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## **The Psychology of Global Crisis through the lens of liminal experience: Stuck in the middle with SARS-CoV-2.**

Paul Stenner  
The Open University, UK

### **Introduction: 'Stuck in the middle' of permanent liminality**

In the early 1970s, Gerry Rafferty and Joe Egan wrote a song with a highly contagious chorus refrain: 'clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am, stuck in the middle with you.' Judging by the large number of Covid-19 re-versions, this Stealers Wheel classic has struck a new chord with many. I propose that some new sense can be made out of the current pandemic by viewing it through the theoretical lens of *liminal experience*. This theoretical move makes visible various ways in which it is possible to become 'stuck in the middle of a transition' or held suspended in *liminal hotspots* of various kinds (Stenner & Kaposi, 2020). Compared to the interpretive frame provided by the concept of crisis alone, the concept of liminality combines a phase of separation with the importance of going through experiences of transformation in order that progressive change might occur.

There is value in learning to 'think' liminality, not just spatially (as marginality, where something liminal exists in the margins of a form of life ordered by a dominant perspective) but also temporally, as a becoming that involves the emergence of novelty. When the familiar pattern of lives undergoes a significant transition, the resulting radical uncertainty re-configures expectations of the future and memories of the past and can transform the very seat of reality: the present. The present is, of course, always *someone's* present, and I write from the limits of my own.

The concept of liminality refers to more or less *devised* or *spontaneous* transitions through which new becomings are enacted. Liminality is the experience of order transformed or structure suspended to yield anti-structure (see Stenner, 2017). The concept was first applied in the context of analyzing rituals within small scale communities: between the pre-liminal 'rites of separation' (which help those involved to say goodbye to a world in the process of being left behind), and the post-liminal 'rites of incorporation' (which say hello to a new world), there are the liminal 'transition rites' in which participants momentarily experience what it is to exist in a de-territorialized condition on the cusp or threshold between worlds. In this context, liminal experience – under strict ritual guidance – helps those involved to re-feel, re-think, and otherwise re-experience themselves afresh in preparation for a changed life chapter. Liminality thus concerns the interruption of a pattern of life such that another might take its place but foregrounds the curious phase between. But liminality is relevant beyond the ritual context because it is also experienced in less 'orchestrated' ways when the historically established pattern of lives is abruptly interrupted (Szokolczai, 2008). Such

experiences of discontinuous transition tend to be inherently ambivalent: glimpses of dawning heaven can morph in moments into hellish jaws and back again.

Elsewhere (Stenner, 2017) I have argued that liminality acquires a new ontological importance once a genuine shift is made away from the metaphysics of substance, which has dominated much of western thought to date. Whitehead's (1929) process ontology (Stenner, 2008), alongside the tradition of process anthropology traceable to van Gennep (1909/61) and Turner (1967 1982), provides a viable alternative, but it requires that basic concepts be re-thought from the ground up. Below I begin to tackle the concepts of 'crisis' and 'experience' in a way that makes their relation to liminal transition more thinkable and tractable (see also Szokolczai, 2008). Illustrating these concepts through an encounter with the pandemic opens new processual ways of thinking *psychologically* amidst 'global crises.' My argument assumes that our very knowledge practices need guidance through a rite of passage of sorts, and perhaps the pandemic brings them to just such a threshold.

In dwelling on theory in the midst of crisis, I am painfully reminded of Dostoevsky's *Dream of a ridiculous man* in which the odd-ball hero contemplates the inevitable responses of the indignant scoffers to his dream of a harmonious human future. But curiously, now *is* the time *both* for action *and* for dreaming a different future before the smog fully re-establishes itself over the world's (unequal and unsustainable) urbanity. Viewed this way, the issue is not 'theory' versus 'practice' or 'dreams' versus 'action' but the cultivation of modes of theory that do not disconnect from practice through a failure to accommodate the nature and relevance of dreaming, imagining, and envisioning future ideals to effective action. In this spirit and full acknowledgment of the limits of my local vantage point, I end my contribution with a critique of some aspects of the UK Government response to Covid-19. I hope my reflections connect with those of others who aim to think and act differently and develop their resources in their own ways.

