

**THERE MUST  
BE SOME WAY  
OUT OF HERE**

**Mapping the pandemic  
from Left field**

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**@mpass**

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By Phil Cohen

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### **About Compass**

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with top-down/state reforms and policy. The question we are trying to help solve, which we explore in the recent document [45 Degree Change](#), is not just what sort of society we want, but, increasingly, how to make it happen?

# Content

05	Preface and Acknowledgments
06	Starting Points
07	A chronicle of many deaths foretold
11	Going Viral: diary of a communicable disease
14	Danger-Pandemonology at Work! The making of a bio-political crisis
16	The emotional geography of risk
20	Imagining the body politic in a state of emergency
23	The imperatives of solidarity: from moral panic to moral economy
28	There goes the cohort: Covid-19 replays the Generation Game
30	Hope after Woke: on critical mindfulness
36	'I Can't Breathe': Mapping Politics' Other Scene from Left Field
40	Voice, Agency and the art of listening
44	Endnotes
49	Further Reading

## Preface and Acknowledgments

This text is a companion piece to ‘Political Mindfulness: Fresh Perspectives on Multiple Crises’, published simultaneously by Compass. It looks at a range of public and personal responses to the pandemic for what it tells us about the kind of society and culture we live in. Drawing on the insights of psychoanalysis and anthropology a model of risk perception is outlined and applied to understanding the forms of social solidarity which are invoked by the government’s confused and often contradictory public health messaging. I argue for an exit strategy from the present moral panic aimed at ‘high risk’ groups towards a moral economy of social recovery based on the multitude not the tribe. The piece concludes by considering how far the scope of mindfulness could be extended to give the Left a handle on the present conjuncture.

Mindfulness is always an exercise of the dialogic imagination. The present text originated in discussions with many friends and colleagues over the past six months. I am especially grateful to Dick Pountain, Tim Clark, Donald Nicholson-Smith and members of the Livingmaps Network for many insightful comments. My partner, Jean McNeil proofed the text and helped with matters of style; John Wallett and Les Bell have made lockdown more bearable with their good humour and astute responses to the situation, proving that fences, even digital ones, can sometimes make for good neighbours.

I would also like to thank Neal Lawson for the opportunity to take these ideas for a walk and Jack Jeffrey for patiently seeing the text through its various iterations to its present publication.

*Phil Cohen*  
*Wivenhoe June 2020*

## Starting Points

‘There is nothing that humans fear more than the touch of the unknown. We want to see what is reaching towards us, and to be able to recognize or at least classify it. Humans always tend to avoid physical contact with anything strange. In the dark, the fear of an unexpected touch can mount to panic. Even clothes give insufficient security: it is easy to tear them and pierce through to the naked, smooth, defenseless flesh of the victim. All the distances which humans create around themselves are dictated by this fear. They shut themselves in houses which no-one may enter, and only there feel some measure of security. The fear of burglars is not only the fear of being robbed, but also the fear of a sudden and unexpected clutch out of the darkness. The repugnance to being touched remains with us when we go about among people; the way we move in a busy street, in restaurants, trains or buses, is governed by it. It is only in a crowd that humans can become free of this fear of being touched. That is the only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite. The crowd we need is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose psychical constitution is also dense, or compact, so that we no longer notice who it is that presses against us.’ *Elias Canetti Crowds and Power (1978)*

‘The hardest part of lockdown is the invisible ‘look don’t touch’ signs which everybody is supposed to carry with them all the time. Not everyone is huggy, and the English upper class are well known for their so called ‘sang froid’ but what gets my goat is that they expect everyone else to be as cold blooded as them. And then, of course, they go and break their own lockdown rules, and say ‘oh that just proves how human we are, just like everyone else!’’ *Mary Cabbot Pandemic Blog (2020)*

## A Chronicle of many deaths foretold

My title, a famous quote from a famous Bob Dylan song, might at first sight appear to be a plea for some kind of radical escapology. We are in a mess after Brexit and Labour's historical defeat in the 2019 election. How do we move on? We are in lockdown in the midst of the worst public health crisis since the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918. Where is the exit strategy that does not result in a second wave of infection? How can the looming global recession be avoided? There must be some way out of here, but which direction home?

There are currently a number of escapisms on offer on the Left. An escape into the past via nostalgic evocations of a lost world of working class community and instinctive solidarity. Escape into the future of utopian projects, with dreams of reaching the Elysian fields of a classless society. And now thanks to Covid-19, when so much that we have taken for granted is no longer possible, there are those who argue that what only a few months ago was regarded as a Leftist pipedream, the resurgence of a vibrant civil society centred on a post-capitalist economy, and supported by large sections of the population, all this is now suddenly within our grasp.<sup>1</sup>

These responses mirror the 'one leap and we are free' mantra of the Brexiteers, with their vision of Albion unbound at the stroke of midnight on January 31st 2020, magically liberated from the oppressive Brussels Yoke. Such instant panaceas have inevitably lost traction now that it is clear to everyone, except Donald Trump, that there are no quick fixes for this pandemic and that it will be a long haul to achieve any kind of better world the other side of it. Nevertheless, the transposition of the breakthrough scenario into a vision of a brighter post-capitalist future continues to have its advocates.

The Bob Dylan song, All Along the Watch Tower points to a rather different mindset, and one to which this essay is dedicated. Those of us who grew up with it may hopefully still be able to remember that the narrative takes the form of a conversation between two archetypal outsiders, the Joker and the Thief:

There must be some way out of here  
Said the Joker to the Thief

The Joker or Fool is a trickster figure, a shape shifter who speaks truth to power in the forms of riddles, aphorisms and coded references. As a Tarot card the Joker represents new beginnings, having faith in the future, the capacity to improvise and a belief in ultimate success, all qualities which the new Labour leadership might well aspire to. However as devotees to Marvel Comic (including Bob Dylan) know the Joker is also Batman's arch enemy, and in that guise the figure takes on more sinister

overtones as an agent of chaos, a psychopathic clown, an enemy of the political establishment exposing its many hypocrisies. It is not surprising that the Joker became a mascot of the Tea Party movement in the USA, an anti-hero of the alt-Right and has subsequently become the subject of a popular cult movie. Covid-19 is perhaps the ultimate Joker.

At first sight the Thief seems a more straight forward character, except that, as Bob Dylan tell us elsewhere, 'to live outside the law you must be honest'; let's recall that in Greek mythology Hermes, the guardian of the crossroads, is not only the patron god of thieves, but travelers, poets, athletes, orators, and indeed of all those who in their different ways unsettle social norms.

So these two characters together offer a 'left field' perspective which challenges conventional wisdoms about how to conduct affairs. In the song they find much uncommon ground:

There is too much confusion  
I can't get no relief

We can all identify with these lines, I think. The political messaging about the Government's strategy for dealing with the national health crisis has been unclear and inept; moreover the sudden volte face on the initial 'herd immunity' approach revealed a fundamental tension within the Tory party: on one side of the epidemiological argument a compassionate one-nation conservatism with its populist slogan 'we are all in this together' and on the other, a hard line neoliberal insistence that whatever happens the market economy must survive intact even if it means sacrificing a 'surplus' population of the infirm and the elderly.

In the song the source of confusion is quickly identified in its own Dylanesque terms:

Businessmen, they drink my wine,  
Plow men dig my earth.  
None of them along the line  
Know what any of it is worth

This image of 'business as usual' being conducted by people who only know how to exploit the environment for their own pleasure and profit, resonates today against a growing trans-valuation of values, set in motion by the Green movement, but now suddenly escalating in the context of Covid-19 where people are learning a whole new economy of worth no longer based on measures of productivity and profit but on the capacity to care for others.

The problem then is not just that political messaging around the pandemic has been so confused; it is that so many people can't get any relief from the anxieties and insecurities which crowd in on them from all sides making them feel hopeless and helpless. The stresses of everyday life



have, of course, been compounded a thousand fold, especially for those vulnerable, low income communities whose capacity to deal with these new privations has been systematically eroded by decades of austerity. It is not surprising that in this situation people seek escape routes, alternative principles of instant gratification, when so much that is pleasurable has been deferred. So we escape into various kinds of addictive crazes and cravings, we become online shopaholics, stay-at-home workaholics or alcoholics, we pursue alternative careers as drug or sex addicts, or, in my case, compulsively watch Newsnight. We flick channels, surf the net, in search of some ultimate fix of meaning. So many different ways of institutionalising attention deficit disorder.

It is precisely this culture of frantic distraction which has been so brutally reconfigured by the pandemic in the service of radical escapism from a terrifying present and possibly even more terrifying future. The consumption of comfort foods, feel good movies, and shoot-em-up video games has rocketed. Meanwhile life offline continues, as we learn the socially distanced dance, choreographed around the ritual avoidance of physical contact, a newly lonely crowd cruising the supermarket shelves for that must-have item and furtively enjoying a brief moment of pleasure when we get our hands on it, yet all too aware of others hovering close by, already infected with the same all-consuming bug, each now being one too many for the other in the competition for scarce supplies. En route, we learn to conform our lines of desire to a 2 by 2 metre grid of mutual surveillance and control, a surreal miniaturization of the cartographic order imposed by Capital and the State on that otherwise unregulated traffic flow of people, information and goods we call 'globalisation'.

In response, sections of the Left have tended to retreat into a residual Puritanism. Always suspicious of popular culture and its commodified pleasures, they welcome the imposition of constraints on consumerism as part of the lockdown regime, prefiguring a new politico-moral economy in which people give up eating meat, driving cars, buying plastic wrapped goods, or travelling by plane in order to save the planet. The fact that in the initial phases of lockdown, air pollution and CO2 emissions fell dramatically, traffic jams became, all too briefly, a distant memory, and pedestrians and cyclists reclaimed the streets seemed like a dress rehearsal for this brave new world.

Alternatively, if the current exit strategy does not work, there may have to be a selective re-introduction of prolonged and draconian lock down measures, requiring the micro-management of every aspect of daily life; this, in turn may provoke mass civil disobedience from the populations of the worst hit areas, almost all of them already suffering multiple privations, and require a brutal suspension of democratic norms by the State to suppress it. This is the Great Fear of a political class that still prides itself on ruling by consent, and a Tory Party desperate to keep its elderly and working class voters onside. Even the nudge economists recognise that the new uncertainty principles are just as likely to provoke risk taking behaviour as conformity to precautionary measures.

This dilemma is brilliantly captured in the penultimate verse of *All Along the Watchtower* where initially we have the characterization of a laid back, laissez faire attitude to life, which perhaps for Dylan's generation epitomized the stoned, hedonistic hippydom that mutated so seamlessly into the hip entrepreneurial capitalism of the 1970s and 80s.<sup>2</sup>

"No reason to get excited",  
The thief he kindly spoke.  
"There are many here among us  
Who feel that life is but a joke.

But this is immediately contrasted with a very different mindset, one of shared circumspection which eschews fake news and is all too aware of the urgent need to engage with a coming crisis before it is too late:

But you and I, we've been through that,  
And this is not our fate.  
So let us not talk falsely now,  
The hour is getting late."

Dylan no doubt has in mind here the threat of nuclear war with its principle of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and the pervasive fear of this generation that a 'hard rain is gonna fall'. Yet the comment translates with sickening precision to the multiple crisis we now face.

We talk glibly enough about 'late capitalism' and 'late modernity', perhaps wishfully thinking that both are coming towards the end of their life span, or at least losing their stranglehold on our collective imagination of the future.<sup>3</sup> All kinds of last 'posts' are currently being sounded: post-capitalism, post modernism, post humanism, post feminism, post communism...all now currently being updated with the advent of Covid-19. Within this frame, the only sense in which 'late socialism' might be talked about is that it has already died the death and we are mourning its decease, as occurs amongst some Leftist intellectuals in ex-Eastern bloc countries. In any case the sense of urgency communicated in this song has other roots, a radical impatience with political prevarication and false talk in the face of an emergent threat whose terms are made clear in the final verse:

All along the watchtower,  
Princes kept the view,  
While all the women came and went —  
Barefoot servants too.  
Outside in the cold distance,  
A wildcat did growl.  
Two riders were approaching, and  
The wind began to howl.

So we have a stark scenario of what may happen when an *ancien regime* is threatened with being blown away by forces it can neither understand or

control. We start with the image of a privileged prospect, a commanding view of the world, which depends on the continued subservience of those whose labour maintains its edifice of power. Meanwhile outside the walls, on the far horizon, the Joker and the Thief re-appear, disguised now as two outriders of the apocalypse and the winds of change begin to howl. This is no longer the fire next time, it is Apocalypse Now. It may mark a turning point in human affairs, but as the trickiness of the song's two protagonists indicates, we can never be sure which way the wind will blow. It is certainly a song for our times, an allegory of the multiple crisis we face.

