karol, by gaining his own autonomy in a given space, finds his own paths, independent of the well-trodden paths which have been set for him³. This is how Karol did it: *I mean, I had my places there. When I get to some new spaces, I immediately try to find [several] places where I will feel more or less at home.* Later in his narrative, Karol continued to draw his map, which he created then, creating “his” places, making the space familiar in a planned and systematic and tactical way, which he implemented independently from the strategies devised by university's planners, and perhaps even in spite of them. The routes of this research-oriented and educational wandering bypassed the lecture halls. There was a dorm on the route:

I have a picture in my head – I'm sitting there, my two roommate colleagues are already asleep, they went to bed early, I'm sitting in front of the computer, it's dark in the room, only the computer and monitor are on, and I'm sitting there around midnight, writing. I remember it very well (...) [this was] my good place, this room, when they were already sleeping, I had peace and quiet and could write. Next, the second place that was important (...) the church run by

³ As part of the student exchange, universities plan where students will stay and the routes that lead there, Erasmus students are provided with maps – their “own” topographies.

the Dominicans in XYZ was such a place, although the one in Gdańsk is also important for me, but because of its environment, activities, such matters, less for spirituality, because I don't even have the time, I just look around and there is always someone saying “hello”. And there, I would come and sit in the back at a mass, where there were only few people. I had time to concentrate and I didn't know anyone there, it was so quiet, calm. I connected with it from a completely different side, so it was also important for me, and walks to Malta, because I often took – well, once or twice a week – I took Father Cyprian's dog for two- or three-hour walks to Malta and there, I already knew all these... It is a big park, not Malta, but the Citadel, and I was walking in the park at the Citadel, and there were also places for me where I calmed down, where I walked far, because it was in the autumn, so these leaves, Rudy [the dog] in these leaves, and I talked to this dog a lot in this park, yes. I had such a good time, so all of this shows that it was a time of thinking and learning about people, something like that.

De Certeau calls such systematic, purposeful practice of wandering using one's own paths “tactics”, which he ascribes to residents, while the “strategies” are the domain of city planners, who, in a way, have the bird's view and see little. Karol also stressed the time factor, which is key in de Certeau's description of tactics: as procedures whose value derives from the importance given to the category of time – the circumstances that turn a specific moment of action into an advantageous situation, the speed of movement that re-orient the space (Certeau 2008, 39). Wandering, using specific techniques⁴, is thus exploring space in time that is unusual – and so, in a way, “sacred” – as it involves a specific configuration of possibilities. Using these possibilities becomes an emancipatory educational activity – catching a moment unlike all others. Familiarizing the space can thus be seen as overcoming its oppressive character, linked to the sense of place-making in time that became the moment of freedom, a celebration. For the *Erasmuses* – the narrators remaining in the state of liminality, place-making happens within such a “celebration”, in liminal time⁵ – the time of educational peregrinations exempted from ordinary rules.

As Karol stressed, and as is also the case in other narratives, visiting students, unlike the local ones, “have time” and thus can, indeed, wander around the city, i.e. the university town where they came to study. Their studies have a completely different course and content. As they wander, they engage in action-based study, in their magically sacred time, exploring the space and making it familiar, making

⁴ The tactics of wandering, which I present using Karol's narrative, were present in all other narratives, and most stressed by Karol, Róża, Magda, Ewa, Małgorzata, Aleksandra, Justyna, Alina and Marek.

⁵ I wish to point out that references to ritual time have been more developed in Turner's work than van Gennep's. For Turner, it is a principle that organizes the transition (see the terms he used for specific phases and moments). In his description of the liminal phase, Turner highlighted reflection on *liminal beings*, having no property and no possessions – they are not subject of the *normal* flow of time – and only exist within a ritual, i.e. a moment in time and beyond time (2010, p.116).

their first or yet another university town “their own”. It is also noteworthy that this familiarity with the cities – most often gained through the tactics of wandering – is an expression of subjective agency in relation to a place; in fact, taking place beyond strategies, beyond the study programs to be completed during the student exchange, beyond the “credit points”, etc. As Karol said about his studying during his trip:

I used to walk here and there, go to church or walk the dog in XYZ, or somewhere, and for me, it was a time of deepening knowledge, not just scientific knowledge, but also knowledge about myself or something, the time to write letters. It was a time of looking more in-depth into some things related to the spirit, the soul, I don't know, with myself and so on. That time...something else has changed in my understanding of how I learn. As I said, I don't know, just a greater autonomy in all that, and some awareness of the fact that studies are about mobilizing oneself somehow and wanting and searching. And... then I discovered it and had more time to devote myself to it, yes, because I had no other obligations, apart from eating. I had a lot of time to sit in reading rooms or in parks and somehow manage my development, but it wasn't anything crazy, not like I suddenly climbed some mountains, only small hills and that was that.

This context raises some guidance-related issues, including the question of forms of assistance (type of instruction, type of information material, etc.) in relation to the subjective being in a place, the subject's place-making in a city or in another space. Reflection on this area of guidance seems to be a contemporary challenge. If researchers look into it, they can develop “spatialised thought” within the guidance theory and practice, which would situate it interestingly within the so-called “spatial turn”.

