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WAYS OF PERCEIVING

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The Song Between the Raindrops

Introduction

Liminality describes a condition of being *in-between*—a threshold where time stretches, perception shifts, and familiar structures become temporarily unstable. Originally developed in anthropological theory to describe transitional states within ritual processes, the concept refers to moments in which individuals are no longer situated within one structure but have not yet entered another (Turner, 1969). In contemporary cultural discourse, liminality has expanded beyond ritual studies to describe spatial, psychological, and sensory experiences in which certainty dissolves and new forms of perception emerge (Zander, 2024). Rather than simply marking passage between two fixed states, liminality can also be understood as an experiential condition in which uncertainty, anticipation, and possibility coexist.

The Song Between the Raindrops explores this condition through immersive and psychologically charged environments, framing the in-between as a meaningful space rather than merely a transitional state. The exhibition is situated within the abandoned shell of Debenhams department store in Swansea's Quadrant Shopping Centre, a site itself suspended between past and future, decay and redevelopment. Visitors navigate a raw concrete interior stripped of commercial fittings — effectively a liminal architecture within a liminal urban context. *A loop of liminality.*

Featuring works by Pierre Huyghe, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Ryoji Ikeda, Tacita Dean, and Olafur Eliasson, the exhibition investigates liminality across ecological, psychological, temporal, technological, and atmospheric registers. Through spatial choreography and immersive environments, the exhibition invites visitors to inhabit perceptual thresholds where time, presence, and atmosphere unfold in subtle and generative ways.

Exhibition Map and Visitor Flow

The exhibition unfolds through five interconnected zones that guide visitors through different interpretations of liminality.

Upon entering the building, visitors encounter Pierre Huyghe's *After ALife Ahead* (2017) (Fig. 1). Installed within the open central hall, the work presents a living system composed of algae cultures, microorganisms, automated lighting systems, and algorithmic processes. Environmental conditions shift gradually and unpredictably, creating a constantly evolving environment. Visitors inhabit an ecological system rather than observing a static artwork, experiencing the tension and beauty of unpredictability. Within the exhibition, Huyghe's work acts as a conceptual pivot, expanding liminality beyond psychological experience into ecological processes that unfold beyond human control.



Fig. 1. Pierre Huyghe, *After ALife Ahead*, 2017

Moving into a more enclosed and dimly lit zone, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *TH.2058* (2008) (Fig. 2) introduces a psychological and narrative dimension of liminality. The installation constructs a speculative future scenario in which visitors shelter beneath artificial skies while surrounded by sculptural forms and narrative fragments. Fictional and historical references intersect to produce a suspended atmosphere of sci-fi uncertainty. Visitors become participants within an ambiguous narrative environment, occupying a speculative moment that feels both familiar and estranged.



Fig. 2. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *TH.2058*, 2008

The exhibition then transitions into a darkened space where Ryoji Ikeda's *data-verse* (2019) (Fig. 3) immerses visitors in an intense audiovisual field composed of rapidly shifting data visualisations and electronic sound. Scientific imagery and algorithmic patterns are projected across the space, producing an overwhelming sensory environment in which the boundaries between perception, technology, and information collapse. While Gonzalez-Foerster constructs narrative uncertainty, Ikeda produces liminality through sensory saturation and technological immersion.

