

Journal Article for The Journal of Arts and Humanities.

## COVID-19 and the 'Virus of Everyday Life'

An exploration into how distorted time perception and memory during lockdown may shape our society Post-COVID.

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Key Words: COVID-19, Time, Memory, Lockdown, Collective Trauma

## Abstract

COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on our Society. This article examines how time perception and memory has been distorted during England's March 23<sup>rd</sup> – May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Lockdown and hypothesises on what the social impacts of this distortion may be in the future. This is done through a multidisciplinary research approach exploring, history, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, social theory as well as art and literature. During the course of this paper, it is explained that we perceive time through the aspect of change, using memories as markers to orient ourselves in our temporality. COVID-19 is described as a collective trauma, the implications of which will go on to characterise the narrative of society. The impact of technology and media on the experience of Lockdown and Collective Trauma are seen to have both positive and negative effects on Society in terms of future progression, simultaneously helping us connect with each other and, conversely adding to our trauma. The article finishes by hypothesising that Lockdown may have been a catalyst for reevaluation of our social structure. It develops the idea that, if society understands the implications of collective memory and takes care curating positive narratives, we can shape the direction of our post-COVID-19 future. At the time of writing, COVID-19 is an ongoing Pandemic so the lasting impacts of many of the topics discussed are unknown, thus this article does not seek to provide absolute results. It serves as a contemplation on the shifting condition during the COVID-19.

## Introduction

This article is a speculative, interdisciplinary discourse that analysis the effects of Lockdown and the COVID-19 Pandemic on the time perception, memory and psyche of society. It will examine the social implications of what we have and are continuing to experience. I present, for consideration that the Pandemic, especially the period of Lockdown, is a Collective trauma; an ongoing period from which we have not recovered. To allow me to be specific, this article will focus on Western Society, particularly the UK. I will also be centring my analysis on England's 'Lockdown' defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "a period of time in which people are not allowed to leave their homes or travel freely, because of a dangerous disease" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Lockdown rules in England were instated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 and began to be eased on the 10th May 2020.

Typically, to write about a topic objectively, a certain amount of critical distance is required to reflect and explore its impact. When writing about COVID-19 we are not afforded this luxury. Due to the lack of critical distance, I have chosen to analyse the effects on, and societal responses to, past pandemics to reflect on COVID-19.

To facilitate my analysis I am using thinkers who explore, time perception, memory, collective trauma and social theory: Dr. Julia Shaw's ideas on time perception and memory (2020, 2016); Martin Heidegger's theories in 'Being and time' (2019); Gilad Hirschberger's paper 'Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning' (2018) ; Guy Debord's social commentary on the structure of society (1994, 1961); Barbra Adam's ideas in the book 'Time in Social Theory' (1990) and Barbra Adam's and Chris Groves' studies into Futurity in 'Future Matters' (2007).

Shaw's article 'Lockdown is distorting our memories – but there are ways to regain control' (2020) has been fundamental in my research, as it studies the themes of our temporal perception of time within lockdown, discussing how the lack of change during lockdown contributes to memory distortion. In this article the definition I will be using for "temporal" is relating to time in a transitory state.

Underpinning this article is an understanding of Heidegger's theories on 'Being and Time' (2019). He states that we are temporal beings, always living ahead of ourselves, in what we are planning to do. We do not live in time, but as time, tying together the past, present and future (Heidegger, 2019). Our being is inherently linked with our memories and thus our time.

Hirschberger's paper on 'Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning' (2018) has assisted my understanding of COVID-19 as a Collective Trauma and provided insight as to how societies define themselves and heal from collective trauma. This construction of meaning and healing is predominantly based on prevailing perceptions and memories following trauma (Hirschberger, 2018).

Guy Debord is a notable theorist for the themes I develop within this article as I believe his social critiques foreshadow the society in which we now live. I will be looking at his book 'Society of the Spectacle' (1994) and more importantly his paper of 'Perspectives for Conscious Changes in Everyday Life' (1961). In 'Comments on Society of the Spectacle' (1994, p.2.) Debord describes 'the spectacle' as the "Autocratic reign of the market economy;" a way in which capitalism controls society, particularly through media or advertisement. The spectacle condenses reality into commodifiable items, encouraging us to focus on material wealth (Debord, 1994). This describes the structure of our current consumer-capitalist society.