## **Rethinking the concepts of 'crisis' and 'experience' in the light of liminality**

### *Crisis*

Koselleck (1988) has traced a long heritage associated with the word 'crisis' and its close relative 'critique.' Both words derive from the ancient Greek *krino*, meaning 'separate,' 'decide,' 'quarrel.' The verb *Krinein* means to divide and is closely related with *keiro*, to cut. The word 'decision,' for instance, implies a 'cut' which selects one amongst various possibilities that are ripe for becoming actual. Its ancient origins in Greek medicine and law indicate a double separation: a *troubled process* calls for a *decisive judgment*. The word crisis refers both to the decisive judgment and that which calls for it. In medicine, for example, the first separation is the process that constitutes the serious illness itself: e.g., a raging fever separates the patient from their health. The disorder of this first departure from physiological 'business as usual' calls for a medical decision about diagnosis and prognosis: will the patient live or die? What will be done? In the case of law, the first separation is a departure from a social order structured by law (a feud between two families escalates into violence, for instance), which calls for a second separation in the form of a legal judgment deciding the fate of those on trial: What will be done? Is the defendant innocent or guilty? A third sphere

in which the term crisis was used in ancient Greece was in military and political struggles in which a strategic decision was made, and this also illustrates the pattern of double separation.

These phenomena all indicate a future-deciding tipping-point, and the concept of crisis thus appears to introduce an inherent demand for decision with respect to a departure from order. The parallel with liminal experience is thus evident. The rites of passage discussed by van Gennep (1909/61) are also cultural responses to situations in which social order is transformed, but the responses are designed to facilitate and foster the transformation at stake. Hence in liminality theory, 'separation' is just one of three phases proper to becomings, suggesting that crisis alone equates to being stuck in the separation phase of a becoming, calling forth a decision in the form of an *either/or*.

Koselleck (2006) pointed out that today there is 'virtually no area of life that has not been examined and interpreted through this concept with its inherent demand for decisions and choices.' Since at least the 1970s, warnings have been issued about a global systemic crisis, including interconnected crises of energy resource, biosphere, demography, and society (Weber, 2016). Social crises of economy and political representation are distinctive obstacles because one finds something more like a vacuum just where coordinated human action is most needed (Adams, 2016). Today crisis talk is *global* in the weak sense that it is mobilized in diverse fields (health crises, identity crises, crises among the sciences, financial crises, etc.), and in the strong sense, the scale of the processes demanding attention has grown to global proportions.

With respect to crises on a global scale, Koselleck (2006) shows how already for Leibniz in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the emerging Russian empire spelled crisis for Europe. But the word crisis was first used in the distinctively modern sense of a prognosis of the global political future by Rousseau in 1762 when he wrote: 'We are approaching a state of crises and a century of revolutions' (cited in Koselleck, 2006). Rousseau's modern use of the word crisis, however, applied only to the first of the two separations distinguished above and no longer applied to the decisive response. Koselleck observes that, alongside this shift, the word *critique* - previously synonymous with *crisis* - acquired a new meaning amongst the Enlightenment *literati* and *philosophes*. With Kant, it acquired its modern philosophical significance as the method of modern philosophy, and with Diderot and Lessing, it acquired its modern aesthetic meaning (the literary 'critic'). Critique now signifies a negative commentary largely *disengaged from any responsibility for practical relevance*: an elite specialism estranged from the realities of the process it addresses. Crisis in this modern sense is increasingly construed as a phase of turmoil that must be decisively *seized* for the sake of the future on a global scale. Indeed, perhaps modernity itself might be grasped as a constant seizure of this kind, and in raising this proposition, I deliberately intend the resonance with a seizure of a medical variety. In so far as its keyword is *crisis*, modernity as such can show up from this perspective as a permanent fit of crisis upon crisis, ever formed anew from the crucible of crisis: *permanent liminality* (Szakolczai, 2017).