## **Going Viral: diary of a communicable disease**

In the early days of Covid-19 we watched, spellbound in horror, as the grisly spectacle of this infernal pandemic unfolded across the world on our TV screens. We saw harrowing scenes from intensive care units with patients struggling for breath urging us to stay home and save the NHS. Perhaps this was a calculated, and some may say even cynical move, to terrify us into submission to the government's guidelines. In fact, such scenes are just as likely to induce a sense of numb helplessness or panic. Panic attacks the foundations of civil society, it is deeply corrosive of trust and unites people only in negative reciprocities, in what Sartre called 'seriality' where each of us is other to the other.<sup>4</sup> In a pre-digital age, panics were relayed primarily by word of mouth, in other words through rumour, that 'blunt monster with uncounted heads' that Shakespeare writes so well about and its power over 'the still discordant wavering multitude'. The best, and certainly funniest account of how panics spread through rumour in face to-face communities is James Thurber's short story 'The Day the Dam broke', in which a mis-overheard comment on the Main Street of a small town in middle America coincides with someone breaking into a trot and soon has the entire population heading for the hills. If you are in need of a good laugh right now, this is recommended reading.<sup>5</sup>

Rumour is a precise symbolic analogue of a virus, its subjective correlate. Today however online digital culture, and in particular social media, have given a whole new meaning to 'going viral'. Not only because we now have a powerful model of virtually un-regulated and uncontrollable communication, but because there is a whole architecture built up as a system of defence against rogue pathogens, malevolent 'bugs' which are continually trying to introduce 'viruses' to infiltrate, attack and destroy our operating systems. The advent of Covid-19 has also encouraged 'phishing' expeditions by online hackers offering to sell you phony prophylactics in exchange for your personal details so they can raid your bank account. If the medical virus doesn't get you the computer virus will! This doubling up makes virology an all too ready source of symbolism for vilifying any populations which might be at risk of getting portrayed as 'carriers' of bad news. Perhaps we are seeing the first truly cyborg pandemic. Meanwhile rumours hardened into conspiracy theories continue to dominate social media coverage, with the hidden hands of Big Pharma,

aided and abetted by Jewish Finance Capital, heading the list, followed by a Chinese plot to overthrow Western Civilisation, and God's Revenge on his chosen people for breaking the ten commandments. The usual suspects.

We also should not underestimate the extent to which public responses to Covid-19 are being shaped by disaster movies: films like *Outbreak* (1995), *Virus* (1999) Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion* (2011), Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and its sequel *28 Weeks Later* (2011) are due for a big boost in rental streaming sales. Meanwhile in the bookshops, pulp fiction like Stephen King's *The Stand* with its graphic depiction of total societal breakdown after an influenza virus being developed for biochemical warfare is accidentally released, is flying off the virtual shelf. Along similar plotlines, Dean Koonz's *The Eyes of Darkness* is another page turner now overnight best seller; first published in 1981 the story centres on a bioweapon developed by the Chinese in Wu-han and designed to produce 100% mortality rates in targeted populations within 24 hours. This must be Trump's bedside reading, as he twitters on about the 'Chinese virus'. For lesser mortals, having your worst fears fictionalized is maybe a cathartic, if magical way of preventing them being realized. Finally, video games, which we are being encouraged to play during lockdown are another major source of pandemic scenario construction, much of it based on conspiracy theories about the disease's provenance.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time we are being subjected to an info-demic, a blitz of official pronouncements, media commentary and personal testimony, spiced with large amounts of fake news; meanwhile the pandemic becomes grist to many an academic mill driven by their business- as-usual norms of productivity. This overload has resulted in two complimentary but opposite forms of psychological defence mechanism: HIS (Hysterical Immunity Syndrome) amongst people who just want to blot the whole thing out and carry on as if nothing had happened; HERS (Heard Emergency Response Syndrome) amongst those who have become obsessively immersed in the most graphic details of the unfolding health crisis.<sup>7</sup>

So what makes a disease communicable is not just its mode of physical transmission, but its mode of media and cultural transmission. Covid-19 is in one sense news from nowhere; its arrival was not predictable, and its sudden advent, of course, made it instantly newsworthy. Yet in another sense an epidemic is always the same old story; however new the actual bug, the unfolding of the epidemic plot line follows a familiar course: It is always and already 'bad news'. That combination of repetition and disjuncture is its paradoxical time signature. As such the pandemic takes on a particular resonance within the framework of the capitalist info-spectacle. This is a story that always leaves us in suspense, in fearful or excited anticipation of what comes next: is the disease terminable or interminable, will the exit strategy work or produce a new infection spike? Stay tuned...In other words the narrative has the structure of a TV soap opera and this serialisation integrates the pandemic closely with the constant revolution of commodity production and consumption – the quest for permanent novelty that keeps the wheels of creative industry

turning. Globally the news of the virus travels faster via social media than the virus itself, and in that sense it is always ahead of itself. But its incubation period becomes part of a serialized drama which ensures that public responses are invariably behind the curve of events. It is this double seriality, of sociality and storying, that makes Covid-19 the first post-modern pandemic, an unreliable narrator of its own demographic trajectory, never coinciding with itself.

Let us take a simple example: the role of the mask in communicable disease. It has a long history going back to the plagues of the 15th and 16th centuries.<sup>8</sup> Fast forward to 2020 and medical authorities disagree about the protective value of wearing masks. The extent of the take up of hygienic masks is, of course, partly determined by the type and effectiveness of the advice issued by public health authorities in different countries. In China it was from the outset an official policy enforced by law. Take up is also determined by highly specific cultural factors linked to normative strategies of social intimacy and distancing, definitions of bodily space, and, not least, the ritual role of masks. In Britain, face masking is traditionally associated with aristocratic/bohemian excess as exemplified in the masked ball, with the balaclava and criminal banditry, and more recently with the kitsch guising of children at Halloween. In other words, it represents some form of licensed transgression. There is no etiquette of public civility anchored to personal body space to support the practice of wearing hygienic masks as exists in countries like China or Japan. As a result, there is likely to be much more public resistance to adopting its use and consequently a time lag in its adoption. In the initial phase of the pandemic anyone wearing a face mask in public in the UK was likely to be seen as a carrier of Covid-19 and subject to social avoidance or worse. The mask was a signifier of the virus presence, the public face of the epidemic. As the number of cases grew exponentially, masking began to be used as a placebo for herd immunity to persuade people it was safe to return to work. It may be difficult to predict the exact tipping point but as masks become mandatory on public transport, those not wearing one are likely to be seen as a threat to public health and in turn become subject to social ostracism. So now wearing a mask becomes an exercise in virtue signalling in a regime of moral hygiene which creates a whole new category of social outcasts: the secret virus carriers unmasked!

The mask is thus a key protagonist in the unfolding narrative of the pandemic, a major intermediary in that association of human and non-human actors which compose the epidemiological eco-system we call Covid-19. We have all become caught up in this system, irrespective of our actual hygienic practices or medical status. In the process, our faces cease to be a source of mutual recognition and communication, their motility and variety of expression become forced into a fixed 'look', the invisible mask the virus wears to replicate itself, the medium that conveys its silent, lethal, message. At the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that masking can also serve another counter-hegemonic function: the protesters who have taken to the streets to proclaim their defiance of a racist bio-political order which is killing them can protect themselves

against both viral transmission and the risk of police surveillance and arrest by using this simple device.

## **Danger Pandemonology at work! The making of a bio-political crisis**

This example underlines the importance of being aware of how the real relations of viral transmission become doubled over in a set of imaginary relations. The very fluidity of the pandemic and its multiple relays, with hotspots suddenly popping up in so many different places, gives rise to an urgent need to fix its meaning, to render it into a stable and coherent sign, an omen or portent of some malign force or deep malaise. The mechanisms that have come into play in this transposition are hardly new. We are in the midst of what sociologists like to call a moral panic, involving the creation of 'folk devils' whose presence in society comes to be seen as a threat to its moral health, and even political integrity<sup>9</sup>; this is, because, like the Joker and the Thief in Dylan's song, they are perceived to transgress the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In situations where these boundaries are anyway becoming more porous, and civil society threatens to become anomic, the population of 'folk devils' multiplies in an attempt to draw the line between respectable citizens and dodgy denizens.

If existential panic ramps up anxiety, scatters the wits and freezes the mind in an attitude of flight, moral panic refocuses it around a concrete fear of the Other which is actionable. Its preferred idiom is gossip, or what we now call fake news, magnified exponentially by social media. The opportunities for this have been greatly increased by the social isolationism of lockdown. For example, we have seen the emergence of 'Covigilantism' on a mass scale with people being encouraged by the authorities to report on their neighbours whom they think are in breach of the restrictions, an instant recipe for making bad community relations even worse. Like all such populist responses to a crisis in civil society the targetology is opportunistic and fluid. One day Covid -19 becomes 'the yellow peril' and British Chinese are shunned or attacked in the street, the next it is elderly people picnicking outdoors, or young skateboarders taking advantage of the deserted streets to practice a few moves.

In addition to the risk of creating a new caste of 'untouchables', quarantine strengthens the hand of those who want to create a new Fortress Britain, who saw Brexit as an opportunity to reinvent it as born-again island nation, surrounded by a proverbial 'moat defensive' against the invasion of 'foreign bodies'. Ironically it took a virus to bring home to everyone, albeit in a wholly negative way, just how globally inter-connected our societies are through trade and tourism, and just how much magical thinking is involved in evoking national sovereignty and 'taking back control' of our borders as a cure for all our ills. The precautionary strategy of social distancing scales up frictionlessly into policies of national isolationism,



with a little help from nativist rhetoric. Unfortunately in the early phases of the pandemic the worst case scenarios being spelt out by some epidemiologists and inflated into fully fledged genocidal nightmares by the popular press, provided an all too convincing rationale for the autochthonous dreams of the alt-Right.

We also need to question the 'Don't Panic, Keep Calm and Carry On, Britain can take it' message headlined by sections of the right wing press, which as always are keen to re-animate sentimental memoryscapes of wartime Britain, when everyone proverbially tightened their belts and pulled together. As is to be expected the grin-and-bear it, tough-it-out True Brit Grit Brigade headed by Boris Johnson but largely composed of retired military men, is trying to weaponise the pandemic to evoke Churchillian war time spirit in the masses. Vera Lynn singalongs of 'We'll Meet Again' celebrating VE day may produce a nostalgic tear or two from those, especially Tory supporters, who never lived through the Blitz but still believe that it was our finest hour. It may also offer a simulacrum of camaraderie for those who feel they missed out on wartime socialism. Courtesy of such imaginaries, we are being sleep walked into a vision of sunlit uplands where the bug has finally melted away and we all live happily ever after in Tory Brexitland.

Do we need reminding that the reason why 'Don't Panic' as uttered by the elderly Lance Corporal Jones in Dad's Army was so funny is that it was uttered in such a panic-stricken voice? One reason why the video clip of this episode has gone viral is that it perfectly captures the ambiguity of many of the public pronouncements about Covid-19, albeit in an inverse way: the voice of calm authority issuing statements maximally calculated to induce panic. Perhaps it is as well then that stiff upper lips are hard to sustain in these days of touchy-feely politics, and definitely not possible while wearing a face mask. We are encouraged to display 'resilience' – that weasel word which the evangelists of neoliberalism use to describe and celebrate passive adaptation to their austerity regime and which is currently being re-commissioned as the innate capacity to 'bounce back' after the pandemic, to resume the capitalist mode of production and consumption with renewed vigour.<sup>10</sup>

The national health crisis also potentially empowers technocratic visions of a control society, in which 'at risk' groups, i.e. groups profiled as a special epidemiological threat, are electronically tagged so their movements are traceable and mappable at all times.<sup>11</sup> The utopia of 'smart cities', or urban governance by algorithm, all too easily morphs into an Orwellian nightmare. Will we see the materialisation of a new landscape of mass surveillance which mirrors the dystopias portrayed in films like Blade Runner: exclusion zones, evacuation zones, 'red' lock down zones, *cordons sanitaires*, so many lines drawn in the shifting sands of the pandemic? It is no longer in video games that we inhabit ghost neighbourhoods patrolled by zombies in space suits. In the early, unforgettable scenarios of lockdown, the familiar rhythms of everyday life and livelihood are disrupted and rendered strange: The eerie silence of once crowded

streets is punctuated by the wail of ambulances taking the infected to hastily improvised hospitals, the sound of a city keening for its unexpected dead dumped in mass graves.

The health crisis is creating a whole new bio-political order based on mass screening, tracking and tracing, throwing up new strategies to regulate the disposition of bodies, the movement of populations, and the separation of the sick from the healthy. Whether these are democratic policies undertaken with popular consent, or measures imposed by authoritarian states, will be crucial to the geo-political outcome of the pandemic.