In 'Perspectives for Conscious Changes in Everyday Life' (1961) Debord explains that the consumer capitalist lifestyle keeps people (society) trapped in a cycle of monotonous work, described as 'everyday life'. This benefits ones' boss but is inherently unfulfilling, leaving individuals to fill the gap with material goods (Debord, 1961). Debord suggests the only way we can change the mundane parameters of everyday life within capitalism is for a societal break in this cycle, allowing society to question the meaning of life and the cultural norms.

Debord (1961, p.2) describes society as being "infected with the virus of everyday life because they [individuals within society], having no access to specialized activities, have only everyday life to live." This quote is relevant to the current society, infected with COVID-19, but also refers to a covert ideological virus that has affected our way of life for generations. I hypothesize that through the COVID-19 crisis, and particularly in lockdown, the break in 'everyday life' that Debord called for may have finally been answered. Lockdown may provide the opportunity "to renounce everything that Transcends Everyday life" (Debord, 1961, p.4). Debord called for a disruption of the spectacle, to alert society of its existence. By drawing on Barbra Adam's and Chris Goves' studies into the idea of futurity (future time, or future state/ condition) and Hirschberger's ideas on the construction of meaning after trauma, I believe we may be able to start answering the question of how to create a society uncontaminated with "the virus of everyday life" (Debord, 1961 p.5).

In 'Time and Social Theory' (1990, p.106) Adam's argues that, to study any aspect of social theory, time must be addressed as it is inherent in the way we live and perceive ourselves and our society; "implicated in every aspect of life". I have analysed Lockdown in accordance with this statement. Adam and Groves go on to explain that we cannot separate thinking about the present from the future. When considering ourselves we inherently consider the future as this orientates us within the present. We need to predict and organize the future in an attempt to avoid the unknown; "knowledge of the future is not just possible but is an essential of social life" (Adam, Groves, 2007, p.8). In their book 'future matters' Adam and Groves "address the complex relation between action, knowledge and ethics" (2007, p.1). They investigate the balance between these three subjects within the construction of our collective futures; arguing for individuals to take responsibility for their present actions in relation to future impact. These theories have underpinned my speculations on the effect of time perception and memory during and after lockdown.

When applying Adam's and Groves' theories, I will discuss the future as a 'present future' which "refers to approaches to the future from the standpoint of the present through which we seek to predict, transform and control the future for the benefit of the present" (Adam, Groves, 2007, p.200). I will use the term 'progress' in relation to the conception of our 'present futures,' "the aim being the construction of happiness" (Adam, Groves, 2007, p.201) through human design and knowledge. When I speak of detrimental narratives, I mean those which prevent us from sculpting our 'present future' or that which removes responsibility for the 'present future' (Adam, Groves, 2007). Furthermore, I have coined the phrase 'COVID-trauma' to discuss the ongoing trauma of the pandemic, the phrase refers to the experiences of trauma during this pandemic.

Firstly, the article will explore our time perception and how this relates to memory within COVID-19. Secondly, it will go on to examine COVID-19 as collective trauma in consideration of memories and narrative impacts on Collective Trauma. Thirdly, I will examine how narratives can be created within our society. Lastly, I will draw these themes together in a contemplation of the possible lasting effect on our society.

I will regularly transition between these themes, creating a discourse between all elements of discussion. This is because, as an ongoing topic, the subject is still in flux, thus the concepts are also fluid. I will leave open-ended questions, as this is an ongoing exploration. I invite the reader, during the course of this

article, to consider your own perception of time in lockdown, your own memories and evaluate the possible effect of those on the collective narrative of society.