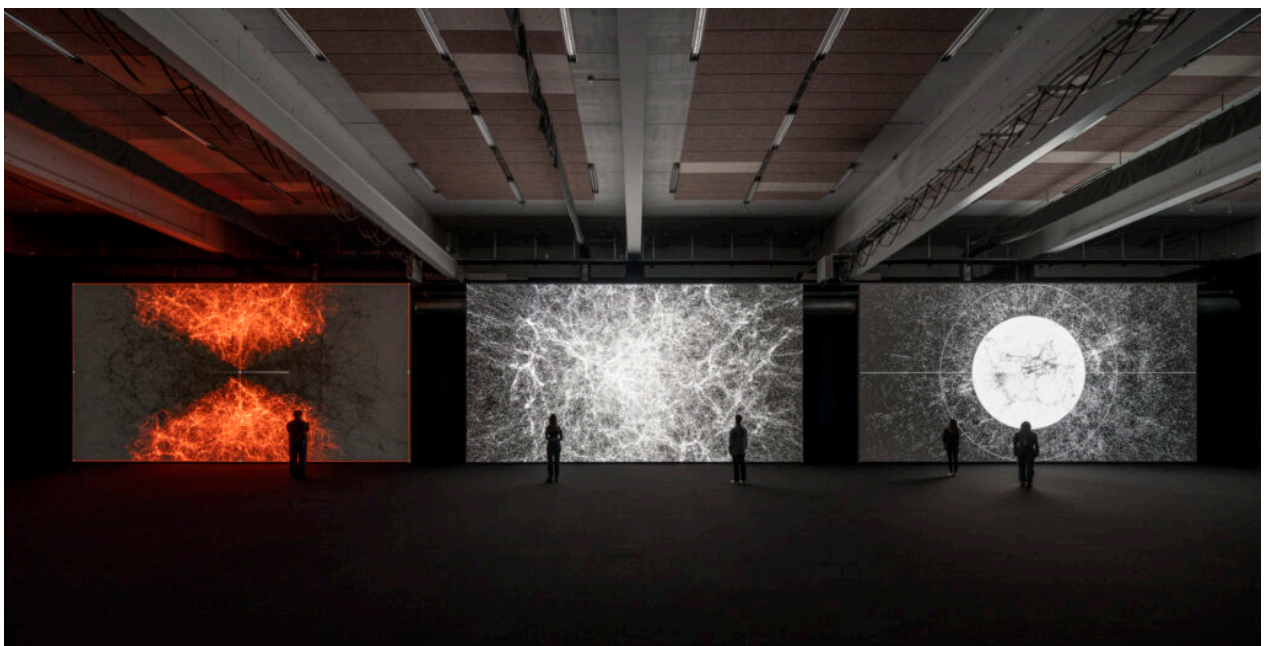


Fig. 3. Ryoji Ikeda, *data-verse*, 2019

In contrast, Tacita Dean's *FILM* (1997–ongoing) (Fig. 4) offers a quieter encounter with temporal liminality. Projected onto a large vertical screen, the analogue film unfolds slowly through layered imagery that reflects on memory, duration, and the passage of time. The deliberate pace of the projection encourages prolonged viewing, allowing visitors to experience time as something stretched and contemplative rather than accelerated. While Ikeda's work destabilises perception through digital intensity, Dean's approach invites reflection through cinematic stillness.



Fig. 4. Tacita Dean, *FILM*, 1997–ongoing

Finally, Olafur Eliasson's *Your Blind Passenger* (2010) (Fig. 5) occupies a long corridor near the building's exit. Dense fog fills the space while coloured lights gradually shift in intensity and hue. As visibility fluctuates, visitors must navigate the environment slowly and attentively. The installation dissolves spatial certainty and encourages bodily awareness, transforming movement itself into a perceptual experience. This final encounter returns the exhibition to the embodied dimension of liminality, emphasising the sensory instability of space.



Fig. 5. Olafur Eliasson, *Your Blind Passenger*, 2010

The exhibition is illustrated in the conceptual floor plan (Fig. 6), showing a linear visitor movement from Room A (Huyghe) → Room B (Gonzalez-Foerster) → Room C (Ikeda) → Room D (Dean) → Final Atrium (Eliasson). The map demonstrates how spatial arrangement reinforces a thematic exploration of liminality and it proposes a rhythm that echoes the flow of life itself. One might read this progression as a passage from emergence to conclusion, where the threshold between birth, life and death is understood as inherently liminal. Yet, this liminality is not confined to endpoints - it permeates each transition, each step between rooms, each fleeting moment of experience. In this way, the exhibition unfolds as a continuum of in-betweenness, where spatial arrangement reinforces a sustained meditation on liminality as both condition and passage.

The Song Between the Raindrops

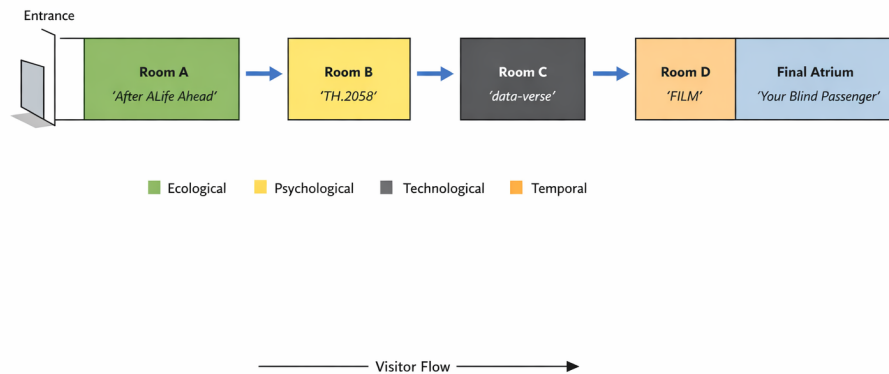


Fig. 6. Conceptual exhibition layout for *The Song Between the Raindrops*

Curatorial Rationale

The curatorial concept of *The Song Between the Raindrops* is grounded in the idea that liminal spaces are not simply transitional zones but environments capable of producing heightened states of perception and reflection. The selected artists explore this condition through different material and conceptual strategies, revealing the complexity of liminal experience across ecological, narrative, technological, temporal, and atmospheric dimensions.