## The emotional geography of risk

One reason for the chronic panic around Covid-19 is that it evokes such a powerful image of the *lethal*, that association of what is hidden and unknown with a boundless, arbitrary but all too precise mortal threat. If it may not be possible to map the 'known unknowns' (i.e. the full extent and rate of transmission, the process, treatment and outcome of the disease itself and potential vaccines), how much more difficult to represent what the psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas has called the 'unthought known', the deeper more unconscious responses to the pandemic, emerging in coded forms and indexed to earlier, often repressed memoryscapes of trauma and loss.<sup>12</sup> We are dealing here with what Freud called the 'other scene' of everyday life, where rational calculations of self-interest and limited altruism give way to structures of feeling and belief dominated by often disavowed fears and fantasies of 'the other' (other class, other gender, other ethnicity). This is fertile ground for the popular imagination of disease. These denizens of our inner world inhabit a country of the mind which often remains foreign to us, making us strangers to ourselves, but which nevertheless we can still own and, after a fashion, assemble into some kind of cognitive map.<sup>13</sup> We urgently need to find more mindful ways of exploring and charting this *terror incognita* if we are to develop a coherent political response to the threat of a pandemic.

One starting point is to recognise how Covid-19 is transforming our mental maps of the environment as well as the way we navigate it. A new tactile geography of risk is emerging in which hitherto safe public spaces like parks, playgrounds, squares, schools, libraries and university campuses, cinemas and theatres, etc. have become no-go areas, and declared out of bounds; equally areas hitherto associated with dangerous people or risky practices- street gang territories, shoot up alleys used by drug addicts are suddenly emptied and become safe for dog walkers. There is also a new phobic landscape of risky sensuous encounters with objects, in which flat surfaces, doorways, letter boxes, and handles are suddenly seen to be potential virus 'hotspots' requiring special precautionary measures. In a sense the pandemic is turning us all into hysterical materialists.

How people respond to these changes depends to a large extent on emotional dispositions which shape perceptions of environmental risk



and modes of attachment to place. One relevant model linking these two factors is to be found in the work of two psychoanalysts, Michael and Enid Balint. In their book *Thrills and Regression*, the Balints characterise two modes of emotional orientation to objects in space. Their starting point is Freud's insight that the mother's body is the first environment we learn to explore; in particular Freud stresses the ambivalence that arises from the fact that it is both a landscape of intense delight and an object of deep anxiety.<sup>14</sup> The maternal body is both the infant's first home and a medium for making sense of what is strange and unfamiliar about the wider world. The mother's (or substitute carer's) arms and lap are our first prospect on the world, from whence we launch ourselves experimentally in search of new adventures in life; if all goes well these same arms and lap are our nearest and most reliable refuge from the hazards, disappointments and terrors we encounter *en route*. Later, as we grow up, the mother's body will provide a model or analogue of the dens, turfs, territories, niches, and other nesting devices through which we give a local habitation and name to our larger ambitions, rivalries and fears.

The Balints argue that there are two complimentary but different ways of holding the mother's body unconsciously in mind. In the first mode (which they call philobatic: love of movement) people enjoy exploring the wide open spaces, are always on the lookout for new experiences and dares, like courting danger and the unknown, and see obstacles as challenges to their resourcefulness. They are attention seekers who travel hopefully because their personal geography consists of warm, friendly expanses which are felt to be safe, trustworthy and encompassing, a supportive stage for exciting performance; the child has the whole wide world in its arms, the world is your oyster and you are its pearl! At the same time this landscape is dotted more or less densely with dangerous and unpredictable objects, threatening in their independence, thrilling in their challenge, representing hazards that have to be overcome. There is an underlying confidence that when things get risky or the going gets rough the wider world will click in and will provide resources to enable you to anticipate or head off potential disaster. The philobat goes to war as to a remote but exciting spectacle in which s/he will play a heroic part, on the front line, or possibly acting at a distance from their back yard. In this idiom which many commentators misrecognise by calling it resilience, a world turned upside down is one which yields exciting new possibilities.

In contrast, in the second orientation (which the Balints call ocnephilic: love of clinging) people only feel safe when they stay close to home, where they feel literally in touch with their surroundings, familiar objects, people, signs and landmarks to which they cling. They cannot bear the thought of exposing themselves to danger; It is the inn, not the road that attracts them, and they do not travel hopefully, if at all. They are always making little dens for themselves and looking out for potential bolt holes in and against a wider world that is experienced as almost uniformly hostile and untrustworthy. The ocnephilic universe thus consists of safe familiar objects separated by vast abysmal empty spaces, unconsciously representing maternal abandonment, there is no good mother there, only

a bad, persecuting and at the limit emotionally dead one. This is associated with a pervasive fear of being dropped, let down, losing or being torn away from people and places. That is why there is so much clinging to the object, so much urgent hugginess and such intense attachment to place, in the belief that it will somehow click in and shield you from external danger. Behind this lies the desire for a totally benign and protective environment, a world in which all risk and anxiety has been eliminated and one is held forever in the warm embrace of a protective family or nanny state, guaranteeing permanent ontological and material security.

This model deals in two ideal types of environmental risk perception linked to contrasting styles of self-embodiment. These may correlate with certain kinds of personality trait, those who are risk takers or risk averse, or phobias (claustrophobia and agoraphobia) but empirically they are found in a variety of weak and strong combinations; people may flip between one mode and another according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Anyone who has lived with a teenage son or daughter knows how volatile these positions can be, one day hunkering down in the bedroom immersed in video games or remote texting, occupying a safe but expansive virtual space, but keeping the material world outside at bay; and then the next day plunging into physical outdoor activities and partying with friends like there is no tomorrow.

There is also a material aspect to these psychological orientations. Venture capitalists are by definition philobatic, they are good at taking calculated risks in the financial and property markets and have a basic confidence in their durability, even as they exploit their temporary instability. Equally there are people who have secure well paid jobs, live in large houses, and have considerable assets who may nevertheless be risk averse and see the world as a dangerous place from which they need to retreat into the safety of work or home. Famous recluses, like Howard Hughes and Emily Dickinson, are often people who take great creative risks, achieving celebrity and sometimes considerable wealth but then recoil from the public gaze in a way that is incomprehensible to philobats who crave just that attention. In contrast those who live a precarious existence on the margins of economy and society, who lack basic human and institutional supports, are on permanent red alert, so that a sense of social insecurity becomes hard wired into their very mode of being in the world; their treatment by the authorities often reinforces their basic distrust in the capacity of the wider society to click in to provide support.

Culture also plays an important role. Socialising always involves spatializing. If you are growing up in a 'homie' street culture, then you are not going to feel safe moving out of your estate or neighbourhood. If you belong to an extended kinship network which is geographically dispersed, as is the case with many diasporic communities, then you are more likely to sustain a 'philobatic' stance, and believe in the basic friendliness of the wider world, unless and until the threat of racism intensifies, and you retreat into an ocnephile position, clinging defensively to the support of your own kind, which is also the tendency of nuclear family units. Social

and cultural capital also make a difference. If you have a lot of social resources and cultural assets, you are likely to see the world as a place of opportunity and to have the confidence to build bridges and reach out to other groups and institutions as partners with whom to pursue joint projects. If you have much less opportunity, you are less likely to trust or to have the capacity to make wider alliances, and will tend to concentrate your resources on projects close to home which strengthen immediate social and cultural bonds and affirm existing shared identity.<sup>15</sup> In general those who privilege styles of social segregation 'keeping ourselves to our selves' will tend to adopt and relay ocnephiliac perspectives, whilst those who set great store by social congregation, will project an philobatic standpoint on the world.

The Balints' theory helps us model the complexity of responses to the risk represented by the virus and to the measures that have been introduced to combat its spread. The advent of the pandemic is an ocnephilic charter, it dramatically endorses this view of the external world as an overwhelmingly threatening space with home, and the 'back yard' as the only safe place. People with this standpoint will feel quite comfortable with the lockdown, will enthusiastically work from home, don masks and other protective clothing, and be able to tolerate, even secretly welcome, virtual forms of sociality. They may however take some persuading that it is safe to go out for a walk, for although they are highly dependent on staying in close physical touch with the material world, tactility has become all too risky. Nor will they have much confidence in the capacity of the State to create any wider protective environment. From this emotional standpoint all situations are potentially front line.

In contrast those of a philobatic disposition will feel deeply resentful of any constraints on their freedom of movement, will feel claustrophobic at being cooped up indoors; they may be attracted to frontline situations, are more likely to engage in risky public behaviour and hence are more likely to catch the virus. But ironically this may be partly because they have much greater trust in the capacity of the State, and in particular the NHS to click in and protect them if they fall ill. Our prime minister, in case you haven't noticed, belongs in this category!

These orientations are always locally situated and may co-exist or reverse into one another, for example in response to changes in perceived levels of pandemic threat associated with local mortality and infection rates; we are seeing sudden shifts in public mood as registered through social media, between states of alarm and despondency and unrealistic optimism. However, attitudes are tending to harden into opposing camps in the ongoing public debate about if, when and how lockdown should be lifted. The philobatic position is all for lifting the restrictions as soon as possible because the prospect of an extended lockdown, is intolerable and think the risk worth taking. Ocnephiliacs remain adamant that it has to be safety first and will cling to social distancing for dear life, until such time as a safe vaccine is available.

## Imagining the body politic in a state of emergency

We are seeing a strange coalition of interests emerging amongst the quick 'exiteers', echoing that of the Brexit alliance, between hard line neoliberals at the top end of society who are most concerned about the economic impact on businesses and those at the bottom who are suffering most from the material and psychological effects of lockdown. Although such positions may be over-determined by personal structures of feeling, they have their own political logic. In fact, the two dispositions we have just described entail very different imaginations of the body politic. The first, which correlates with a philobatic standpoint, sees the State's role in minimalist terms, ensuring basic social order, within which there may be a few occasional outbreaks of disorder or disruptive innovation to spice up the routines of 'business as usual'. In the second case, associated with an ocnephilic perspective, politics is essentially about crisis management, dealing with a chronic state of emergency interrupted by a few temporary outbreaks of peace and stability. By definition they cling to nurse, or rather the nanny State, for fear of finding something worse. If that fails, then they re-imagine the State as a persecutory Leviathan.

These patterns of risk perception thus bear on more general ways of being- in-the-world and these in turn draw on specific cultural codes and values which connect with issues of class, gender, age and ethnicity. As children we learn about what or who is safe and dangerous by watching how our parents, or other primary carers behave, as well as responding to specific cues, words of caution or encouragement, admonition or praise. Later on, peers and people we admire will play this role. These 'world views' are not just the expression of emotional attachments, although they underpin them. They are a function of the degree of social and symbolic control (or the lack of it) which individuals and groups exercise over their immediate and wider environment. And that in turn is intimately connected to issues of power and inequality in society, especially relating to the distribution of social and cultural capital.

In order to understand this political dimension to personal perceptions of risk, we need to shift our frame of reference from psychoanalysis to anthropology. In particular the work of Mary Douglas and her cultural theory of risk, can help explain both its unequal distribution and different forms of public response.<sup>16</sup> Her model operates on two dimensions. The first, *Group*, indicates the strength of affiliation to and incorporation within a community of practice and its social norms. The stronger the pledge of allegiance required, the less freedom the individual has to 'do their own thing' and the greater the penalties for non-conformity. In terms of social capital, bonding is the name of the game. The weaker, less encompassing the pledge, the easier it is to gain distance from collective constraints on choice and initiate new, more individualised, forms of sociality. This enables bridging strategies to develop through partnerships with a wide range of civic stakeholders. However at the limit social bonds dissolve in the negative reciprocities of seriality.

Social patterns are not just blindly enacted, they are always accompanied by forms of symbolic action which either legitimate them, or alternatively allow people to dissociate themselves from the groups to which they are supposed to belong. Douglas calls this second dimension *grid*. This term refers to distinctive ways of feeling, perceiving and thinking about the world and one's place in it. They are intimately tied to forms of cultural capital. Strong grids make for totalising standpoints, expressed through highly ritualised or routinized patterns of feeling and belief which affirm cultural identity and support strong symbolic action against those who deviate from them; the weaker the grid the more particularistic its values and context sensitive their mode of expression, opening up symbolic space for creative innovation, and cultural bridging strategies, given that moral sanctions have less power to control what individuals feel, think and believe.

The next step in the argument is to use these variables (group/grid: strong/weak) to construct a typology of four different world views which shape perceptions of risk associated with Covid-19. Douglas's model allows us to characterise four standpoints:

*Authoritarian* (strong group bonding /strong grid + ideological bonding) High levels of trust in public institutions and professional experts. Belief in values of social hierarchy and top-down policy making. Obedience to State regulations, strong support for sanctions against those who break lockdown rules. Clear distinction between involuntary and voluntary risk.

*Libertarian* (weak group bonding /weak grid) Distrust of public institutions and professional experts. Emphasis on individual responsibility to keep informed and take precautionary action in response to the pandemic. Health risk seen as voluntary, not involuntary.