The people of Gdańsk – denial

In this section I present “sacred time” that emerged in the narratives of Gdańsk inhabitants, analysed for the study of the way in which they constructed their post-war, local identity. When I consider the quality of “Gdańsk-ness”, I think about social memory of the city's residents, which – in the study *Pohulanka 1946*⁶ – appears mostly in their narratives. Thus, it is to a large extent a memory composed of private memories, as described by Lesław Michałowski. He also included in it the “notorious Gdańsk prose” (by Stefan Chwin and Paweł M. Huelle). It relates to places – the districts of Gdańsk – that acquire the status of a periphery – i.e. places that still present a mystery. When we compare it with very personal experiences of the novels' protagonists, we get a glimpse of a fictional city. However, it is full of real

⁶ The title of the project: *POHULANKA 1946: Tożsamość gdańszczan. Budowanie na (nie)pamięci* [Gdańsk residents' identity – constructing a (non)memory].

street names, shops and characters. This is real Gdańsk, but very private – not to say “intimate” (Michałowski, 2010, p. 260).

In this sense, private memories of the respondents constitute a social memory, as there is an exchange between them, they are connected with each other and subject to mutual influence. According to Sławomir Kaprański: “social memory does not have to mean «sharing the memory» (common memory), but it involves individuals creating their own views on the past through interaction with others” (Kaprański, 2010, p. 19). This interactive theory of social memory informs my analyses, not least because they record, in a “still photo” way, the existing configurations. In particular, this theory examines the relationship between memory and identity, taking into account that “what is socially remembered always appears on the verge of silence about what – again socially – has been forgotten, erased and excluded, also by power structures” (Kaprański, 2010, p. 19). In “me being here”, memory is key, but it is at the same time forgetfulness, non-remembering. Hence the expression I used in the title of the primary project: “(non)memory”, embracing not one mode, but different, multiple memory modes. Their interplay can describe the state of social subjects, saying a lot about their identity as “being local”.

In this context, it is noteworthy to consider what Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek noted:

“It rarely happens,” they wrote, “that communities sharing the same territories, or neighbouring territories, have clear consciences. Their identity is usually burdened with the memory of violence – experienced or committed. In the latter case, [...] there is quite often a tendency to forget; on the other hand, if the former is the case, it is in the culture’s interest to dwell in the past, to remind and to seek that others remember as well” (Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009, p. 56).

Violence suffered is therefore associated with a tendency to remember, to demand memory. The attitude of the affected community and the circumstances of the interplay of space and memory create the social Self in the place where the violence was committed; this is how the “locality” is created. On the other hand, violence that was done to others results in a tendency to forget, erase, insert “memory implants”, as Marian Golka (2010, p. 68) dubbed filling in the gaps created by such forgetfulness. In this case, it seems that we are dealing with an attitude of a criminal, blurring the traces of a criminal act. Such attitude also creates conditions conducive to self-creation and the “locality” becomes imbued with it, demonstrating a certain flexibility as to the past and a tendency to “implant”.

The section of Pohulanka Street, which was the place of the execution, does not exist at the time of this study as – literally and figuratively – it has been overgrown. Among the narratives collected by Alicja Zbierzchowska (2010), there are those that describe the shock experienced in connection with the realization that one has so far ignored the existence of the place, with many narrators living just

next door. The shock was all the more profound because, in the course of their long lives, the participants, recruited from among senior citizens pursuing university evening degree education, have never heard about this place and this event. The author, focusing on the causes of the collective oblivion presented by the inhabitants of Gdańsk – not only about Pohulanka –, noted, following Golka, the conscious privatization of this event – it was to remain only in the individual memory of its direct witnesses. This would partly justify an active search for knowledge among the people of Gdańsk, once they learned about the event. This is indicated by all the material collected during the research, all the narratives, as well as numerous comments made on the Internet fora where the problem was discussed (Boryczko, 2010). The students of the Gdańsk University of the Third Age (GUTW), on the one hand, wondered how it was possible that they **did not know** about Pohulanka, and on the other hand, they claimed that they probably **always knew** about it, since even as children, they played the “rock the hanged man” game. The time related to Pohulanka stopped, ritually suspended in the lives of the actors, working towards ignorance, which in their narratives they characterized as bringing relief.

Similar conclusions come from my childhood memory, which gave rise to the project. As a part of my own research, I wrote two biographical micro-histories in which knowing and not knowing, for example, what kind of cemetery Pohulanka was, accompanied me almost from my birth in the town where this street was part of the space. In my memory, to this day there are still some child’s questions, for example: why should I say the prayer for the dead near a strange place overgrown with bushes, but we do not go there to light candles, and why do children scare each other with this place, mimicking hanging people, which is different from the usual hand sticking out of the grave that we associated with “ordinary” cemeteries? Such knowing and not knowing at the same time probably gave rise to our sensitivity to the neighbouring Pohulanka. It was also probably the reason why we would never have thought of living there, and this message, although it has been formed within the framework of private memories, has become universalized and seems to still be at work within us.