Pierre Huyghe's practice frequently investigates systems that blur distinctions between the artificial and the organic. In works such as *After ALife Ahead* (2017), the artist constructs environments in which biological and technological processes interact autonomously. As Huyghe describes, his installations function as "dynamic and unstable situations" that evolve independently of human control (Huyghe, 2017). Within the exhibition, this evolving ecosystem introduces liminality as a condition of uncertainty and transformation that extends beyond human perception into nonhuman systems.



Fig. 7. Abandoned Debenhams Building. (Image: Swansea Council)

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster similarly constructs environments that disrupt familiar temporal and spatial frameworks. Her installation *TH.2058* (2008) merges speculative fiction with architectural space, inviting visitors to inhabit ambiguous narrative worlds. Visitors encounter a world that feels simultaneously speculative and plausible, reinforcing the psychological dimension of liminal experience (Tate, 2008).

Ryoji Ikeda approaches liminality through technological immersion. His work *data-verse* (2019) transforms scientific data into audiovisual compositions that reveal the vast informational structures underlying contemporary life. According to Ikeda, the *data-verse* project explores “the aesthetics of data as the invisible substance of the world” (Ikeda, 2019). Within the exhibition, this produces an intense sensory threshold where visitors experience the limits of human perception in relation to digital systems.

Tacita Dean’s analogue film works offer a contrasting engagement with liminality through time and memory. *FILM* (1997–ongoing) emphasises duration and materiality as ways of slowing perception and encouraging contemplation. As Dean notes, analogue film allows for a “different relationship

with time, chance, and attention” (Dean, 2011). Within the exhibition, this slower temporal rhythm functions as a counterpoint to Ikeda’s digital acceleration.

Olafur Eliasson’s installations explore the embodied and atmospheric dimensions of perception. *Your Blind Passenger* (2010) manipulates light, fog, colour, and spatial orientation to create environments in which visitors become acutely aware of their sensory experience. As Gernot Böhme argues, atmospheres are spatial moods that shape how environments are felt and inhabited (Böhme, 2017).

The abandoned Debenhams building (Fig. 7, 8) strengthens this curatorial framework by functioning as more than a neutral container for artworks. Its unfinished surfaces, echoes, and exposed architectural structures reinforce the exhibition’s thematic focus on transition and instability. The building itself becomes an active curatorial element, embodying the condition of suspension between past commercial identity and future redevelopment. *A loop of liminality.*



Fig. 8. The Vast Stripped Back Floor Of Debenhams. (Image: Swansea Council)

Conclusion

The Song Between the Raindrops positions liminality not simply as a transitional phase but as a condition to be experienced and inhabited. Through ecological systems, speculative environments, digital immersion, cinematic duration, and atmospheric installations, the selected artists construct spaces that destabilise ordinary perception and invite visitors to dwell within moments of uncertainty and suspension.

The abandoned Debenhams department store intensifies this exploration by acting as a spatial metaphor for transition and transformation. Its unfinished architecture echoes the conceptual concerns of the exhibition, reinforcing the sense of suspended time and uncertain futures. As visitors move through the exhibition, they encounter a sequence of perceptual thresholds that shift their awareness of space, duration, and presence.

In doing so, *The Song Between the Raindrops* reflects broader developments in contemporary curatorial practice, where exhibitions increasingly function as immersive environments that foreground spatial experience, sensory awareness, and the active role of the visitor.

Collectively, the works of Huyghe, Gonzalez-Foerster, Ikeda, Dean, and Eliasson demonstrate that ambiguity and instability can be productive conditions for reflection and engagement. By inhabiting these thresholds, visitors experience liminality as a poetic and generative state - the quiet space between moments, the song between the raindrops.

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List of Figures

Fig. 1. Pierre Huyghe, *After ALife Ahead* (2017). Installation view, Skulptur Projekte Münster, Germany. Photograph © Ola Rindal, courtesy the artist.

Fig. 2. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *TH.2058* (2008). Installation view, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London.

Fig. 3. Ryoji Ikeda, *data-verse* (2019). Installation view showing audiovisual data field.

Fig. 4. Tacita Dean, *FILM* (1997–ongoing). 16mm film installation view.

Fig. 5. Olafur Eliasson, *Your Blind Passenger* (2010). Installation view showing fog-filled passage.

Fig. 6. Conceptual exhibition layout for *The Song Between the Raindrops*. Digital floor plan showing visitor flow from Room A → Room B → Room C → Room D → Final Atrium. Curated and designed by the author.

Fig. 7. Abandoned Debenhams building. Photograph © Swansea Council

Fig. 8. The vast stripped back floor of Debenhams. Photograph © Swansea Council