*Fatalist* (weak serialized group/strong grid + ideological bonding) Risks, including health risks associated with Covid-19, are seen as totalising, systemic and involuntary, part of a globalized world order which defies control or understanding. Skepticism toward official statistics but belief in conspiracy theories which explain the pandemic as a result of some hidden force. Emphasis on self-reliance. Pessimism about the outcome of public health measures. Voluntary and involuntary risks are conflated.

*Communitarian* (strong group bonding / weak grid + cultural bridging) Health risks are perceived as involuntary, being embedded within a much deeper set of social anxieties; the official mode of risk management and communication seen as inflaming rather than dispersing these anxieties. Deep distrust of political authority and professional experts, but strong belief in the creative capacities of ordinary people to find solutions. There is a tendency to preach egalitarianism while practicing sectarianism.

It is clear from these profiles that such world views are not mutually exclusive. For example distrust of professional experts and State interventions can be found variably articulated in communitarian,





withdrawal from all interaction), influence responses to lockdown (degrees of adherence or transgression vis a vis rules of social distancing, masking, travel and self-isolation) and finally mandate or undermine strategies of 'resilience' or 'normalisation'.

## **The imperatives of solidarity: from moral panic to moral economy**

The model I have just described can perhaps help us to understand how the moral anatomy of a pandemic engages with the ethical status of the measures which the State is taking to control, mitigate or suppress it. We have become all too familiar with Covid-19 patients imploring us from their sick beds to Stay at home! Self isolate!! Keep your social distance at all times!!! But what kind of statements are these? Anyone who has done a Moral Philosophy 101 course will recognise these as Kantian imperatives.<sup>17</sup> But Kant distinguished between two very different kinds of moral injunction: the categorical imperative, which was unconditional, context free and absolute for everyone. Its claim to validity, according to Kant, is that it expresses a principle of universal rationality, and people are compelled to act on it in so far as they will everyone else to do the same. He contrasted this with what he called a hypothetical imperative, which is context dependant, negotiable and is based on a specific ulterior motive or individual desire.

Categorical imperatives can work as part of a democratic consensus only in a relatively unified civil society, as might occur in wartime. Failing that their implementation requires a quasi-military, command and control strategy. For this reason, they are favoured by authoritarians and accepted by fatalists while libertarians resist them in favour of hypotheticals which give more scope for individual judgement and decision making.

The confused and at time blatantly contradictory nature of government's public health messaging can be largely put down to its oscillation between, and sometimes conflation of, these two types of imperative and the political standpoints which underpin them. The authoritarian strategy implies a civil society characterised by atomised subordination to State regulation; the second, libertarian, approach evokes a network society composed of self-regulating individuals acting in their own best self-interest. Still, in a liberal democracy, the authoritarian command has to be given an egalitarian edge - we are all in this together - if it is to be respected and followed, while the shift to a more libertarian register has to rely on an even more amplified populist rhetoric via an appeal to 'common sense' to achieve any kind of legitimacy in the face of mounting public disquiet at the government's erratic handling of the situation.

In practice it has not been easy to sustain a clear-cut distinction between what the State commands and what discretionary power it allows to

citizens. For example, during the initial phase of lockdown, if everyone followed the universal rule about staying at home, public spaces became empty and therefore safe to venture out in. However, if some people treat the injunction as a hypothetical imperative, they may well then decide that for the sake of their physical and mental health they need to engage in one of the proscribed activities.

One source of public confusion stems from the paradoxical nature of the lockdown injunction itself: at one moment it evokes an anonymous virtual crowd of home-alone citizens as recipients of the instruction but, of course, the message itself is an order for physical crowds to disperse. Underlying this is a highly ambivalent attitude on the part of the political class towards the crowd: as an electorate, represented by public opinion polls, its support confers unique popular legitimacy on a government's policies but as a potentially disorderly mob it poses a counter-hegemonic threat to the political system as such. The volatility attributed to the crowd is in fact a projection of a profound split perception of 'what counts' within the political culture of liberal democracies, and this has been carried over into health messaging.

The *laissez faire* herd immunity policy interpellated the crowd is a site and sign of benign contagion; then once a more authoritarian stance was adopted in order to impose lockdown, the crowd's power of social combination comes to represent a catastrophic risk to the maintenance of public health. The subsequent attempt to create crowd *bubbles*, closed groups or 'pods' which kettle themselves through internal policing, was one strategy for containing the Great Fear of the crowd's bio-energetic power. But the very image of the bubble speaks volumes about the fragility of collective self-isolation.<sup>18</sup> What happens when the bubble bursts? The crowd suddenly re-materialises as a swarm, or multitude celebrating its release from the imposed taboo on physical closeness. As Elias Canetti noted: 'in the dense crowd the fear of the Other changes into its opposite in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose psychical constitution is also dense, or compact, so that we no longer notice who it is that presses against us'. This is what has occurred in the worldwide anti-racist protests against the murder of George Floyd by a white policeman in Minneapolis.<sup>19</sup>

The 'volatility' of the populace is thus doubled over in the mass psychology of the epidemic where the crowd becomes both an embodied form of human solidarity against the virus and a mobile carrier of contagious panic. And so we arrive at the chaos theory of public health messaging, in which even the slightest change in one of the policy variables, most notably the much fetishized 'R' factor, leads to a sudden great leap forwards or backwards in the direction of travel in managing the pandemic through social isolation and crowd control.

Perhaps the worst wound that contradictory messaging has inflicted on the body politic is to trap its citizens in a set of impossible personal dilemmas: should you stay locked down because you are over 70, even



though you are fit and healthy? Should you send your children to school because they are driving you crazy, and/or absence from school is adversely affecting their mental and social development, even though that may greatly increase the risk of infection to your whole family? Should you go to work, because you desperately need the money or your employer tells you that if you don't you will lose your job, even if the work environment is still not safe and you have to rely on crowded public transport to get there?

There is no calculus of probabilities, however sophisticated and well informed by scientific evidence, that would enable people to make a rational decision between these risk options. They find themselves trapped in a classic double bind, damned if they do, damned if they don't.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is enough to describe these moral dilemmas to give the lie to the rational choice theory of risk that underpins the nudge economics which the government has adopted as the basis of its exit strategy. It is a model which assumes that given proper health messaging, individual citizens are incentivized by material self-interest to make rational decisions about risk, and are thus ultimately responsible for their own health outcomes. It fits perfectly with the neoliberal health agenda but it does not remotely correspond to the real life situations in which many people find themselves.

All the talk of 'national sacrifice' and the use of military metaphors may in fact be designed to impart a pseudo-performative clarity to an otherwise confused command structure, but it cannot conceal the multiplication of anomalies. The furious resentment directed against Dominic Cummings when he broke his own lockdown rules was not just that he 'let the side down' (the political establishment view) or that his behaviour illustrated that there is one law for the elite and another for the people (the popular view) but that in so doing he showed himself to be impervious to what Elias Canetti has called the *emotional sting* of obeying commands that 'volunteer' you to do, or not to do things that go against fundamental human priorities - like visiting a dying partner or relative.

In my case the sting was somewhat less profound. It was about not going sailing in my dinghy, which I can do perfectly safely single handed with no risk to anyone, except possibly myself. So what was to stop me? Well the police might try, but there aren't enough of them to actually prevent minor forms of civil disobedience. If I was a libertarian, no problem there. In fact, my standpoint is closer to a communitarian position (strong group, weak grid). What did stop me was firstly the fact that if I did ignore the injunction and went sailing I would face the social opprobrium of the community, in this case the sailing community, and might well be thrown out of the sailing club which has imposed its own lockdown. Alternatively, I might recognise the categorical nature of the imperative and the fact that if everyone did like me, then public areas, like the slipway, would again become crowded and social distancing would become impossible. In other words, an epidemiological version of the tragedy of the commons.<sup>21</sup> There is even a further over-ride: survivor guilt. How dare I be out and

about enjoying myself when so many other are suffering so much. As I have already suggested, the pandemic can mobilise a harsh self-punitive politics of conscience, which makes pretend heroes, if not cowards of us all. Mortification can take many imperative forms, from the self-denial of small pleasures to more perverse masochistic identifications. The pandemic is making us all gluttons for punishment, addicted to our daily dose of bad news. The question, as always, is: how do we remain on the side of life (and Eros) whilst surrounded by so much death and still stay safe and sane?

There may also be situations where the two kinds of imperative come into conflict creating an almost insuperable moral conflict. In the early stages of the pandemic this was happening in ICUs across the world as they were swamped by cases. The categorical imperative of the Hippocratic Oath states that doctors shall first do no harm, and secondly do good to all their patients without exception. However due to lack of medical resources, doctors have found themselves having to carry out a triage to decide which patients have a good enough chance of survival if put on a ventilator and which do not, the latter only receiving palliative care. For this purpose, doctors have to abandon the Hippocratic Oath and fall back on a purely hypothetical injunction: they must use their personal clinical judgement to draw the line between those who have a chance to survive and those who have to be left to die. Yet even in this extreme case morality is not a matter of individual choice but of social constraint - it is constituted by a *collective* conscience, strong group and grid in terms of the Douglas model. Doctors conducting the Covid-19 triage will be constrained and supported by codes of conduct regulated informally through their community of professional practice.

Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, and a Democratic Socialist, argued that the collective conscience was articulated through two very different forms of human solidarity<sup>22</sup>: *mechanical* in which people are pledged involuntarily and even mindlessly to certain customary, inherited norms linked to tribal loyalties enforced through the categorical imperative: *one for all and all for one*. These principles of affiliation are great for generating effervescent identifications and strong attachments to place (e.g. territorial gangs or football supporters) but, like all pledged groups, they imply a high degree of social and cognitive closure and are highly resistant to change. When this kind of group formation weakens, for example when it becomes disembedded from social institutions, then, as described earlier, it may be propped up by punitive guilt tripping accompanied by strenuous virtue signalling, and often orchestrated through moral panics targeted at pariah groups. This may well be what will happen if the lockdown strategy starts to lose its compelling symbolic power in hard pressed communities.

Many of the new tribes that have emerged in contemporary cultures, are in revolt against the social atomisation resulting from neo-liberal policies.<sup>23</sup> They may be communitarian in the sense of being strong on group adherence and cultural bonding, but they also promote stylistic innovation

and greater individuality of expression. In so far as they do, they point towards a second, more voluntary and mindful form of solidarity, operating through the hypothetical imperative: from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. This recognises that people are inter-dependent because of, not despite their differences; this form of solidarity is based on elective affinities and cultural bridging; today its re-emergence is part of a widespread reaction against the massification of identity associated with social stereotyping, whether positive or negative. As such this form of differentiated solidarity (strong group, weak grid) is linked to the notion of the multitude which lies at the heart of moral economy.<sup>24</sup>

Historically moral economy was about regulating a just price for labour, goods and services through customary practices, including collective bargaining by riot. As such, it was an expression of mechanical solidarities. Today it is about setting indicators of public health and wellbeing as core values in measuring economic performance, and developing practices of fellowship, co-operation and mutual aid across many areas of public life. It now constitutes a third sector of the economy, between the State and market, and in its most ambitious form points towards nothing less than the collective self-organisation of civil society in common pursuit of environmental and economic justice.<sup>25</sup>

We are currently seeing a spectacular demonstration of the power of the multitude in the efflorescence of mutual aid groups across the country in which people who would not otherwise have much in common are coming together to establish support networks for those perceived most at risk in the pandemic. Against this background the immediate issue for the Left is simple: can there be a democratic or at least a non-authoritarian form of bio-politics which trusts and relies on the people to self-regulate, is informed by locally situated knowledge, takes into account different material circumstances and cultural formations (viz hygiene and distancing rules) and is enforced by hypothecated community injunctions?<sup>26</sup> Or does the emergency require a state of exception with a command and control strategy which imposes a one-size-fits-all categorical imperative, ultimately through co-coercive means. One danger of this latter policy is that it legitimises a form of authoritarian populism spiced with a libertarian message: *you can be whatever you want to be as long as you do what you are told and follow these rules which will make you safe from the consequences of your own desires.*

In choosing, as we must, to put our weight behind the first option, to strengthen moral economy against moral panic, to scale it up as the basis of an alternative recovery plan, we need to develop an evidence base focused around understanding in much more detail how different cultures and communities create specific geographies of risk perception in relation to Covid-19. Only then will we be in a position to develop a system of trace and test informed by locally situated knowledge, as opposed to the top down command and control strategies which are currently favoured by the UK, and some other governments.

We must also be mindful of how far the pandemic is superimposing a new set of distinctions, both moral and material on fault lines already deeply etched into our social fabric. Familiar forms of inequality, often camouflaged by the promiscuity of everyday social intercourse, now stand out in stark relief, not least incidents of racial abuse. On one side of the tracks, the super-rich, already used to self-isolation in their mansions, penthouses and gated communities hunker down with daily deliveries from Fortnum and Masons, or charter private jets to take them to luxury quarantine in island tax havens. On the other side, the young and old on low incomes living cheek by jowl in densely populated housing estates, shared flats, tenements, multi-occupied houses, high rise blocks, hostels and squats. This dual city is crisscrossed by a new spatial division of labour between frontliners and backyarders, the former key workers concentrated in the production and delivery of essential goods and services, the latter in managerial and administrative positions, especially in the digital and knowledge economies which are flourishing under lockdown. In the backyards too class distinctions prevail. To be bearable, the lockdown, which is essentially a form of do-it-yourself house arrest, requires extensive material and cultural resources in the home, resources which are concentrated amongst the professional and managerial classes and by and large not accessible to other groups.