The time that made the Pohulanka event eternal has got suspended in the memory of residents and narrators. This time, though magical, seems to have the power to format reality. For example, according to one narrative, it could have influenced a construction developer’s decision not to invest in the area and stop the construction of their “green district housing” (Mendel, 2010a). The formative power of Pohulanka’s presence in the biographies of Gdańsk residents can also be seen in the impetus with which they reacted in Internet forums to the anniversary reminder of the execution in 1946. Unlike in the past, “knowing” has now taken control of “not knowing”. The interplay of these identity strategies of “knowing-not knowing” seems to shape the “landscapes of memory” of the people of Gdańsk and, consequently, their “me-being-here”.

Myths contribute to the sacralisation of Gdańsk-quality (or perhaps they powerfully reveal it). These myths are present in the participants narratives. They are described in the text by Chwin, included in the volume presenting the original study (2010). The German historian Peter Olivier Loew (2006) wrote about them as well – starting in 1945, with the city destroyed, undergoing de-Germanization, and where quite spontaneously, the local myth of “Polishness”, supposedly always there, is just being grafted. Historicizing reconstruction leads to the emergence of a myth about the unique nature of old Gdańsk, and finally to the myth of genius loci. The myth of Polishness combined with the myth of proletarianism form the nucleus of the myth of the rebellious city – and after the events of 1970 and 1980, this myth is transformed into the myth of the dissident Gdańsk. There is also the myth of maritime Gdańsk, the myth of multicultural Gdańsk, the myth of open Gdańsk, etc., etc. There are, thus, “top-down” myths, such as the Polish-proletarian myth, the “intellectual-dissident” myths, the myth of genius loci, and myths that appear automatically, such as the myth of Gdańsk’s uniqueness (Loew, 2006, p. 15).

The force with which these myths shape our “niche” and form our “Gdańsk quality” is very powerful and can constitute one of the mechanisms described by Hans Mol (1996). The myths make the “local” sacred in this place. The people of Gdańsk do not only appear different but are clearly “sanctified” by their “being-there”. When we look at comments on the Internet, analysed by Marcin Boryczko (2010), we see the elation that the senior students of GUTW felt in relation to being one of the people of Gdańsk (Zbierchowska, 2010). There is no doubt that “being from Gdańsk” – i.e. living there, here and now – involved *sacrum*.

The liminal “sacred time” in the participant’s narratives can be interpreted within the framework developed by the theory of oblivion by Augé. At the very beginning of his book, *Oblivion*, the author noted that both for the individual and the whole society, oblivion is as necessary as memory (Augé, 2009, p. 13). Later, he reflected that our practical life, everyday life, the life of an individual and of a community, both private and public, are organized through forms of oblivion, of which we first become aware, only to question them and to imbue them with meaning (Augé, 2009, p. 33). For Augé three figures of oblivion that maintain the narrative are: “return”, “suspension” and “beginnings”. I believe they can be used in understanding some dominant tendencies that persist within a community, in discursively defined contexts (thus, they can constitute a representation and a form of oversight).

The first of these figures, the “return” (Augé, 2009, p. 59–88) involves regaining the past that has been lost, while forgetting the present. In our study, it is present in the narratives of senior students, and is particularly visible in the emphasis that they placed on the necessity to learn what really happened, how and why people have been silent about Pohulanka and other post-war events that occurred in Gdańsk (Zbierchowska, 2010). Perhaps the same figure can also be an expression of a nascent obsession about the past, or one that has already become stable, with-in the social space.

The second, “suspension”, relates to the present (there is a radical idea that there is nothing but the present). “Gdańsk quality” manifests this form very powerfully. Its presence in the thinking of mainly young Gdańsk residents was noted by Paweł Bykowski (2010), and other researchers participating in that research project – for example, Boryczko (2010) noted it on the Internet forum, where very likely the users were young people. Those who presented lack of interest in the past and stressed the importance of the present, were, in particular, young people, often migrants, visibly distant towards the place, which they see differently from afar. The young “Gdańsk-quality” has been shaped by these tendencies.

The third form of oblivion consists in an openness towards the past and is a figure of the “beginnings”, where both past and present are forgotten. In the study, this figure found some representations in the narratives of young people, students, but also more senior residents, mature students at the university. When they speak about the past that they now negate because of their discoveries about the post-war period, they keep being oriented towards the future (*I wish it...; it should not be so, that...; it would be good if here, in Gdańsk, we spoke more about...*). There is no present in their stories.

The figures of time that I presented above, following Augé, had the capacity to include the narratives focused on an event that was formative for the identity of Gdańsk residents. It was the event that – by happening in the liminal post-war period and in the pivoting *sacrum*, bringing fear and terror, but also happiness – laid the ground for the persistence of its somewhat magical memory. This memory, as our study narratives demonstrate, is formative for the identity of the people of Gdańsk, and for the behavioural aspects of collective forms of urban life. People who hold a memory based on semi-conscious ignorance (knowing-not knowing) have the disposition to behave in a way marked by evasion and multidimensional denial, as Stanley Cohen described the “state of denial”. It is a state in which the impossibility or refusal to constantly face unpleasant truths and to live with them is universalized (Cohen, 2001). As Cohen argues, communities in this state can ignore local and supra-local problems and avoid them persistently, based on a repeated motive that worse things are happening elsewhere. In this way, the state of denial creates a relativistic map of horrible places and allows people to assume an attitude of calm towards one’s own community: *after all, what is happening here is not so bad* (Cohen, 2001, p. 20). This state of affairs characterizes communities which, as a result of their tragic experiences, are suspended from their everyday life, in the “sacred time” which they remember, like the residents of Gdańsk, while learning collective ignorance, knowing and not-knowing at the same time. These are examples of coping without the help of the Other, without the professional intervention of an advisor.