### *Experience*

The history of psychology can be conceived as a series of crises with respect to its fundamental concept: experience. Social change of the kind required of humanity will mean

profound changes, not just at the level of practices, but also at the level of people's mentality or 'worldview,' including perceptions, ideas, and desires. However, it is no exaggeration to say that the concept of experience that should surely be at the core of the discipline of psychology is in tatters. Roots for an adequate psychological concept of experience within its Eurocentric history can, however, be found in Dilthey's descriptive psychology (see Szokolczai, 2009). Dilthey was amongst the first to take systematic issue with Kant's 'critical' limitation of the concept of experience whereby the German word *Erfahrung* (experience in the sense of accumulated wisdom) was reduced to the entertainment of sensory data structured by *a priori* categories. Within Dilthey's proto process psychology, experience takes on a meaning consistent with its etymological roots in the notion of passage: it is a *going through* (see Szokolczai, 2008). To have *an experience* in this sense is to go through something which changes the subject having the experience. To emphasize this transformative *event* of a going through, Dilthey follows Goethe and uses another German word for experience, *Erlebnis* (roughly, 'lived experience').

Whitehead worked out a concept of experience that is compatible with that of Dilthey but broader in scope. As a theoretical physicist who lived through and contributed to the quantum and relativity revolutions, Whitehead could grasp that at the most basic level, reality is composed not of irreducible bits of matter or substance but of atomic *occasions* through which the togetherness of the basic structures that we call 'matter' are ongoingly realized. The atomic actual entities that make up the universe are, abstractly put, occasions of actualization during which potential is concretely realized. Whitehead names that process of concrescence 'experience'. Here 'experience' must not be equated with consciousness: most experience is far from being conscious, and only very refined high-grade forms of experience include consciousness as a phase. This concept of the 'actual occasion' of experience thus expresses an ontological continuity at play throughout nature. Even the most basic entities of physics are characterized by an event of *going through* that can be likened to Dilthey's rethinking of experience. Experience is essentially a process: a 'transition' that effects a real transmission and yields a novel form.

Together the Dilthey / Whitehead notion of experience stands the older (substance) tradition on its head in three main ways:

First, empiricism is radicalized: there is *nothing without subjects*. Apart from actual occasions of experience, nothing exists.

Second, there is *no subject without objects*. One must no longer ask how the world emerges from the subject but rather 'how the subject emerges from the world' (Whitehead, 1929 p.88). The Kantian preoccupation with how the entertainment of subjective data gives rise to the appearance of an external world is superseded by an effort to describe how objective data can pass into subjectivity (by creatively building on prior order that is objectively available in the data). Hence 'subject' is not disconnected from 'object' but emerges from it, indelibly *embodied*.

Third, *every actual occasion of experience is inherently socially embedded* in two senses: a) the character of any actual occasion depends on data given for its experience by its social environment, which in turn is constituted from the characters of the actual occasions that

together compose it, and b) these data are thus not extrinsic to, but constitutive of the subject of experience. Far from being abstractable from its setting (a 'sovereign individual'), a subject is a 'perspective' on the wider universe.

This threefold rethinking of experience carries three further implications concerning sociality, relationality, and temporality.

First, it reveals 'the social' to be a question of 'order' or, better, 'ordering' or 'patterning,' since the attainment of order – thankfully - is always partial. Any 'society' (whether a society of people or the society of cells that together compose an ant or the society of molecules that together compose a cell) is an ordered nexus of actual entities, a society being something self-sustaining: it creates its own foundations by means of the coordinated ongoing activities of its component entities. The element of *order* characterizing a society persists only because its members can, presupposing it, ongoingly *enact* it.

Second, relationality is fundamental, not secondary: any experience and any society presuppose a more or less stable environment beyond itself. In isolation, *nothing exists*.