## **There goes the cohort: Covid-19 replays the generation game**

Just how complicated this inter-locking of structural and conjunctural inequalities is can be illustrated by the increasingly salient generational dimension of the pandemic. Prior to Covid-19 a new generational division of labour was emerging driven by intensified automation of both mental and manual labour processes. This is producing surplus populations at both ends of the demographic spectrum: at one pole young people concentrated in the low skill, low wage economy, mainly distribution and service jobs highly vulnerable to replacement by intelligent machines and who are currently subject to chronic underemployment on zero hours contracts; at the other, older people whose skills and experience are rapidly being made redundant by the pace of technological change. Covid-19 has added a new twist, in that major companies are now accelerating the automation of their operations, especially in logistics and distribution.

If Capital here seems to be creating the conditions for inter-generational solidarity in the sphere of production, in terms of social reproduction the opposite is happening. Many young people are having to continue to live at home well into adulthood, due to a malign confluence of labour and housing market conditions which makes it impossible for them to gain secure well-paid employment and thus to live independently and form stable relationships.<sup>27</sup> So-called 'generation rent' have been forced into

a prolonged period of 'kidulthood' by a chronic lack of opportunities. Meanwhile their parents and grandparents are often cushioned by generous pension schemes and by owning their own homes. Enter Covid-19 with its predilection for killing older people in preference to younger. Cue for Social Darwinists to crawl out of the woodwork to suggest that one of the positive spinoffs from the pandemic is to 'correct' the demographic imbalance created by advances in medical care for the elderly, and ensure that the Gerontocracy cease to hoard capital assets (their houses) and opportunities (their jobs so enabling young people to come into their inheritance sooner rather than later. Paradoxically the systemic neglect of conditions in care homes which has accounted for the UK's high position in the grisly international league table of surplus deaths, is not just down to careless oversight on the government's part; it is a symptomatic expression of the conflict between the increased political and economic bargaining power of elders in the neo-liberal property owning democracy and their declining cultural and social power within the atrophied structures of Patriarchy in which 'care' is relegated to the 'extra-economic' domain of domestic labour and women's work.

Despite the implicit ageism of lockdown policies treating all over 70's as a unitary cohort at high risk, one encouraging aspect of the popular response to the crisis has been to emphasise intergenerational solidarity, both virtually, and on the ground with many young people volunteering to help senior citizens with shopping and other tasks. There is also a proposal for 'intergenerational reciprocity' whereby the economic costs of the pandemic should be distributed equally across age cohorts with senior citizens sacrificing the so called 'triple lock' which increases the value of their state pensions relative to wages.<sup>28</sup> Some may see such proposals as a way of robbing Old Peter to pay Young Paula rather than deal with the huge deficit generated by through more radical redistributive measures aimed at the Super Rich. Certainly generational injustice cuts both ways and to weaponise it in a quasi-oedipal war between tribalised age cohorts is a mistake.

At the same time, we should not ignore the potential to disrupt long established patterns of social inequality presented by the crisis. There is pervasive *trans-valuation of labour values* now going on across all sections of society. Hitherto despised, disregarded, debilitating and underpaid forms of work, often associated with fetching, carrying and delivery jobs (historically associated with juvenile labour but now concentrated in the gig economy) and the work of caring, cleaning, and generally looking after people and places (traditionally associated with women's work and often performed by members of BAME communities) is now suddenly revealed as critical to the maintenance and reproduction of civil society. This diverse, dispersed, working class, whose hands-on skills often combine elements of manual, emotional and domestic labour is in many cases self-employed in the gig economy and non-unionised. As a result, it has been largely written off, including by sections of the Left, and even treated as a 'race apart'; yet it has now emerged as the new backbone of the nation albeit one which has yet to find its political voice.

If there is ever to be a way back to shared power for the Labour Party it must focus its energies on reaching out to this constituency, and give priority to addressing its manifold concerns.

## Hope after Woke: on critical mindfulness

In this brief and necessarily sketchy account of responses to the pandemic<sup>29</sup>, I have drawn on certain insights from the human sciences: cultural sociology, political anthropology and psychoanalysis. This is because I think we need to use these kind of approaches if we are to do more than surf the waves of the info-demic around Covid-19 and develop a more critical way of thinking about and engaging with the enormous emotional and social fall out that will inevitably occur. A precautionary strategy which effectively seals the trauma inside isolated individuals and families, and cuts the afflicted off from physical contact with their loved ones is storing up another epidemic, of depression and post-traumatic stress for the near future, a crisis with which our mental health services are currently in no shape to cope. No amount of public displays of solidarity with those in the frontline, important though these are for morale, will compensate for the after-blows which will subsequently be experienced as part of the long-term legacy. For example, social distance may make some hearts grow fonder, but it is breaking many more into little pieces of despair. Fences, even digital ones, may for a time make good neighbours, as Robert Frost famously put it, but in this pandemic a lot of them have either fallen into disrepair, or else been erected into impenetrable barriers.

Psychoanalysis, in particular, offers a critically important supplement to the neuro-cognitive behaviorism which today dominates approaches to public mental health and wellbeing. In a way it is a party pooper. In place of optimism of the will, it offers pessimism of the intellect. For example, the evangelists of 'Mindfulness' project a sunny side up view of the world, promising that once their techniques are mastered even the darkest cloud will be discovered to have a silver lining. In contrast, Freud and those who have followed in his footsteps have a tragic view of the human condition as a lifelong struggle involving contending psychic forces, interspersed, in you are lucky, or have done the necessary psychological work, with aleatory moments of joy and satisfaction. Freud famously said that the task of psychotherapy was to transform extra-ordinary unhappiness into ordinary unhappiness. Indeed one of the criticisms frequently aimed at psychoanalysis is its pre-occupation with states of ill-being, whether neurotic or psychotic. In contrast the wellbeing movement stresses the importance of creating the conditions for people to develop a positive outlook on life, to incubate good dreams not bad ones and to re-write their life stories so that difficult, traumatic beginnings can have happy endings. It is easy to see why this would appeal to managers of the happy-clappy economy who want their ill-paid and insecure workforces to project a positive corporate image. But we also have to recognise that the quick emotional fixes offered by CBT are always going to be more popular and



accessible than the long and difficult and costly path of exploring the deeper springs of human striving. Nevertheless, as someone who did embark on just that journey and benefitted immeasurably from it, I think that some elements of psychoanalytic thinking can be usefully integrated into the practice of mindfulness.

So how are we to avoid becoming a nation of traumatized germophobes as we religiously wash our hands after every contact with the world and pray we don't catch OCD? A psychological survival kit is almost as essential as personal protective equipment for health and care workers, and it is just as necessary for *all* those directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic, and that means approximately 90 per cent of the population. Many people are devising their own self-help therapies with a little help from the media. A lot of these are about keeping busy; Guardian readers are urged to get more into home cooking, clothes making, bread and wine making. Arts organisations are nightly beaming opera, ballet and plays into the homes of the cognoscenti. The Daily Mail suggests gardening and jobs about the house. The Mirror features allotments and the Sun virtual gambling, video gaming and family TV dinners. Corporate advertising targets globe trotters and those living in the fast lane, advising them to take advantage of the fact that the pace of life is temporarily slowing down and invest in indoor gyms and outdoor swimming pools. For those with somewhat more limited means, meditation, music, workouts, and generally cultivating the small pleasures of everyday life are recommended as the antidote for restless minds and bodies. The internet and social media are also full of advice, some of it useful, some not, on how to get through this without cracking up. For instance you can download a package developed by NASA to help astronauts deal with the stress of confinement to close quarters, and so perhaps imagine you are escaping to another germ free planet while staying all too grounded in this one. We may all be in this together but it seems that culturally speaking we are still living worlds apart.

The Left has traditionally been wary of individual therapies for some good, and some bad reasons.<sup>30</sup> I well remember giving a talk to a constituency Labour Party meeting at a time when the party was in one of its phases of 'listening to the electorate'. I talked about psychoanalysis as a particular form of attentiveness to what remained unspoken in political discourse. The audience listened politely but never really engaged with the ideas in discussion. Afterwards the chairperson came up and apologized for the lack of response 'We don't take much to Freud or psychoanalysis in the party to be honest. All that stuff about dreams and phantasies! We are more concerned with the real world and how to change it materially for the better'.

A certain economism, linked to notions of technological progress has always been part of Labourism's intellectual baggage. It has prevented the party from moving beyond purely transactional modes of political education (i.e. propaganda/recruitment) based on appeals to rational self-interest; a younger generation of activists, influenced by feminism and identity politics are perhaps more conscious of the fact that the heart,

like the mind, has its reasons which this narrow rationalistic form of materialism cannot know or address.

One aspect of this story which I only realized long afterwards has to do with the nature of attention itself. How was it possible for this audience of well-meaning Lefties to give every sign of paying attention to what I was saying and yet not get interested enough to engage with my argument. Perhaps they were hearing my voice but not really listening, they just let their attention wander, their minds drifted off elsewhere. Evidently what I had to say was of no real concern to them! But perhaps there is more at stake in this story than my failure to hold an audience's attention. Or even my need to seek their attention. And it lies at the heart of what the notion of mindfulness is, or could be, about, whether it is merely an adjunct to the contemporary culture of self-possessive individualism, the therapeutic arm of neoliberalism or whether it can take an altogether more critical turn.<sup>31</sup>

Jonathon Crary in his research on changing technologies of perception has made us aware of the double-edged nature of attention as it has developed within the framework of capitalist modernity<sup>32</sup>:

'Attention is both a simulation of presence and a makeshift, pragmatic substitute for its impossibility. For the control society, attention is a model of how the human subject maintains a coherent and practical sense of the world to ensure that he or she is productive, manageable, disciplined and adaptive. In a word efficient'

He notes that pathologies of attention are conflated with creative reverie, the deep absorption and immersion in daydreaming, and the practice of curiosity. This alternative and potentially subversive mode of attention, he writes;

'often involves a form of aesthetic looking and listening so rapt that it is an exemption from ordinary conditions – a suspension of temporality, a hovering out of time – the term implies something being stretched, holding something in wonder or contemplation but also a cancellation and interruption in the flow of time and commodities'.

As the methodology of mindfulness training has evolved, from a specialized strategy for dealing with chronic pain to being a multi-million pound industry promoting individual health and wellbeing for the affluent masses, it has continued to pay lip service to the second kind of attention, while in its practical application it has greatly reinforced the first. As Peter Doran, one of the moment's advocates, but also an environmental activist, a political economist and one of the sternest critics of 'McMindfulness', comments:

'mindfulness is being sold as a respite from hyper-consumerism, or as support for our struggle to comply with pressures to enhance



productivity in the workplace. It is being used, for example, as a form of self-discipline of enhanced productivity in corporate and institutional settings. Equally, the practice is being deployed by institutions to help mitigate heightened moments of distress such as when staff are being prepared to adapt to news of their imminent redundancy.<sup>33</sup>

Currently the mindfulness movement has gone into overdrive to provide relief for stressed out key workers, and help those locked down indoors to cope with anxiety and depression. There are countless apps and videos with instructions for different kinds of meditation exercise and other ways of neutralizing the emotional impact of the pandemic. How effective these techniques are proving to be is uncertain, extravagant claims are often made by the movement’s evangelists, but hard evidence of the long-term impact is hard to come by.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless it is perhaps worth pointing out that the various mental and bodily exercises designed to focus attention exclusively on the present moment and its positivity may enable frontline health and care staff to cope with the impossible conditions in which they daily find themselves, but only at the cost of bracketing out any consideration of how the government has mishandled the situation, the long legacy of NHS underfunding, and the need to develop a whole new system of social and preventive medicine to deal pro-actively with future pandemic scenarios.

So how far is it possible to push the envelope of conventional mindfulness beyond this tunnel vision? The diagram below (see illustration) is an attempt to do so but remains confined to the dynamics of personal growth split off from its properly political dimension.

**Figure 2**



Even staying for a moment within this restricted frame, we might introduce a political supplement by adding a new element to the psychological toolkit: social dreaming. This group therapy technique was first introduced by a psychoanalyst who was interested in how people working in complex organisations where there was a good deal of internal conflict, registered this in their inner lives, and in particular in their dreams.<sup>35</sup> Instead of regarding dreams as being about purely private psychodramas, this approach involves members of a group sharing their dreams, exploring possible interconnections in terms of symbolic meaning and using this material as a basis for considering issues which they might have in common. This collective dream work in turn creates an imaginative framework for thinking together about the political dimensions of personal experience.