One can ask: what insights for guidance can we discern in the context of such needs of individuals and groups? What type of information offered and how can it be helpful in such cases? Is it expected at all?

The homeless – the autonomous defence of identity and dignity

Research material analysed in this section in terms of “sacred time” in biographical narratives has been derived from research on the “heterotopies of homelessness” (Mendel, 2007). It was a heterotopology, i.e. the methodology of studying heterotopia – in accordance with the research premises – Foucault’s “place of spaces”, the place of the Other. This cultural phenomenon consists in the creation of places that physically exist in space but are always ambiguous, being at the same time their various representations, ways in which they are contested and reversals of their meaning and function, etc. Homelessness is heterotopic, it generates “different, diverse places”. Based on these research assumptions, researchers developed a description of the ritualization applied by research participants, persons in the situation of homelessness (Mendel, 2007). Ritualization turned out to be the essential content of biographical narratives, made from the margins of social life, in-between worlds – the regular world, i.e., the world of the homeless, and the world outside it, dubbed “legal”. Developing this description in the context of educational challenges led to a research hypothesis related to the need for educational work to change social reality through ritual intervention. Change is here understood not as modernist progress (spanning linear time, emphasizing development as a “push forward”), but as going “into the depths” of culture, bringing forth qualitative difference. It focuses on instances of ritualization, which are an important part of it.

For the purpose of this study, we developed a version of the biographical method, which can be described as an autobiographical narrative interview with educational and therapeutic value, a kind of action-research. It should not be understood as a kind of triangulation of methods, but as a uniform research method, composed of different approaches, crafted – as I mentioned – in response to specific conditions and needs. In a situation when the respondents are homeless, i.e. people in crisis, not satisfied with their own situation, an important postulate was to carry out interviews in a way that would allow the participant to consider the fact of participating in the research as an unquestionable benefit for themselves, which would also involve social advantage. The advantage here is understood as a change occurring in connection with the interview (life narrative), which can be observed in the person’s statements and attitude. The reflection that accompanies telling the story of one’s life has the agentic power and therapeutic potential that is associated, among other things, with the feeling of “holding your life in your own hands” (Demetrio, 2000a, p. 124). Hence, the researchers sought to develop a biographical method that would be exceptional, as action research, a strictly educational method, oriented towards beneficial change in the research participants – both for individuals and the community in which they are embedded. It was a method that linked the dimension of individual and social activity to the therapeutic dimension, understood as helping oneself by learning from one’s own life and from others’ lives, which are part of a biographical story. A story that is a particular intertwining of timeless and

time-sensitive aspects of the narrative, such as the plot – *fabula* (narrator's story) and the *sujet* (complementary narrative elements that make the verbal construction transparent and fascinating, absorbing the narrator). (Demetrio, 2000a, p. 125).

Focusing on the “sacred time” and in reference to the previous part of the analysis (the Erasmuses), it is worth noting that the analysis of the narratives of the homeless has drawn extensively from the approach developed by Duccio Demetrio, who described autobiography as an educational journey, i.e. learning in the circumstances of liminality, in “sacred time”. In such an approach, events seem like “toys in our hands” and by playing we give new shape to what happened in the past (Demetrio, 2000b, p. 13). Demetrio emphasized that resurrecting the past involves elements of fun, while hiding or transforming reality is a source of knowledge (Demetrio, 2000b, p. 14). We can say that autobiographical narratives are thus seen as a therapeutic activation of memory and, at the same time, as a creative action towards developing one's own, life pedagogies conducive to coping (Demetrio 2000b, p. 19). In this perspective, for the purpose of studying the heterotopia of homelessness, researchers devised a version of the biographical method, in which retrospection was intertwined with introspection, shaping the ground for change in the subject (their orientations, dispositions to act, etc.). With typical difficulties involved in creating such a tool for biographical research, “autobiographical therapeutic games” turned out to be extremely useful (Demetrio, 2000b). They became the basis for the categorized dispositions for the narrative interview, in which – in line with the memory processes that make up life's narratives, there was a transition from evoking images from the past to memories to merging fragments of the past (Demetrio, 2000b, p. 19–20).

