

# The Space Between

SHARED SENSEMAKING IS NEEDED IN THIS PERIOD OF INTENSE LIMINALITY.

BY TONY O'DRISCOLL

As we enter second quarter 2021, it is likely safe to make these two assertions: First, few of us would have predicted our collective COVID-19 fate. Second, many of us happily ushered in the New Year in the hopes that it will bring a brighter future for all.

Since a year ago this month, humanity has been thrown into a *liminal space* that resides between a prior pre-COVID world that no longer exists and an emerging post-COVID world that is not yet understood.

We human beings have a fearful relationship with uncertainty that is encoded into our biology. When fear takes hold, we tend to want to snap back to the familiarity of a known past rather than to lean forward into the unpredictability of an unknown future.

Today, many of us feel like a trapeze artist hurtling through the air with no safety net, having let go of one bar and desperately reaching for another to avoid falling into the abyss. It is an uncomfortable place to be.

## WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE

This is not our first liminal experience as a species. Some 500 years ago, we navigated the transition from Pre-Modernism to Modernism. During that period, mysticism gave way to objectivism as scientific reasoning provided an alternative to supernaturalism.

In the 1950s, we experienced a liminal shift from Modernism to Post-Modernism, where skepticism questioned reason, subjectivism challenged objectivism, and pessimism sought to throttle progress. In transitioning from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, we have taken a number of digital liminal leaps: from connecting *to* the Web to access information, to connecting *through* the Web to share experiences, to becoming immersed *within* the Web in virtual communities that have converged around alternate versions of reality.

As a species, we are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain continuity of contact with an ever-evolving horizon of intelligibility. Things just don't seem to make sense anymore.

Our only option at this critical juncture is to overcome our fear and tap into our uniquely human ability to make shared sense of the mysteries we do not yet understand—just like Plato did more than 2,500 years ago—through open and authentic dialectic.

My New Year's resolution for 2021 is to listen to others with a perspective that is wholly different from my own, with the aspiration that, together, we can reach a place we could not have arrived at separately in enabling humanity to move through this period of liminality and arrive at an operating system for society that better fits with our new shared reality. ■



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