This opens up some interesting research questions. How do the dreams of frontliners compare with those of backyarders in the present crisis? Are the former more likely to directly register and condense the graphic details of current experience and their associated anxiety states? Will the latter, deprived of the stimulus of everyday social activities, hunker down to explore memoryscapes related to long repressed childhood traumas, whose after affects are triggered by the pandemic and now appear in elaborately displaced form? Or again do the codings of 'pandemic' dreams vary according to the subject's unconscious model of environmental risk perception, the philobatic dreamscape being very differently organized from that of the ocnephile? Currently researchers in many countries are collecting dreams from 'at risk' populations, albeit usually within a narrow neuro-biological frame of reference. Hopefully some of this work might provide insight into just how the extreme stress being created for people in different situations is being processed and represented at a deeper, more unconscious level with implications for future mental health policy.<sup>36</sup>

Covid-19 has concentrated minds wonderfully on immediate bodily and affective states and their relationship to the physical environment as recommended in most mindfulness manuals. We might call this the *intensive*, phenomenological moment of mindfulness, focusing down on the primary world of the senses and how the world, and the word is made flesh through them, bracketing out any pre-meditated judgements about our experience. But what next?

We can go in for neuro-linguistic programming and teach our automatic pilot to wash our hands for us for 20 seconds while we sing the Internationale under our breath. That is the mindless (but still useful!) response in which we literally wash our hands of any potentially wider signification. Or we can become aware of what this act brings to mind – a childhood memory perhaps of being made to wash our hands after going to the bathroom and refusing to do it? Or a friend with OCD who insists on scrubbing the kitchen floor before and after cooking? The associations will vary according to our moods and circumstance so that however repetitive, each time it becomes an intentional act with a different meaning. So this is

the second *extensive* moment of mindfulness, in which we learn to exercise our sociological imagination in a way that renders our attentiveness into a form of structured curiosity about the world and our place in it. In critical mindfulness, these two moments, intensive/introspective and extensive/extrospective, paying attention to the self in relation to others and seeking attention from others in relation to the self are no longer at war, but part of the same exploratory process.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, critical mindfulness requires us to rethink the relationship between the personal and the political, so that we neither conflate these terms or reduce them to one another. Hannah Arendt, who thought more about this issue than perhaps any other 20th century philosopher, argued that the political transcends the personal, in so far as it constitutes an area of public deliberation and action that by definition goes beyond, even while conserving, traces of private interests. Conversely the personal transcends the political in that it represents a space of existential concern and sensuous/aesthetic encounter with the world which necessarily goes beyond, even while it conserves traces of conflicts of interest in public life.<sup>38</sup> If we over-personalise politics, personalities become more important than policies in shaping how citizens think and vote. But if we de-personalise politics altogether, we get ‘machine’ politics, dominated by bureaucratic or technocratic systems of governance, for which citizens vote mindlessly or not at all. If we over politicise the personal we get a public discourse dominated by *ad hominem* arguments in which *what* is said and done is much less important than *who* is saying or doing it. Then again if we de-politicise the personal altogether, we are left with an insular self-regarding standpoint from which the rest of the world can go hang as long as my own little bit of it is OK.

So is the idea to achieve some perfect equilibrium between the push and pull of these conflicting tendencies? One of the key messages of mindfulness, after all, is about the need to sustain a sense of mental balance in situations of conflict. However, translated into the idiom of political discourse, this does *not* mean simply listening to all sides of an argument and trying to reach consensus, with an imperative to find the ‘middle ground’ or ‘third way’ between conflicting positions. Let alone remaining ‘neutral’ and somehow above the fray! What it does mean is not prematurely shutting down the discussion by operating any of the above mentioned essentialisms, and being prepared to consider new perspectives that take us out of our ideological comfort zone. This is a recipe for a robust, cut-and-thrust form of democratic debate in which frustration is tempered with good humour or wit, dialogue replaces point scoring and shared commitment to a common project over-rides personal animosities and ambitions. In particular critical mindfulness is an antidote to moral panic. It is a means of re-collecting our scattered wits, coming to our common senses about what is important in life and what a good society means, while re-connecting with a moral economy in which such project can materialise. In situations where the pace of events is leaving us all struggling to keep up, to create moments which allow us to pause for reflection, is to enable us to get our ‘second wind’ and regain the energy

and commitment we need to continue the struggle.

## **'I can't Breathe': mapping politic's 'other scene' from Left field**

How then can the new leadership of the Labour Party draw on these values and attitudes to steer its way through a mindfield which includes the bitter aftermath of electoral defeat, the current national health crisis, making sure Black Lives Matter and dealing with an environmental crisis compounded by a world recession. I think that taken together these separate instances intersect to constitute what might be called a left field, and one which requires a special kind of mapping.

Left field', as American readers will know, is originally a baseball term and refers to an unusual move in the game. It was taken up by commentators in the 1980s at the high point of post-modernism to define the originality of artists and thinkers whose work was not otherwise on the cultural map. In this context the term took on the current connotation of 'something coming suddenly out of nowhere', through a singular, disruptive act which, to extend the sporting metaphor, we have come to call 'a game changer'. Risk analysts call this an outlier, or, more poetically, a black swan and use it to refer to a class of highly improbable events whose impact cannot be assessed using linear cause-and-effect models.<sup>39</sup> It is evident that we are living in an ever more precarious and uncertain world in which black swans are multiplying. The usual method of conjunctural analysis simply makes an inventory of instances or moments, considers their possible patterns of causal interaction, and then generates a hierarchy of significance.

In my view that approach is too static to deal with the present situation. Instead we need to test our ideas by tracing their genealogy in countless small micro-political acts and follow where they lead in order to establish the possible points of contact at which they might converge into something qualitatively different in scope and scale. In tracking the often obscure relays of this process, the dead ends as well as sudden switches of direction, it does not help to see it as simply an acceleration of existing tendencies (for example, a growing disenchantment with the political class leading to a switch in party allegiances); nor in terms of an archaeological model where changes in surface patterns (viz of voting behaviour) are seen to be caused by underlying processes (viz class re-composition), without any mediation; nor, finally is it useful to introduce a conceptual *deus ex machina* borrowed from a grand narrative about globalisation or neoliberalism, to fall back on what Marx called dumb generalities and dogmatic abstractions which are then mistaken for concrete realities.

A left field event is one in which conflicts and discourses which are normally quite distinct, and which exist in relations of displacement or even denial towards one another, but which nevertheless bear on shared predicaments connect with certain outliers and suddenly condense into a singular moment of political outrage. To take a topical example, how do

we understand the sudden worldwide upsurge of popular protest against racism triggered by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis? This was not just down to the video of the event going viral over the internet and being beamed into millions of homes in lockdown. For sure it was the last straw for BAME communities already suffering disproportionately from Covid-19. At the same time many members of these communities (especially the youth) are experiencing lockdown as an attack on vibrant forms of public congregation and street culture which are core elements of their collective identity. And then, to add insult to already large injury, they find themselves in the front line of moral panic about 'Covid carriers' and cast yet again as social pariahs, subject to stringent policing, again especially towards the youth. Sometimes these elements are captured within a discourse of race, sometimes in terms of class or even generation. Now they have become fused in what has become the key meme of the mass movement which has sprung up, building on the Black Lives Matter campaign but giving it a new focus and edge.

'I can't breathe', the now famous words uttered by Floyd with his last breath as the policeman crushed the life out of him with knee on his wind pipe not only graphically evokes the horrendous physical symptoms of patients seriously ill with the virus, it also expresses the sense of claustrophobia experienced by many in lockdown, especially the suffocation of so many hopes and aspirations within BAME communities by the relentless operation of a carceral state which fails to give them educational and hence job opportunities, forces them back into the hidden economy in order to survive and then disproportionately imprisons them. Finally, the phrase conjures up the spectre of the environmental crisis and the negative impact of air pollution on public health, leading to an exponential growth in asthmatic conditions, which of course in turn increases vulnerability to Covid-19. The toxic nature of our economy is something which its lockdown has highlighted as the streets and skies are temporarily emptied of traffic.

The chain of associations generated by the phrase thus instantly connects these otherwise discrete instances of injustice and condenses them in a single powerful statement about the deep malaise of contemporary capitalist society. It also points towards the joyful human solidarity that can be mobilised against oppression. The fight to breathe more freely by breathing new life into the body politic against the stifling structures of social inequality mandates both the intensive and extensive dimensions of mindfulness.

At the same time to do the kind of mindful conjunctural analysis I am arguing for also requires us to be more attentive to what might be called the 'other scene' of political life. By this I do not mean the unintended consequences or unpredictable outcomes of particular political acts or policies. Rather it points to what operates *through* the surface chain of events but beyond the rhetorics which attempt to give them a retrospective coherence or ideological rationale. I am talking here about a more unconscious structure of representation which scripts

and punctuates the unfolding of the political plot, introducing sudden and unexpected twists and turns whose sources conspiracy theories misrecognize even as they bear witness to their symptomatic effects.<sup>40</sup>

So, from this perspective, and to take an obvious example, the role of the Shadow Cabinet is not just to stick close to their opposite numbers, doggedly following their every move, and where possible broadcasting their failings. In addition a mindful opposition must be attentive to the 'other scene' of political life, populated as it is by figures who often operate in the shadows, outside the bright light of the public gaze but who embody or enact feelings and phantasies unspoken or repressed in the official rationalising idioms of political discourse. Think of the portrayal of Dominic Cummings as a devious puppet master, pulling the strings of government behind the scenes, Boris Johnson's archetypal shadow.<sup>41</sup> This dark side of politics is dominated by petty resentments and personal feuds, covert racism and sexism often enacted through a culture of bullying, and by shady deals cloaked in ideological justification; it is where people take umbrage at the drop of a cliché, where tribalism, factionalism and turf wars flourish and what Freud called 'the narcissism of minor difference' prevails.<sup>42</sup>

In this tense space, unacknowledged feelings often run high and low, just as the mood of political organisations swings between triumphalism or manic denial at one moment and abject fatalism the next. This tendency to oscillate between optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect, the former perhaps the prerogative of youth and the latter of age, runs counter to Gramsci's famous mantra, which recommends that both attitudes are needed to temper and counter balance the other in a mindful dialectic, rather than being split off and juxtaposed to one another. Left to its own devices optimism of the will runs away with the story and we end up with the scenarios of fake hope offered by the (Br)Exiteers. Unalloyed pessimism of the intellect can produce scintillating critique and armchair dystopias which offer a poor consolation for political defeat.

This bi-polar structure is frequently traversed by another which might be called paranoid/schizoid in that it splits the world up into idealised goodies (the ever-virtuous People who think, feel and act like us) and persecutory baddies (the Ruling Elite or Evil Outsiders) who don't. Heroes and villains are, of course, the very stuff of popular culture, they allow us to project and give vent to feelings that might otherwise turn much more nasty and destructive if acted out. The problems only arise when such Manichean views of the world become institutionalised as the basis of tribal loyalties or State policies.

So to be politically mindful in this context means to keep in mind the operations of hidden power and inequality, to investigate them and render them publicly visible but *without* fetishizing them. Political mindfulness is not political correctness by another name, nor is it an exercise in what social scientists like to call 'inter-sectionality', a tick box approach that registers these different instances as reified analytic categories which are



only then allowed to, somewhat clunkily, interact.

The failure to grasp concretely and imaginatively these lived dialectics of power and positionality leads to a peculiar idiom of mindlessness. So for example, there is a way of feeling, thinking and talking about issues of race and ethnicity which dissociates them from the dimensions of class, gender and generation in which they are always and already enmeshed. Equally there is a way of banging on about class which tacitly colludes with, and even actively reproduces, forms of racism, sexism, and ageism. Then again there is a way of critiquing Patriarchy which ignores its generational dimension, the power exercised by fathers as elders, as well as men, and/or addresses 'youth' as a unitary category.<sup>43</sup>

In what passes for common sense in factionalised political discourse we can find numerous examples of this mindset, here are some all too familiar ones from the Left: 'Don't Mourn, Organise', 'If you are not with us you are against us', 'People who voted for Brexit are stupid' or 'Its always capitalism/patriarchy/imperialism what dunnit'.

Raymond Williams called this kind of one-dimensional mindset 'robot thinking';

'which resembles human thinking in everything but its capacity for experience. If you step into the robot's world, you get your fuel free, and you can immediately grind into action, on one of the paper fronts, where the air stinks of pride, destruction, malice and exhaustion. The first characteristic of the robots is that the world exists in terms of their own fixed points. Are you a Marxist, a revisionist, a bourgeois reformist? Are you a Communist, a Left radical, a fellow traveller? What answer can a man make to that kind of robot questioning? 'Go away', I suppose. It seems the only adequate thing to say.'<sup>44</sup>

Williams is writing in the 1960s and perhaps being unfair to present day robots if not the culture of Cold War Communism. Since then plenty of people have voted with their feet and dropped out of Leftist activity, turned off by mindless factionalism and the shrill invective of organisational in-fighting, some to retire hurt into private life, others to sublimate political ambitions in professional ones.