Thus, the memory of the respondents invariably referred to time and used it, which was evident in narratives. In this statement it is interesting for me to see which narrative fragments reflected the presence of *sacrum*, the “sacred time”. As I mentioned, homelessness can be described as different, diverse places – heterotopias. According to Foucault, heterotopia exists when people break with their traditional time (2005, p. 123). Homelessness is a departure from the “common” time, it is its own, autonomous time. This is a recurrent motif in the analysed narratives, creating their peculiar temporal pattern⁷. Therefore, the analyses were dominated by the issue of ritual. Its theoretical conceptualizations constantly refer us to relative time. Ritualization is a temporalizing mechanism, allowing people to master time by introducing certain events into the space-time continuum. Rituals of the homeless, in a constantly modernized world, carried out as rational processes, taking place in and through institutions, can easily be integrated into the framework of van Gennep's transition rites (2006). They are, in fact, a transition from one social status to another, in three phases of separation, marginalization and accommodation.

⁷ Hence, in the book reporting the results of this research (Mendel, 2007), I identified the “systemic transformation”, which is impossible to determine in a rigid, universal time frame, or the “trajectory of homelessness”, which is always present in the unique time, the time of the homeless.

Within the institutionalized world, focusing on the homeless, the rituals constitute gradual legalization of the homeless person's status, starting with registration procedures and ending with a clear qualification, giving access to specific social benefits – determining that a given person is indeed without an address, i.e. homeless.

The homeless, therefore, perceive the world with a sense of ambivalence. Their reality seems to be binary. It could be called a bi-reality in which, at the same time, these people exist within the common world, but because they are on the margins, they are also outside, and look at it from a distance (and vice versa, because the distancing works both ways). It is not my business and not my world – said one of the respondents⁸. His description of the reality in which he lives as a homeless man, “squatting” on an urban plot, reflects a sharp contrast between two separate worlds. The “we-them” distinction is very clear: what do *you know* (...), *you do not know such things*. What appears to be completely unreasonable in one reality is not surprising in the other: *I'd rather go jail, I would....* However, rational reality does not react to these instances of “irrationality” on the margins and reveals the fullness of its indifference to people there: *but they do not want to lock me up*. The world in which the homeless person lives is thus not only divided – its parts are so far apart from each other that they become abstract, intensifying the *sacrum*. The quote above had a significant continuation: *It is not my business and not my world, I am not God*. The “not-mine” world is so far away, so much so that one cannot count on its reaction, it must belong to gods. The division into “we” and “them”, present in all the analysed narratives, is linked to time and an explicitly articulated accusation: *They took [it] away from us then, which means that we are homeless, but they cannot take away our dignity*.

As I already mentioned, all narratives in the study referred to the bi-reality in which the homeless live. Many of them emphasized “legality” as a feature of the “not-my-world”, “before marginalization”, “broken” world. One of the women narrators spoke directly about the experience of verification: *am I legal*. “Legality” is a clear feature of a rationalized reality, organized into institutional forms of social life. To participate in it, one must submit to the countless rituals that take place through procedures and documents that name individuals and groups, confirming their affiliation, defining – constantly anew – their status, role, position, etc. At the same time, through the same procedures and documents, this affiliation can be denied and, as a consequence, just like some individuals and groups are privileged, other individuals and groups are also marginalized by means of special “official” acts and “papers”, such as certificates, proofs, court decisions, etc.

The “legal world” manifests itself to the homeless in actions that make them think of it in terms of magic, referring to religious patterns and to the “sacred time”. This can be seen, among other things:

⁸ All quotes in this section come from Mendel (2007).

- in the magical quality of the “conditions” that one of the women participants described during an interview: Question: *And what do you have to do in order to... live with your son?* Answer: *There are conditions;*
- in the control and supervision, practiced as the consolidation of the subordinate position of the homeless and in forms that a respondent illegally staying in an urban garden plot sees as having magical connotations: *and today I dreamt of a dog, so today the police will come, and here they come. Whenever I dream of a dog, they come;*
- in the legitimacy and accepted presence through appearance, in the omnipresent requirement of “appropriate” appearance, often formulated non-verbally, inherent in the organizational culture of an institution, in the life of the “legal world”. The statements of the homeless are very suggestive when they describe this requirement, describing their efforts ensuring that they not treated as “worthless”: *I try to prove that I am not worthless. I go to the hairdresser's once a month, I do my hair, yes. I have everything washed, I have things ironed, here I have everything clean, yes.* In the “legal world”, like in a temple, you have to be dressed properly, so as not to offend the deity with inappropriate attire;
- in the power of judgment, the unpredictability of judgments and the graciousness of the “legal world”, manifested by the unequal application of the rules, the occasional departure from them (as in the divine world, no one knows when and what whim will make the lives of the faithful go one way or another, but they can always hope that the gods will turn out to be gracious). The rigid requirement of paying for the use of public transportation, which is very burdensome for the research participants, was referred to as an urgent problem to be solved. However, it turned out to be less rigid towards another marginalized group, the disabled. It is as if the “legal world” winked at them and kindly allowed a little exception from the rule. Here is an excerpt from the narrative of one of the respondents, who presented himself as “born tiny” and a “hydrocephalous”:

before I get to Wrzeszcz from here, I first have to pay for the bus from Wrzeszcz, it costs money. Only these bus controllers already know me. Reputation, no? Because this is reputation, those guys that check tickets, they all know me already. And I showed the ticket once, because I was going to Gdańsk (...) – why did he buy the ticket? After all, we already know you, don't we? He says: when I see you again with a ticket, you'll pay a fine. I say: all right, I won't buy tickets anymore. I went once, the last time, they were the same ones, and they say: you have a ticket, right? No! I don't have a ticket at all! I said so because I know them. And you're lucky, [they said] because otherwise you'd get a fine.