Third, rather than following Newton in viewing time from the outside as mere chronology, time is understood, not just from the perspective of the one going through it, but of the one constituted by it: the one whose present is informed by the fact that she is capable of imagining a future and of remembering a past. Human psychology, in particular, entails the experience of a present that is constituted through its integration with a remembered past and an imagined future, and the world that we *consciously* experience is that symbolically mediated composite 'construction.' The first conception of time as externality is itself, of course, an experience. However, it is an experience that can take for granted this complex symbolic mediation. The second conception emerges through experiences in which the first can no longer be taken for granted because it has been disrupted. When time as chronology is disrupted and transforms into time as process, then we have an experience not just thanks to time but with time.

Together, the sociality, relationality, and temporality of all experience clarify the ontological basis on which a disruptive event can generate *liminal experience* by disrupting and re-ordering expectations of the future, reconfiguring memories of the past, and thereby transforming the very seat of reality: the present (see Mead, 1932/1980). The order or patterning that underlies and is re-created by means of experience does not always hold, and when fundamental change arrives, those involved experience liminality.

### **Rethinking Emergence and Togetherness: Epidemic as the epiphany of a newcomer**

There are multiple liminalities at multiple levels. To explicate these levels, we must attend to the aspect of liminality noted earlier, which concerns *creative emergence* at the threshold of becoming. When an existing pattern of *togetherness* is disrupted, this occasions experiences of liminality from which - given adequate conditions (including tolerance and acknowledgement) – a new pattern of togetherness can emerge. In his book on the Cretan origins of the cult of Dionysos, Kerényi (2006) observes that the word *epidemia* was used in ancient times to signify the new arrival in the land of the new god. An epidemic followed the

epiphany of a new arrival. Just so, the pandemic must be viewed as a new arrival. As an unfamiliar fact disruptive of the prior order, we shall sketch how it gave rise to a cascade of liminal disruptions at multiple levels of the process (chemical, organic, psychological, sociological).

First, at the source of the pandemic is precisely such an epiphany: the event of the emergence of a new type of coronavirus, a novel *chemical* configuration in the universe. This new arrival was named *severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2* or SARS-CoV-2 for short. However, far from being received as a god, the British Prime Minister, among others, referred to it as ‘devilish.’ This subjective valuation is not hard to sympathize with, but in fact, SARS-CoV-2 is neither god nor demon, but it is, or was, *new*. Indeed, according to scientific orthodoxy, a virus is not even considered alive, requiring living cells to enact its own ‘parasitical’ chemical becomings.

Second, SARS-CoV-2 can thus *only exist relationally*. Its patterned chemical processes presuppose the existence of its host, whose patterned biological processes it ‘intercepts’ and disrupts. Equally *new*, then, was Covid-19, which names not the virus but the *disease* it causes on encountering living bodies and converting them into virus factories. While conceptually distinct, they manifest an inseparable ‘togetherness’ at the level of *event*: no SARS-CoV-2 no Covid-19, no Covid-19 no SARS-CoV-2. The advent of Covid-19 is essentially the *liminal disruption* caused by a novel virus to the organic forms of process that compose the living body of its host.

Third, in acknowledging the ‘newcomer,’ we cannot stop at this threshold between chemical and biological forms of process. A different but related dimension is *the experiences of illness* that the disease event affords to each of those unfortunate millions infected by it. This ‘psychological dimension’ is nothing more than a matter of considering the disruption to organic forms of process *from the internal perspective of the one going through that process*: it concerns how the ill person experiences a certain organic decomposition caused by the virus. The illness experience of the patient is doubly liminal: it includes both the disruptive encounter with troubled physiology and the consequent interruption to the patterns of their social activities (they stay at home, for example, or go to the hospital, and these too are experiences of liminality as defined above).