## The Loss of Temporal landmarks

Our world view is derived from stories. Our brains are hardwired, not to recall facts and figures, but to remember events and narratives (Scott, 2018). Our perception of ourselves is based in memory and the narrative we assign to those memories. Our perception of time is established on the chronology of our memories. (Shaw, 2016)

Temporal Landmarks are standout events or dates within our personal calendar, such as birthdays, or even 'Mark's leaving do on Saturday' (Peetz, Davydenko, 2019). "We use these temporal landmarks to orient ourselves within time" (Peetz, Davydenko, 2019, p.2). They define the way we remember timelines. Our memories are stored within the mind in relation to events, for instance: 'we had the argument after Sarah's wedding'. Furthermore, prospective landmarks define our future outlook, allowing goal setting and wishes which can determine our response life. (Peetz, Davydenko, 2019) As Adam and Groves (2007, p.8) put it "knowledge of the future is not just possible but is an essential ingredient of social life."

During lockdown, most events have been cancelled, rhythms and structures of normal life have been disrupted. There have been few temporal landmarks to help us orientate our memories into a timeline of events. As Shaw (2020) states, "when we perceive time, what we're actually perceiving is change." Due to the lack of change of daily activity many people report that their sense of time and memory of lockdown is jumbled (Shaw, 2020). This is because "our experience of time differs according to how much happens in the intervening period" (Adam, 1990, p.92); if not much has happened then time seems to have condensed (Shaw, 2020).

Furthermore, in our daily lives, working from home can blend the work-life balance, merging and home. This removes our daily landmarks of going to work and relaxing on return, potentially elevating the amount of stress (Garfin, 2020). Without these distinct separations, the day synthesizes into a homogenous block. This can be damaging to a persons' fulfilment, perhaps giving the individual the impression, they have not achieved anything as they have been in one place. "Western industrial life is timed" (Adams, 1990, p.104) we are constantly scheduled in a "strict temporal order" (Adams, 1990,

p.106). When this order, is disrupted, as it was during lockdown, it can leave us perplexed as to our place in the world.

The only timeline we have is the collective 'lockdown episodes' spawned my social media, for example: clapping for the NHS, watching Tiger King (March 2020) and the death of George Floyd spreading awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement. However, people tend to find the duration of these episodes more vague. If you asked: Are there any specific memories surrounding these times, would they recall more than a handful? In the article '*Lockdown is distorting our memories – but there are ways to regain control*' (Shaw, 2020) published in the Guardian during April, Shaw begs the question, what will happen to our memories without personal pinpoints? And what will happen to our collective goals and self-progression without many certain future projections? (Shaw, 2020) Adam and Groves would state that without collective future aims, the progression towards our present future may be impeded (Adams, Groves, 2007).

The alteration of our time perception and memories in reference to our progression, is currently impacted by Collective COVID-trauma.

## **COVID-19 as Collective Trauma**

Collective trauma can refer to events that occur within a smaller group, such as a family, or a larger group like a society or nation. Here, I will be focusing on the societal reactions to Collective Trauma. The definition used of "Collective trauma, refers to an entire group's physiological reaction to a traumatic event" (Watson, *et al.* 2020, p.841) which is a "cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society" (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1). Traumatic events within a community can take many forms; natural disasters, war and genocide often create collective trauma. COVID-19 (and specifically lockdown) is a collective trauma (Watson, *et al.* 2020, p.840).

The reaction to trauma at the individual level is consequential as the societal and community reaction is made up of individual responses (Hirschberger, 2018). Human reaction to trauma varies, "initial reactions to trauma can include exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation" (Centre for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). These reactions are noteworthy as we must consider what reactions we are displaying to the ongoing trauma. Are we consumed with anxiety, anxiously checking the

death tolls in our area? Are we confused? overpowered by the constant stream of information; finding our own news sources, who's narrative we prefer to the mainstream media. Or perhaps we are overwhelmed to the extent that we 'check-out', disassociating from the reality of the pandemic. Numb to the phenomenon of isolation and the repercussions of COVID-19. Adam and Groves (2007) would argue that this 'checking-out' removes us from being 'active agents', separating us from the collective responsibility of our societal progression.