- in the magic quality of the address. An address is the mark of the “legal world” containing *sacrum*, and thus becomes close to sacred as well and “sanctifying”. To have an address means to be a better person, e.g. someone with integrity: *I am honest with women, I say that I am such and such, I do not have an address,*

I am staying in the shelter for now. I think that I gain more from honesty and the right approach to the matter. Having an address also means “being innocent”, e.g. as in the following situation, described by a participant, who treated address as a guarantee of his innocence: *because it was a robbery in the apartment, they should not put me in jail, I was not my address.* Having an official address is also a condition for achieving some kind of perfection, “accessing sacredness” of the “legal world”. The homeless, from their position of people seeking the sacred, can see very clearly how the “legal world” is built upon it, how the law and the meaning of an address, defined by it, regulates social life, establishing it as a never-ending struggle, without ethical, ordinary, “human” reflexes. The “legal world” is ruled by Themis, whose blindness has already made the participants suffer. Many of them have become homeless as a result of the – always lawful, yet ethically dubious and harmful – loss of address, which surprised them, was done without their knowledge, often as a result of intrigue by family or neighbours, etc. *My family kicked me out and now – [I live] at the railway station,* said one of the respondents, adding that what he would like to forget the harm he suffered from his loved ones;

I lost my apartment because I could have – after my mother, two years later she had it, because my father died, I could have – after all, I had lived there since birth, this apartment would have been mine, and yet it turned out to be a failure that I was left with nothing;

and another excerpt from a narrator quoted earlier:

I don't know how it was done, but they wanted to remove my official address in this house (...). Well, this is my new ID, made three months ago, it clearly states the address, right? Exact. (...) and regularly I have an address. I go in with the police, they have some paper that I'm registered there.

In these life stories, the address is treated as a fetish, which acts as the “pivot” for the sacred. Often, the narrative about it presents time as breakthrough moments and ascribes the magical power to the action of gaining and losing an address, just like in the following statement: *I could have removed him **then** from this official address, but I did not. And I was very wrong,* said a woman, evaluating her life from the point of view of her 72 years of experience. It all depended on removing the man from this address, its meaning focused on this action. Some of the narratives also voiced a belief that an address can open all doors, that it acts as a pass, justifying the failure to comply with the rules of the world and making it open, without borders:

I have already been everywhere, in every city, I can even go abroad, because I have the ID with an official address. I've been homeless for 25 years, and I still have my address and I never buy tickets for transport, I always travel for free.

The narratives that were subject to analysis show that the instances of ritualization of the “legal world” produce enslavement, which has its important temporal dimension. As in this story, time and freedom are inseparably intertwined, and the pivoting *sacrum* evokes a sense of confusion: *I am free now for a moment. Maybe they’ll revoke my probation again and I will... How free am I? I am “unfree”. The whole life goes on like this, all right.*

The homeless participants felt not only “unfree” and lost, but also humiliated and terribly unnecessary, which permeates almost every narrative. The address plays a magical role in the rituals, which create the process of social stigmatization – loss of freedom, in relation to homelessness. An address, like a sign of the legal world, seals the status of an individual who thus has his or her place and meaning within it. Without an address, one is “outside the world”, outside “this” world, of course. The world of the address-less person becomes, with the ritual gesture of de-registration from the official address records, the reality of “nowhere”. And despite all the flagrancy of the fact that “nowhere” does not exist and that every “homeless” person lives and works somewhere, the world – defined here as Legal – behaves repulsively towards them and defines them by its absence, characteristically expressing it in the language of pathology (while social groups, individuals and collectives are considered “pathological”, sick, requiring separation and thus justifying their being pushed to the social margin). This also relates to the terms used to describe programs of “getting out of homelessness”, in which the “without” seems typical, e.g. a person without a home, without a job, without the chances that need to be created for him or her.

This is how homelessness is institutionalized, through a series of rituals, fitting into the matrix of transition rites and practices, sacralizing institutions. In the first place, homelessness appears as a rite of separation (rituals that cut an individual off from the group and the social status that has characterized him/her until now) and is connected with the loss of address, which takes place – temporally – in space, in the network of social relations and activities (*my mother-in-law did not like me, but we lived at her place. She de-registered me and that was it, etc.*). It takes place within administration, in the office, as an accomplished, institutional ritual of “losing an address”. Following this, the homeless person enters a liminal state (*rite de marge*) and no longer belongs to any of the worlds. The first stage of homelessness is always associated with a strongly felt state of suspension in time and space, with inhabiting a place without knowing how long one will stay there and where one will go next. It creates situations in which it becomes a reason for breaking formal orders and suspending the law, for example, staying with friends without a formal address – until the end of the liminal phase – i is conventionally acceptable within the “legal world”.