Fourth, *knowledge of* what I have just summarised poses individuals – particularly those in positions of authority - with *new practical problems of communication*. For example, the Chinese authorities – who had grappled before with new viruses – were faced with the question: what should they tell the world about their observations in Wuhan during the last days of 2019? When the world’s media reported the Italian ‘lockdown’ on March 9th, how should politicians in other countries, the UK, for example, react? Here, the Covid-19/SARS-CoV-2 assemblage need not directly affect the body of Boris Johnson (as it later would) in order to be entertained as a *proposition* demanding action from him. Johnson, unlike SARS-CoV-2, is a highly sophisticated assemblage of processes capable of entertaining *propositions* and operating with them as part of an elaborate political system of communication. As it happened, after a few days of pressure, Johnson shelved his preferred theory of ‘herd immunity.’ Instead, he followed other nations in instituting the unprecedented measures that soon came to be known as ‘lockdown.’ In so doing, he was swayed by a *proposition*: without

action, the UK health system will be overwhelmed by sheer numbers of patients to the point of national catastrophe. Ontologically, a proposition is a theory (it entertains a possible future) but, to continue my theme, this was a *new* proposition that called for *new* action based on the spread of a *new* disease caused by the *new* virus.

Fifth, the new action was called 'lockdown.' As a response to a proposition, the lockdown was not *caused* by Covid-19/SARS-CoV-2 if by that we imply efficient causation since it was oriented to a possible *future* in which health systems might be (and often were) overwhelmed. Lockdown is a coordinated societal response to the anticipated impact of mass illness upon its own patterns or forms of process: upon the continued operation of the social system as such. This too, despite some familiar elements, was a *new* configuration: multiple social systems (education, transport, sport, and leisure, etc.) were abruptly suspended, employees in all but essential jobs stayed at home, safer new ways of carrying activities on were quickly improvised (working online), and new tasks were set (a perfume company switches to producing hand-gel, etc.). Under the orchestration of the political system, lockdown thus interrupts the (communicative and practical) patterns of all of society's subsystems, with the economic system and the health system very much in the headlines.

All these analytically separable levels share a *togetherness*, but a togetherness (pattern) that can be interrupted. The various social systems noted above obviously form a crucial proximal environment patterning the daily lives of millions of human beings, lending form to their emotions, expectations, actions, sense of identity, and feelings of belonging. In a short space of time, the routinely expected immediate future disappears, and the present is transformed into an extended experience of life-having-been-interrupted. The different liminal experiences that many people across the globe have been going through are inseparable from these interruptions to business-as-usual. Whether merely inconvenient (school children whose exams are canceled) or life-threatening an *expected future* (present future) quite suddenly becomes a *past future* as a *past present* is replaced by a *present present* characterized by the fact that there is no clear *present future* to replace it (see Mead, 1932/1980).

Liminal experience *is* the experience of the disrupted present of a transformed (biopsychosocial) pattern/process. To be in transition with no end in sight is to enter a *liminal hotspot* (Greco & Stenner, 2017) between the present of a pattern now passed and another yet to emerge. Things that previously made clear sense suddenly become paradoxical in a liminal present precisely because one is suspended between worlds. The familiar orthodox logic of 'either/or' gives way to a logic that includes *both* 'both/and' *and* 'neither/nor.' Must one retain liberal values of individual freedom or assert strong central leadership? Should measures be uniform and fair to all or tailored to those more at risk? Should warring political parties unite to address a shared problem, or is the tension between parties more important than ever? Furthermore, lacking a familiar way forward, there is a demand to find or invent *new ways of going on*. However, this requires a certain *living through* of this curious phase, which belongs neither to the past as we knew it, nor to the future as we previously expected it. This living through – this *experience* - provides ways to transform the paralysis of paradox into manageable contrasts and tensions that light the way to the new modes of togetherness our planet so sorely needs.

## Eliminating the liminal

I have emphasized the temporal dimensions of liminality as a ‘between worlds’ phase of becoming inherently in process as both a ‘no longer what it was’ and a ‘not yet what it will be.’ This does not deny that the togetherness of a complex world is *always* in process and *never* finished. Instead, it points to disruptions during which this fact *can no longer be ignored*. Order – especially the order of a human polity – is a massively complex, agonistic, and power-soaked affair in which those who benefit from being and remaining *established* have an interest in eliminating liminality from serious consideration. Here we also encounter a more spatially oriented concept of liminality as a phenomenon *at the margins* of a dominant order. Front line key-workers like lower grade nurses (more than 50% of which are from ethnic minorities in London [Kline, 2020]) are liminal in this sense of their low status and relative invisibility, as are the elderly in care homes (who are literally spatially marginalized). Ultimately, however, spatial and temporal dimensions are inseparable. Indeed the ‘spatially’ marginalized, viewed temporally in terms of transition, are often those whose becoming is blocked by an establishment that desires to lock them into a subservient stasis: permanent liminality of a promised equality that ever remains ‘not yet.’ This is why the ‘margins’ are also the source of change (observe the rise of the ‘third estate,’ the ‘third world’ and indeed the ‘excluded third’ in general).