Robot thinking rushes to a priori judgement, forecloses curiosity and always reaches foregone conclusions; it is the antithesis of the kind of attitude required for left field analysis and which critical mindfulness is seeking to promote. So here we are talking about cultivating a free floating awareness attuned not only to how situations, events, ideas, feelings are unfolding in the here-and-now (the intensive moment), but the links, associations, relays that connect these phenomena to the past and to a horizon of future possibility (the extensive moment). This mode of circumspect attention, pausing for thought, is quite close to what Keats called 'negative capability', as he put it 'the capacity of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact

and reason’.

This is not only good advice for poets, but for the research scientists who are currently trying to unravel the mysteries of Covid-19 and who are finding that their epidemiological models, however mathematically elegant, contain built-in uncertainty principles about the facticities of the disease which at present seriously limit their predictive power.<sup>45</sup> It is also to be recommended for politicians and policy makers. This is a mindset which demands attentiveness to the specificities of a given context as well as taking into account the unfolding processes in which it is entangled. It is about being able to think quickly on your feet, because your head is not in the clouds, or buried in the sand; but it also means being able to ground your perceptions in an imaginative grasp of what might be escaping or limiting them.

This combination of qualities is especially necessary in a crisis when hot heads and cold hearts (which sometimes paradoxically go together) are contra-indicated. Instead cool minds and a warm empathetic understanding of where others are coming from are just what the doctor ordered. And indeed it is what doctors, along with nurses, teachers, and carers of every kind, whether professional, voluntary or involuntary, are often especially good at. Mindfulness in action is always care-full, in the multiple sense of taking time to be properly alongside and attentive to somebody or something, not only in looking after them but by exercising non-judgemental foresight; the practice of this prescient concern may take many forms, including listening, considering, discussing and determining, but they also involve the exercise of a properly dialogic imagination.<sup>46</sup>

## **Voice, Agency and the art of listening**

Perhaps the most important lesson the methodology of critical mindfulness has to teach the Left is how to relate voice and agency without confusing or reducing them to one another. If the rich and powerful get things done their way by whispering in the ears of the political establishment – and there is a whole lobbying industry employed for this purpose – the Left has a tendency to engage in megaphone politics, in which those who shout loudest tend to be the ones that get heard. Of course if everyone is shouting at once, there is a cacophony of voices and no-one gets listened to. But that can change if voices are synchronised. The emergence of a new ‘woke’ generation from the Black Lives Matter movement created a collective voice largely through rap music focussed around key areas of social injustice. It was clearly an important moment. Yet once that voice became disconnected from its anchorage in an actual social movement, Woke was all too easily co-opted, travestied, and stylised into a cultural attitude without any personal or political implication. Or to put it another, more old-fashioned way, instead of arousing workers and citizens mindfully from their slumbers, Woke became a mindless cliché, substituting voice for agency, part of the



relentless 24/7 bombardment of media messaging that is invading our sleep, and our capacity to dream.<sup>47</sup>

Much of contemporary political culture is pseudo-performative and systematically conflates voice and agency; the notion that saying something is as good as doing it has increasingly come to supplant the conventional wisdom that actions speak louder than words, and that politicians should be judged on what they deliver and not by what they promise. Populists who claim to speak for the 'silent majority' exploit the fact that in the idioms of popular culture, at least as instanced in Hollywood movies, the strong and silent Clint Eastwood type is a hero precisely because he (and it is always he) speaks and acts to protect the silent and weak. Yet it is precisely that association of silence with either hidden power or abject powerlessness that the Left-liberal intelligentsia has bought into; this has left us open to attack from the alt-Right who use it to portray the 'chattering classes' (aka academics and 'creatives') as being 'all mouth and no trousers'. In reality, and perhaps partly in reaction to the charge that Lefties are armchair critics who are good at Utopian speculation but have no skin in the game, we have seen the emergence of a new generation of radicals who are essentially unpaid but quasi-professional activists, and who dedicate almost all of their time, energy and resources to fighting particular campaigns for environmental or social justice.<sup>48</sup>

As the testimony of Greta Thunberg spells out so eloquently, taking political action to address concerns beyond one's own immediate troubles can function as a form of do-it-yourself-therapy.<sup>49</sup> Her depression and eating disorder seems to have been a symptomatic response to the fact that her autism went undiagnosed and resulted in bullying from her peers at school; it melted away as soon as she discovered her own agency and voice. Admirable and inspiring though her example is, we should perhaps be cautious about prescribing political activism as a 'cure' for everyone in psychological difficulties. Speaking out is one thing, it involves some kind of sublimation of feelings whether of frustration, anxiety, envy or rage and weaponising them in the form of political demands. But acting out these feelings directly in personal attacks, even within a political scenario, is something else and strengthens what I have called the dark side of politics' other scene.

Politicisation begins with the statement of impossibilist demands: What do we want? To change the whole world! When do we want it? Now! An initial Utopian proposition is an essential but not sufficient condition of radical politics. But its compulsive repetition, *irrespective of circumstance*, tends to result in tunnel vision. Again, tunnel vision may be fine as long as there is light at the end of it, but if there is not, at best it is a recipe for whistling in the dark. Where hyper-activism, iterating on one shrill note, is underpinned by a culture of radical narcissism, we get a truly toxic and mindless form of personal identity politics.

The mindful alternative is to learn to listen to the many qualities of silence,

both our own and others. To become more attentive to the space between the words, to what is unsaid, and why. Silences can be oppressive as well as the 'voice' of the oppressed. They can be merely polite, in other words indifferent. There is a companionable silence of shared intimacy and understanding and a silence of paranoid mistrust. In order to listen you have to learn a particular way of being silent. It is now commonplace to say that the Labour Party has to learn to listen to those communities in the so called 'red wall' who voted with their feet in the 2019 election and gave the Tories such a huge electoral majority. But how does a political party learn to listen in this more mindful way?

The quick answer is – with difficulty. The Labour Party has a top-down structure of governance, and despite being a broad church made up of many disparate groupings, often with different ideological standpoints, it has few mechanisms of internal democracy, other than those which try to reduce the cacophony generated by its internal culture of factionalism by insisting that its public spokespeople remain as far as possible 'on message'. Perhaps then its members need to take a leaf or two out of Rachel Pinney's book on *Creative Listening*.<sup>50</sup> Pinney developed the technique of 'structured listening' in her work with autistic children, who had special difficulty in recognising and responding to social cues. Her method involves focussing attention on the immediate communicational setting, in both its verbal and non-verbal aspects and simultaneously being aware of its meta-communicational dimension, the cues which are being sent between partners about how the relationship itself is being perceived and negotiated. It is this dimension which is missing from the traditional focus group and survey sampling methods used by political parties, being referred to disparagingly as 'mood music'.

To some extent Pinney's ideas run in parallel with Theodore Reik's *Listening with a Third Ear*.<sup>51</sup> For Reik, the 'third ear' was about learning to listen and wait for the key moment in the ebb and flow of a therapy session when an interpretative intervention might make a real difference to the outcome. In other words, it required both social tactfulness and a tactical sense to seize the moment and say or do the right thing at the right time. This timing was not random, it was an opportunism informed by an understanding of the underlying, unconscious dynamics of the situation so that clues to what is happening at this level become cues for symbolic action. Awareness of what is going on in the 'other scene' of political life similarly confers strategic advantage, often leading to counter-intuitive interventions which produce startling effects. Politicians with this 'sixth sense' have the ability to put into memorable words the unspoken wishes and unthought hopes of the many and thus shape a multitude into an electorate.

Finally there is the art of listening which has been developed as part of the ethnographer's toolkit, as a way of making observations about groups from a standpoint of peripheral participation in their activities. This is an approach which sensitises the observer to nuances of behaviour, in particular the tension between what people say they do and what they

actually do, and how this relates to implicit cultural norms which regulate what may or may not be voiced and acted upon by whom in particular situations. At the same time there is no rush to pre-judgement about what a particular piece of behaviour means, but rather a provisional validation of the meanings and values which participants themselves assign to it as legitimate interpreters of their own actions.<sup>52</sup> If you want to find out why so many working class people who usually support Labour voted for the Tories to get Brexit done, then at least give them the respect of taking their own explanations seriously as political actors, rather than dismissing them as dupes, infected by 'false consciousness' or the ranting and raving of the Tory press.

If the Labour Party's 2019 campaign was notable for anything it was its lack of any of these qualities of mindful listening. So yes, I am suggesting that Labour party activists should undergo training in these various techniques as part of a new, non-transactional approach to political education. And that the new Labour leadership might adopt and disseminate this approach in order to create the conditions for a different kind of political culture to emerge, one in which militancy does not just mean marching with banners flying and clenched fists, but where those fists, and minds, open out, perhaps not for a while into handshakes, but into gestures of fellowship and invitation.

There is no magic reset button for Labour but now that so many elements of the 2019 manifesto, derided at the time as unrealistic, have become the new common sense, the main tactical task is to ensure that radical initiatives such as Universal Basic Income, a National Investment Bank and the Green New Deal are not gutted of their transformative potential, rebranded in anodyne versions and stitched into a populist Tory narrative constructed around a triumphalist post-pandemic settlement. If Labour fails in this task then we will one day wake up to a headline in the Daily Mail which reads: *Brexit Britain Beats the Bug, Born again Boris declares: Now Open for Business as Usual.*

But perhaps an even more fundamental shift in attitude is required. The pandemic is revealing to everyone caught up in its eco-system just how entangled and inter-dependent are the human and non-human, culture and nature, biology and autobiography, the conscious and unconscious. And just how redundant and reductive are the binary categories in which we are used to thinking about them.

Nowhere is this complexity more evident than in the situation of BAME communities, trapped in an inextricable mix of bio-political constraints, and subject to forms of racial profiling which both compound and naturalise their predicament. It is highly likely that these communities will experience a second wave of infection, find themselves blamed for 'failing to exercise common sense', and become subject to a localised re-imposition of stringent surveillance and control measures. A perfect pandemic storm.

Perhaps this complication of social injustice, and the need to develop new strategies to address it, is the ultimate lesson which Covid-19 has to teach us. It is one that the Left urgently needs to learn if it is to find a common language in which to speak about the indissoluble links between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the present crisis; nothing less is required if Labour is to reach out to a resentful electorate still inured to the chronic insecurities of austerity, now likely to be artificially prolonged well past their ideological sell-by date. The party has to campaign for a post-pandemic settlement in which the health and wellbeing of the body politic becomes conditional on that of every single citizen. Only then will there indeed be hope after 'woke', that all the suffering and sacrifice has not been in vain.

## Endnotes

1. See for example Mason, P (2020) '[Will Coronavirus signal the end of capitalism?](#)', Al Jazeera Opinion, April 3 2020
2. See Pountain, D and Robins, D (1998) *Cool Rules: anatomy of an attitude*, Reaktion Books and Frank, T (1997) *The Conquest of the Cool: business culture, counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism*, University of Chicago Press
3. The British Library lists 1200 items with Late Capitalism in the title. The concept was originally developed by Ernest Mandel in his last book with the eponymous title published in 1975 to distinguish between Monopoly Capitalism and what came to be known as Post Fordism. The most rigorous exploration of the term is Jameson, F (1991) *Post Modernism: the cultural logic of late capitalism*, Verso
4. Sartre distinguished between two types of group formation: the pledged group, in which every member internalises and enacts collective rules and values, as typified in the initiation rites of novitiate 'pledges' in the American college fraternity system; the series, as exemplified by the bus queue, in which each member of the queue is one too many for the other, especially if they have to socially distance while on board so there are fewer places. See Sartre, J. P. (1991) *Critique of Dialectical Reason Vol 3*, Verso
5. The story appears in James Thurber's collection *My Life and Hard Times* (1933). It is based on an actual incident which occurred in Columbus Ohio in 1913 at a time when the area had been subject to unusually heavy levels of rainfall, threatening the local Levees. The event resulted in over 600 deaths.
6. For example, Bloodborne follows the player's character through a Gothic Victorian city whose inhabitants have been afflicted with blood borne disease. Tom Clancy's *The Division* is set prophetically in 2020 New York in the aftermath of a viral pandemic. *Infected* is also set in New York, where the entire city is being infected with a virus that turns people into blood-thirsty zombies. In an individualistic riff on herd immunity the player's blood contains the cure, which less than 1 per cent of the population possesses, the aim of the game being to destroy the infected while trying to reach someone who can make a cure from the blood. Enjoy!
7. Readers may be interested to know that a major research programme

into the prevalence of HIS and HERS is currently being launched by the International Institute of Forensic Pataphysics led by Professor Arthur Craven.