The post-liminal period, the rite of aggregation, may mean that a person is granted the status of a homeless. Within the social space and on the timeline, from that moment on everything is as if it is self-organized, due to and influenced by this status. The status is granted formally, in local government units and their services,

by means of appropriate certificates, giving access to the benefit system and shelters for the homeless. The name of this part of the rituals of homelessness as an institution, i.e. “aggregation” – as the inclusion into a community of people who play the same social role, have the same status, etc., is and at the same time is not appropriate in this case. Of course, there is a large number of homeless people with such certificates and living together in shelters, urban garden plots, etc., but – as this study and simple experience of observing the homeless, who are usually alone, show – it is not a social community. Although the homeless share a similar fate, they strongly emphasize their distance to the others “like them” and, in principle, do not create bonds with each other, but rather, they break up, as if not believing in the social bonds anymore, nor trusting the future. Anyway, aggregation, as inclusion in a specific group, is part of the activities performed within the ritualized institution of homelessness, actualized e.g. by granting the status of a homeless person within the framework of a systemic solution that allows – through a certificate – to consume “privileges”, such as modest benefits and a place in a dormitory. However, this kind of legitimization does not give access to employment. Without an address, there is no such possibility. This is not the case for casual work, where “flexibility”, valued by employers, is what counts, giving access to quick, unrecorded employment. Hence, nowadays a cell phone replaced “address” for the homeless. Almost each of the people participating in the study had a cell phone, due to which it was possible to arrange research meetings (otherwise it would be difficult to make an appointment).

The system that shapes the institution of homelessness is clearly marked, and its ritualized practices are visible in the presented rites of passage – although they seem less “sacred” because of their systemic rationality and secularism (offices, law, emphasizing independence from magic, religion, etc.), they still create magical barriers blocking the homeless from accessing the “normal” world. The sacralized character of ritual practices that create homelessness, manifests itself in the time of the homeless; the “sacred time”, the time spent in places that are “out of bounds”, but remain invisible for the system. The inhabitants of forbidden, non-residential, and thus sanctifying, magical places have managed to live in them and persist against institutional rationality. The homeless living “nowhere”, in relation to their environment, are perceived as being in a state of crisis, periodically deviating from the “home-having” majority. They thus evoke strategies of assistance, based on an economy that refers to time. Such economy of time, however, has a certain falsehood inscribed in its meaning, which clearly constitutes its basis. It is built on the liminal time, on the “sacred time” of the homeless, taken out of ordinary time. According to the principles of such economy, assistance is given to the homeless until they can – once again – stand on their own feet and come out of the state of temporary marginalization, returning to society. This kind of assistance is based on political solutions, ideological orientations and systemic approaches, invariably oriented towards a certain short-term social action targeting people “who have temporarily

lost their independence”, that is, those who are temporarily incapacitated, conditionally objectified, etc., those who do not decide for themselves, and are thus subject to a certain kind of violence.

Thus, the homeless themselves learn from the liminality that they live outside of time, because their magical, “sacred time”, is the time that has been suspended. They also discover that they live in places outside of space, because their places formally do not exist. However, they do live and inhabit them, anyway. These conditions “sacralize” them and, just like their time and space, they are located outside the world, stuck in a suspension that amazes even them (the narratives reiterated the issues such as: *I don’t know how it is possible that I am alive; am I alive at all?*). The “legal world”, the society, on the other hand, learns from the liminality in which the homeless live that everything can be done to their Agambenian, sacred “bare lives”, and helping them may justify any violence done to them (Agamben, 2008). Education is an enormous challenge in this context, but not as a wasteland of unwanted ideas of equality and social justice, but as a carrier of a reviving power, capable of restoring the lost sense of solidarity. The work of restoring such lost reflexes and values was postulated by Zygmunt Bauman, who wrote about “wasted lives” in the context of the fluid, neoliberally formatted modernity (2005). Perhaps this is the direction for guidance work in the conditions of experienced liminality.

Conclusions

The travelling Erasmus program participants described their state of suspension directly, in some cases literally, as sacred – they were outside of “their” place and, at the same time outside of “ordinary” time. The second study focused on the inhabitants of Gdańsk, whose stories about the history of Pohulanka brought forth a description of collective ignorance and denial of a traumatic event: a strategy of dealing with a situation when there is no place for such an experience, either within oneself or in the surrounding world. The last of the research reviewed here focused on people in the crisis of homelessness. Revisiting the narratives allowed me to extract and describe the conditions in which traditional time is suspended and the place of life is – according to the other, “legal” world – a non-place (Augé, 2010), emptied of meaning that is inscribed in housing registers. The homeless learned intensely in these conditions, and their experience of self-education under extreme, crisis conditions proved formative. The respondents described how they had learned that they were not only outside the “appropriate” world, but also within time that made them different.