In light of the above, I offer a brief interpretation of a speech given by the UK Prime minister back on May 10th, 2020. The speech illustrates how the pandemic's liminal features can be effectively eliminated from consideration and how this elimination can generate further unacknowledged liminality. Johnson's speech began by noting that, following two months of lockdown, the UK would enter a second phase where the instruction ‘stay at home’ would be replaced by the slogan ‘stay alert.’ The speech was woven out of two conceptual threads: lives and livelihoods. The virus threatens biological lives and economic livelihoods, not just health but also wealth. The first phase of the lockdown had succeeded in protecting lives, but at the cost of suspending millions of livelihoods. Those inactive millions, he said, feared not just for their lives but also their livelihoods, and so as the threat to life reduced, so restrictions to livelihoods would be removed. The speech thus set up a dichotomy, involving two tightly woven fears, as the frame through which the pandemic must be understood and managed.

Within this frame, Johnson presented the SARS-CoV-2 virus as a ‘devilish’ ‘invisible killer’ posing a ‘vicious threat’ to the two unquestionable and seamlessly intertwined primary values of health and wealth, the biological and the economic. The only question was how to restore these to pre-crisis levels as quickly as possible. This frame focuses only upon a) the apparently good world of the past that has been so rudely interrupted, and b) the same world of the future (perhaps healthier and wealthier) that must soon resume its shape. Any consideration of a curious liminal phase *between worlds* is entirely avoided as if we must avoid looking down while crossing a gaping chasm between two solid landmasses. The speech aimed for a win-win in which, so long as citizens ‘stay[ed] alert’, no incompatibility is envisaged between returning to work and health. And yet, as was clear to many, Johnson's ‘first sketch of a road map for re-opening society’ in fact simply avoided many incompatibilities and contradictions. Those unable to work from home who must return to (or continue) physical or front-line work *were* putting their health at greater risk, especially in the absence of serious test and trace

technology. Johnson famously addressed this by not addressing it: equivocating while denying that equivocation. The UK comedian Matt Lucas (2020) best summed this aspect of the speech:

So, we are saying, don't go to work, go to work. Don't take public transport, go to work, don't go to work. Stay indoors. If you can work from home go to work, don't go to work, go outside, don't go outside. Then we will or won't, something or other.

Since Johnson's directives provided at best ambiguous guidance on actual practice, a short circuit was created between the high ideals of those governing, on the one hand, and on-the-ground practicalities, on the other. This afforded rich possibilities for the attribution of blame for failure to those ordinary people, scientists, hospitals, nursing homes, etc., who must act while simultaneously paralyzing the possibilities for effective coordinated action. Abstract ideals ('protect the NHS,' 'stay alert') were thus set in tension with any actual practice that might deliver these ideals. In this context, his announcements approximate what Gregory Bateson called a *double-bind*: a self-defeating communicative situation in which action gets paralyzed by paradoxes. In these ways, Johnson's communication eliminated the liminal from thinkability while simultaneously multiplying ambiguities and paradoxes in practice like the heads of the hydra.

This approach proved particularly problematic in the case of care homes for the elderly, where a considerable number of Covid-19 related deaths were concentrated (and still, as we approach the end of 2020, many care homes lack basic capacities to test their visitors and those they care for). It was known since at least January 2020 that the elderly with pre-existing conditions are by far the most likely to die from Covid-19. Yet, in practice, care homes were actively exposed to the virus both by receiving people who were sent away from hospitals to 'protect the NHS' and through exposure to care workers (who often work under precarious and poorly paid conditions in several different private care homes, each often under different ownership). Returning to the theme of liminality in the sense of marginality, a root problem here is that the infirm elderly fall outside of the seamless bio-political alliance of health and wealth that is at the core of this political approach. Those whose lives put them on the wrong side of the double-logic risk becoming the casualty, not just of SARS-CoV-2, but of an effort to rush the population to a familiar future with eyes closed to the liminal.