8. For a discussion of this see Cohen, P (2020) 'Going Viral', Livingmaps Review 8 and Canetti, E (1978) 'The figure and the mask' in *Crowds and Power*. Venetian Plague Doctor masks are popular in Halloween and other contemporary carnivalesque depictions of death, but since the advent of Covid-19 wearing them has become socially taboo, as a teenager in Helleston discovered recently to his cost, when he got fined for wearing one.

9. Cohen, S (1973) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Also, for a feminist perspective see Showalter, E (1997) *Hystories: hysterical epidemics and modern culture*, Columbia University Press

10. For a discussion of the ideological uses to which this notion is put see McRobbie, A (2020) *Feminism and the Politics of 'Resilience'*, Polity. Please note that in contrast to resilience which is constructed as a purely inner resourcefulness, fortitude and courage are generated through emotional attachment to others, and to a belief in the common good.

11. See Zuboff, S (2019) *The age of surveillance capitalism*, Profile Books

12. See Bollas, C (2018) *The Shadow of the Object: psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, Routledge. For an alternative neuro-biological model see Hayes, K (2017) *Unthought: the power of the cognitive non-conscious*, University of Chicago. The concept of the 'unknown-relation' as constitutive of human subjectivity, in particular curiosity and the desire to know, was developed by the French psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato in a book of that title published in 1978, but sadly not yet translated. For a further discussion of this issue, in relation to risk analysis and epistemic anxiety see Mike Rustin's article in *Political Mindfulness: Mindful perspectives on multiple crises*, Compass (2020).

13. Kristeva, J (1991) *Strangers to ourselves*, Columbia University Press

14. Freud's notion of the infant's 'anaclitic' (i.e. leaning towards) relation to the mother's body was introduced in *Three essays on sexuality* (1905) but was never fully developed by him. It was subsequently taken further in the work of Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott on early object relations, and in the infant attachment theory of John Bowlby.

15. The distinction between 'bridging' and 'bonding' as two distinct strategies of accumulating social capital was developed by in *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (2000). For an extension of this model to cultural capital and its application to different forms of community stakeholding in civil society see Cohen, P (2013) *On the Wrong Side of the Track: East London and the Post Olympics*, Lawrence and Wishart

16. See Douglas, M (2002) *Purity and Danger*, Routledge, also Douglas and Wildavski (1983) *Risk and Culture*, University of California Press. For an exposition and evaluation of this model of risk see Tansey, J and O'Riordan, T (1999) 'Cultural Theory and Risk: a Review' in *Health, Risk and Society* Vol 1 Number 1

17. This concept was first elaborated in Kant's *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) which has remained a key reference point for discussions about vocabularies of human motivation until the present day. See for example Lilla, M (2008) *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West*, Vintage



18. See Sloterdijk, P (2011) *Bubbles*, MIT Press. This is the first in a trilogy of books examining social formations in contemporary Western cultures, an ambitious attempt at a general theory integrating insights from anthropology and psychoanalysis.
19. See Canetti, E (1973) *Crowds and Power*, Continuum New York. The full quote is given in the frontispiece of this pamphlet. For further discussion of the anti-racist protests see the final section of this text.
20. The theory of the double bind was developed by Gregory Bateson in the 1960's to depict a form of pathological communication in which an injunction being conveyed directly by one channel (viz a verbal instruction) is simultaneously countermanded by another message being relayed implicitly at a meta-level – viz via body language – so that however the subject responds she is continually wrong footed, becomes confused and loses trust in her own experience. See Bateson, G (2000) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, University of Chicago Press
21. The term 'Tragedy of the Commons' was originally formulated by an ecologist to describe how common resources are destroyed through the pursuit of individual self-interest. For example, in over grazing or over fishing. This model has been criticised for its assumption that social behaviour is always motivated by private rather than public interest. Elinor Ostrom in *Governing the Commons* (1990) shows how communities sharing scarce resources frequently self regulate to create sustainability, in other words follow the norms of moral economy not market economy. In my example the sailing club acts to protect a common resource, its facilities, from becoming an infection hot spot, thus potentially killing its membership and then the club itself.
22. Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* was published in 1893. For its contemporary relevance see Thijssen, P (2012) 'From mechanical to organic solidarity and back again' in *European Journal of Social Theory*
23. See Maffesoli, M (1995) *The Time of the Tribes: the decline of individualism in mass society*, Routledge
24. See Hardt, M and Negri, A (2005) *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin. For a discussion of tribe and multitude as avatars of class identity see Cohen, P (2018) 'Finding uncommon ground: working class identity politics after Labourism' in *Soundings* 66
25. The concept of moral economy was initially used by E. P. Thompson in his study of 18th Century crowds to characterise forms of collective bargaining in pre-industrial plebeian culture. In his classic text *The Gift* (1925) the anthropologist Marcel Mauss produced a model of moral economy as a system of socio-economic exchange based on symbolic value and what he called 'symmetrical reciprocity of prestations' (or one gift or good deed deserves another). Mauss saw this system of mutual obligation as an alternative to commodity production and exchange under industrial capitalism. He was active in the French co-operative movement and his ideas were influential amongst Guild Socialists, Libertarian Marxists, Council Communists, and anarcho-syndicalists during the inter war period, all of them looking for ways of connecting workplace struggles around control over the labour process with community struggles around housing, public amenity, democratic rights and justice in civil society. Many of these ideas

have re-surfaced in recent debates around Left communitarianism and the democratic renewal of municipal socialism. See the current issue of Soundings for a good sample of this new thinking.

26. For example, the government's initial measures completely ignored the potential role of environmental health officers who not only have detailed local knowledge but have specialised skills in testing and tracing.

27. See Silva, J (2015) *Coming up Short: working class adulthood in an age of Uncertainty*, Oxford University Press

28. See the report by the Social Market Foundation Inter-generational fairness in the Coronavirus Economy (April 2020)

29. For a fuller account see Cohen, P (2020) 'Going Viral: cartographies of panic and precaution in an age of uncertainty' in Livingmaps Review 8

30. See for example, Rose, N (1999) *Governing the Soul: shaping the private self*, Verso. Also, William Davies, W (2020) *Nervous States: how feeling took over the world*, Norton

31. For a swingeing critique of the mindfulness movement from a Marxist perspective see Purser, R (2019) *McMindfulness: how mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality*, Pluto Book. Also, Davies, W (2015) *The Happiness Industry*, Verso. For a more nuanced view see the introduction to Cohen, P (2019) *Waypoints: towards an ecology of political mindfulness*, eyeglass books

32. See Crary, J (1999) *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, MIT Press

33. Doran, P (2017) *A Political economy of Attention, Mindfulness and Consumerism: reclaiming the mindful commons*, Routledge. This important book explores the connections between critiques of the destructive aspects of capitalist modes of production and consumption, and Buddhist ethics, including respect for nature and the environment and the importance of creating a dwelling space and time outside the 24/7 culture of distraction.

34. A detailed comparative study is currently being carried out by a team lead by Dr Stanley Spencer from the Department of Critical Psychology, University of Cardiff. Further information: [www.mappingmindfulness.net](http://www.mappingmindfulness.net)

35. See Lawrence, W. G. (2018) *Introduction to social dreaming*, Routledge. Also, Manley, J (2019) *Social Dreaming, Associative thinking and Intensities of Affect*, Palgrave.

36. See Barrett, D (1996) *Trauma and Dream*, Harvard University Press for an account of the neuro-biological approach to dream analysis, in this case with material from Vietnam war veterans and others suffering PTSD. For a psychoanalytic approach see Beradt, C (1968) *The Third Reich of Dreams*, Quadrangle Books, drawing on dreams of patients, many of them Jewish, living through the nightmare of Nazi Germany in the 1930's. I am currently conducting a small piece of research informed by the ideas discussed here into the impact of the pandemic on dream lives. Further details can be found on [www.livingmaps.org.uk](http://www.livingmaps.org.uk)

37. See Phillips, A (2019) *Seeking Attention*, Penguin. Philips uses literary sources to explore the double edged nature of attention from a psychoanalytic perspective, albeit one which does not engage with any political dimension.

38. See Arendt, H (2018) *The Human Condition*, Blackwell



39. See Taleb, N (2012) *The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, Penguin. Taleb's initial analysis focused on the behaviour of financial markets but he has subsequently expanded this approach to the modelling of a variety of complex, non-linear systems, including pandemics.
40. See Jameson, F (1981) *The Political Unconscious*, Routledge and the introduction to Balibar, E (2008) *Politics and the Other Scene*, Verso for two very different attempts to formulate this space of representation.
41. The shadow is an important trope in many cultures where it represents the hidden depths of the human psyche, its secret fears and forbidden desires, often associated with sexuality and death. For Carl Jung the shadow was an archetype of the collective unconscious, and represented the darker, instinctual side of the psyche, which resists and subverts the light of rational consciousness.
42. This concept was initially formulated by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Ego* (1921) to explain why apparently insignificant social differences become invested with such great emotional charge. The idea was further elaborated in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), where, in a typical irony he uses it to refer to the growth of anti-Semitism in Germany. Cultural sociologists have subsequently used versions of the concept to explain territorial rivalries between gangs (Elias and Scotson *The Established and the Outsiders*, 1965), strategies of personal impression management (Erving Goffman *Relations in Public*, 1971) and culture wars (Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction*, 1984)
43. For example, there are different class specific forms of racist discourse, based on codes of breeding (the aristocracy), intelligence (the bourgeoisie) and bodily performance (working class). See Cohen, P (1998) 'The Perversions of Inheritance' in *Multi-Racist Britain*, Macmillan. For a critique of the construction of youth as a unitary subject analysis of see Cohen, P (1998) *Rethinking the Youth Question: education, labour and cultural studies* and Macmillan and McRobbie, A and Nava, M (1995) *Gender and Generation*, Macmillan.
44. Williams, R (2018) 'The Future of Marxism' in *New Left Review* 114
45. These facticities include the social and cultural responses to policies that are informed by these models but rarely factored into their calculations. For a general discussion of this issue see Trostl, J (2005) *Epidemiology and culture*, Cambridge University Press. On epidemiological modelling see Tifekci, Z (2020) 'Don't Believe the Covid-19 Models – that's not what they are for' in *The Atlantic*, April 2020
46. In his long, and it must be said often excruciatingly incomprehensible treatise on Mindfulness (2016), the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger highlights care (*sorge*) as a foundational structure of authentic human being-in-the-world. This concern did not inhibit him from giving tacit support to the Nazi regime during his tenure as rector of Freiberg University, a somewhat extreme example of philosophers not practising what they preach. See Lilla, M (2001) *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, NYRB. On the essentially social and dialogic nature of language see Bakhtin, M (1982) *The Dialogic Imagination*.
47. See Crary, J (2013) *24/7: late Capitalism and the end of sleep*, Verso
48. See for example Shenker, J (2019) *Now we have your attention: the new politics of the people*, Bodley Head

49. Thunberg, G (2019) *Our House is on Fire; scenes of a family and planet in crisis*, Penguin
50. Rachel Pinney was a leading child psycho-therapist, a Quaker, a CND activist, an environmentalist, and towards the end of her life, a lesbian activist. Her book, *Creative Listening* is currently out of print, but second-hand copies are readily available.
51. Theodore Reik was an early disciple of Freud in Vienna but emigrated to the USA in the 1930's where he developed an independent psychoanalytic training institute. He had a special interest in linking psychoanalytic insights with anthropological research into myth and ritual.
52. For an ethnographic approach see Back, L (2013) *The Art of Listening* Bloomsbury

## Further Reading

If you have found the ideas in this text of interest you might like to follow some of them up. This is a short list of books I have consulted and found thought provoking in writing about responses to the pandemic:

Les Back (2013) *The art of listening*, Bloomsbury

Michael and Enid Balint (2000) *Thrills and Regression*, Maresfield

Gregory Bateson (2000) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, University of Chicago Press

Elias Canetti (1978) *Crowds and Power*, Continuum

Jonathan Crary (2013) *24/7: Late Capitalism and the ends of sleep*, Verso

William Davies (2015) *The Happiness Industry*, Verso

Peter Doran (2017) *A Political Economy of Attention, mindfulness and consumerism: reclaiming the mindful commons*, Routledge

Mary Douglas (2002) *Purity and Danger*, Routledge

Terry Eagleton (2017) *Hope without Optimism*, University of Virginia Press

Kai T Erikson (1995) *A New Species of Trouble: the human experience of modern disaster*, Norton

Christina Feldman and Willem Kuyken (2019) *Mindfulness: Ancient Wisdom meets Modern Psychology*, The Guilford Press

Julia Kristeva (1991) *Strangers to ourselves*, Columbia University Press

Adam Phillips (2019) *Attention Seeking*, Penguin

Elaine Showalter (1997) *Hystories: hysterical epidemics and modern culture*, Columbia University Press

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) *The age of surveillance capitalism*, Profile Books

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