Coming back to the earlier claim that counselling and guidance helps those who know how to help themselves, and who look for ways to improve the process and benefit from what their counsellor has to offer, I need to admit that I still have no answer to the question whether the protagonists of these narratives need such

help. Perhaps I could rephrase it and ask whether the therapeutic and educational interventions offered by counselling or guidance are the ones that would change lives and make them more comfortable or bring social acceptance. Perhaps the narratives quoted above are examples of how people can deal effectively on their own with the situations which – today, in the vernacular (“vernacular” refers to today’s exuberant “pedagogization”) – are considered to require professional intervention. These examples deny the necessity of guidance in difficult situations. With more attention to “pedagogization” in this context, following Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, we can describe it as an evolving process of intense detachment of learning from education and teaching, and its perception as a kind of capital (2008; 2013). Similar reflections can be found in Gert J.J. Biesta’s *Beyond Learning* (2006), the book which has been re-published multiple times, where he made such claims, reiterating his earlier arguments presented in lectures and publications from the first decade of the 21st century (Biesta, 2016). In Poland, the concept similar to that developed by the aforementioned authors was presented by the authors of the thematic issue of *Societas/Communitas* (Czyżewski, Marynowicz-Hetka, & Woroniecka, 2013). This publication – for the first time in Poland – discursively addressed the problem of pedagogy, locating it within the perspective of social life. Analysing pedagogization in Foucault’s conceptual framework, which highlights the knowledge-power aspect and departs from the previous formula of thinking about it exclusively in terms of parents who are subject to the pedagogical influences of the school and teachers, the authors demonstrated a whole range of approaches – important in view of the conclusion of the present paper, but also for the development of critical thought in the area of counselling and guidance. Among other things, the most noteworthy here are empirical exemplifications of temporal and spatial variables, media-based “models of the subject needed by society”, or “ideal ways of managing” who or what we should be – a “self-entrepreneur”, an “active citizen”, or any other currently desired format (Stachowiak, 2013). This is a format to which we adjust not only because of media messages, millions of brochures and manuals, but also because of people involved in education (including counsellors and teachers). We all live in this kind of *episteme*, being trained to become actualizations of the self that are quite specific, as they are created invariably through saturation with patterns, usually advertised with the noble slogans of free choice and subjective action in improving the quality of our own lives. The neoliberal orientation of such “advertising” seems to remain intact despite the post-2008 crisis of neoliberal ideology – at the ideological level, neoliberalism seems to be doing well and has not yet been exhausted (see: Peters, 2009).

In this context it might be interesting to see the up-coming change and an indication of the way to break free from the circle of such patterns’ reproduction and its stabilization through guidance and education. We can see a new quality in the material that I revisited in this article. We can see behaviours that do not fit into trained conventions and inquiries based on the pattern, as well as the support from

counselling institutions or counsellors. Therefore, I will try to answer the question of what – in terms of advising work – can be learned from the respondents whose narratives focused on their diverse experience of liminal time and space. Such time and space shaped their identity strategies – as happened in the case of Gdańsk residents. In relation to the homeless, they permanently divided their world into two opposing worlds; and among the Erasmus participants – they made them dependent on being in a liminal situation. In each case, these were specifically educational processes, in which neither the respondents nor the researcher noted the participation of intentional “helpers” – counsellors, teachers or more or less professional educators. The generalized experience of the threshold, in the light of this study, demonstrated that education within liminal time and space is important, but that the liminal subject is characterised by self-education. It amounts to being alone with yourself and your problems – sometimes, like student Karol, actually enjoying this kind of “sacred condition”. People who live in places that for them are liminal and who experience the transition seem to be “gazing” into their own difficult and stressful experience and to learn autonomously as individuals.

If so, how could this kind of analysis be placed on the horizon of our reflection in terms of guidance? In such an approach, since our analyses highlighted strategies of coping with stress, it is probably worthwhile to intertwine this point with the form of counselling that consists in providing support and help in coping with the demands of the time and place, the world in which the assisted person finds him- or herself. This is extremely important because, on the one hand, today’s humanitarian and economic crisis and the pandemic that has made it dramatically acute, sparked a powerful shift of the world as we know it – we are all under acute stress and a sense of liminality is widespread (“it cannot go on like this”, “it must end”, “normality will finally come”, etc.). On the other hand, in the deluge of self-help books and infinite forms of guidance and counselling activities that seem to surround everyone, one can feel emptiness. Each of our stresses is unique, and the addressee of guidance – regardless of the fact that he or she is an individual – is a specific subject-environment, a “bubble”, in which we either no longer fit in, or we have not yet done what would make us fit in, or – we do not wish to fit in. In the face of this acute liminality of daily experience of being-in-the-world, we experience more and more anxiety, depression, frustration and so on. The crisis is within us, internalized and deep – a crisis of transition, of crossing into another, better reality. Ready-made patterns do not work, spurring us to act, so the “old” counselling formula can no longer work effectively.

Advising people who try to cope with the requirements of the contemporary world is now conceptualized as a challenge (see, e.g. Mahomed, Johari, & Mahmud, 2019)⁹. The experience of a liminal subject, presented in this text, may prove helpful

⁹ This was brought to my attention by Professor Alicja Kargulowa, to whom I owe more excellent ‘guidance’ and valuable comments. Thank you very much!

in making this challenge more familiar, and act as a trailblazer for guidance practices by providing knowledge about self-educating and thus coping in a “sacred place and time” – another, unknown, transient, but requiring mobilization in order to survive and fuelled by an intention to enter a new, better world.

Translated by Katarzyna Byłów

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