There is an additional dimension to this problem. In the UK context, the pandemic's permanent liminality has been superimposed upon the protracted transition that is Brexit. Johnson numbers amongst the small group of politicians and political advisors who, immediately prior to the pandemic, had so controversially engineered the exit of the UK from the EU. The generation of mass support was enabled through a strategic exploitation of crisis situations (including the alleged threat posed by migration), which greatly intensified existing polarizations amongst the UK population. For Horvath and Szokolczai (2019), 'tricksters' thrive on liminality and use it for their own ends, exploiting its confusing aspects with little care for the long-term becoming of those they throw into transition (through the loss of jobs, loved ones, future prospects, etc.). In UK politics, such tricksterdom is something of an open secret. The father of a prominent conservative politician, Lord William Rees-Mogg opens his and

Davidson's 1997 book *The sovereign individual* with the ominous words 'the future is disorder.' The book (published in various versions) announces a coming economic revolution and offers advice on how to prosper in the new harshly violent conditions. Alert leaders, they assert, correctly no longer believe in the nations they govern. Citizenship itself is 'obsolete,' the potential of the nation-state is exhausted, and its old 'civic myths' mere hollow platitudes. But from the corpse of the old politics will arise a new breed of self-interested 'sovereign individuals' able to exploit the chaos, become hugely wealthy, and establish themselves – to use Lord Rees-Mogg's expression - like the Gods of a virtual Mount Olympus. Since weaker souls will surround this superior minority, Rees-Mogg invites his new psychological type of superman to create their wealth 'offshore' and – given expected violence and decline of state-based justice procedures - to live in highly securitized private spaces. Although an extreme position, it is unwise to neglect the influence of this emerging 'psychology' of crisis, whose technocratic arm we now see routinely exercised in the psychographic manipulation of social media.

### **Conclusion: Do not mess with Mr. In-Between?**

Risking a dream, I have endeavored to outline a process worldview using the keynote of liminality. This emphasis on the in-between phase of liminality becomes particularly important when the 'old normal' that has been disturbed was, to put it bluntly, an environmentally unsustainable, grossly divisive, and demonstrably destructive normality characterized by permanent crises. However, a response only in the register of crisis will only deepen and tighten the liminal hotspots that trap so many. Naomi Klein (2007) has proposed that our time's crucial question is what is to be *made out of* crisis? In the latest application of her thesis, she diagnoses some of Trump's political moves as a 'pandemic shock doctrine' designed to exploit the pandemic crisis to further corporate interests at the expense of the mass of ordinary people. Placing crisis in the broader frame of liminality affords recognition of how unacknowledged liminality gives rise to paradoxes that can paralyze action and provoke polarisations that entrench divisive separations as permanent features. Sovereign eagles with predatory ambitions are set against those hardened by dashed hope into revolutionary violence, sharing in common an instinct for the opportunities created by chaotic disorder. The practical plans of people of action, likewise, become set against the ideals of dreamers. Viewed through the lens of liminality, a permanent crisis is problem as much as solution. It is time we acknowledged the extent to which the virulent economic, materialistic, and psychological *ideas* that have shaped Western modernity were themselves prematurely born from crises that they have only served to expand and perpetuate. Stengers (2016) does not use the word liminality, but she is faithful to process thought when she writes that resisting 'the coming barbarism' means struggling for another world and recognizing our predicament as one of being 'suspended between two histories.' Haraway (2016) does not use it either but is undoubtedly correct in her challenge to 'stay with the trouble' by learning how to responsively attend to the process of change as it is gone through. For my part, I urge that the articulation of a new politics beyond the 'sovereign individual' requires a processual understanding of the psychological as experience.

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