However, disassociation during a period of collective trauma is the most common response (Fisher, 2012). The Plague has examples within its literature of this disassociation, these literatures have recently been re-examined by historians and journalists to make sense of the feeling surrounding our current pandemic. During The Plague, the rich had the means to lock themselves away from the pandemic; this also happened during our own lockdown, with the rich escaping to holiday homes (Neate, 2020). We can see this urge to escape within Plague literature produced by the upper-class (the only literate people). Giovanni Boccaccio wrote love stories "to distract from the atrocities" (Plague Fiction, 2020). In other cases, the traumatic events of the Plague were simply a bleak backdrop for the daily happenings. For instance, Samuel Pepys diary, written in London throughout the Plague, narrated his regular activities. The main mentions of the plague that killed over half the population was about the annoyances he felt at not being able to go to parties. We can see the similarities to our own experience and grievances about the cancellation of football matches and gigs. The Plague was only described in detail after the Pandemic had passed, descriptions narrated from oral memory (Plague Fiction, 2020). The same is true in the documentation of the 'Spanish Flu', aside from figures of the dead, historical archives were created years after the Pandemic had passed (Fisher, 2012). The temporal distance between the Pandemics and the documentation of their events is significant, as Jane Fisher (2012, p.20) states "time allows an essential sense of protection to be achieved; only with this relative security can... comprehensible ways of viewing the catastrophe emerge." We do not have temporal distance from the Covid-trauma, thus there is no capacity to view our situation objectively. Adams (1990, p.26) explains that "experience is transcended by memory", as we are still experiencing the trauma, we cannot comprehend how it will be viewed or remembered.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century (before COVID-19) the idea of plague seemed remote in the western world (Harari, 2016). Science has developed so much that we no longer see death and disease as a fated; but as

something to be conquered (Harari, 2016). There is “an underlying assumption that the future can be shaped according to human will” (Adams, Groves, 2007, p.11). We no longer expect to be killed prematurely by disease, and if it occurs someone is blamed, eg. doctors accused of not spotting the cancer earlier (Harari, 2016). This expectation of life has added to the panic surrounding Covid-19. We are horrified that no matter our scientific progress, we remain vulnerable to mass-scale disease and death. The loss of control of our future contributes to the fear and confusion of Collective Trauma (Hirschberger, 2018).

Additionally, many historical collective traumas have occurred in specific groups or communities. In a Pandemic the trauma is shared worldwide. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected some communities more than others, for example BAME and elderly populations perhaps exacerbating their experience of the collective trauma (Watson, *et al.* 2020). Most of the researched Collective Traumas concern atrocities enacted by one group of people on another, for instance colonizers on Native Americans. Here, there are clear perpetrators and victims (Hirschberger, 2018). The Plague was seen as divine retribution from God to punish sinners. They were deemed the cause and could be blamed accordingly (Tognotti, 2013). Yet, COVID-19 has no perpetrator as we are all victims to the effect of a virus. Nevertheless, some have attributed blame for example, Trump (2020) accusing the Chinese. However, generally there is no “human” perpetrator, for society to attack. This leaves us feeling powerless, contributing to our incapacity to develop our ‘present future’; a concept which Adam’s would say is detrimental to our agency within this future.

“Collective trauma is significant because, unlike individual memory, it can persist across generations and time” (Saul, 2013). For instance, a study by the University of Minnesota concluded 75 percent of the children of holocaust survivors experienced mental health difficulties related to PTSD, anxiety or depression (Danieli, *et al.* 2017). In time, Collective Trauma translates into ‘Collective Memory’ by the addition of narrative to the events. This then defines the society’s views and behaviours (Hirschberger, 2018). Thus, our collective COVID-trauma will become a collective memory, developing traits within our Society which will continue as legacy for the ‘COVID-generation’ of children.

Collective Trauma characteristics a social identity of a community (Hirschberger, 2018). “When an entire society is traumatized, healing becomes more difficult” (verywellmind, 2020). As discussed, collective

trauma is intergenerational. This is because destructive coping mechanisms are normalized and can lead to negative impacts on the community as a whole. However, shared pain can also result in solidarity, helping groups band together and collectively overcome the trauma (Hirschberger, 2018). Collective memories create a guide to future generations on their morals, behaviours and beliefs. Through processing the trauma as a group, communities come together, finding meaning from the trauma and “redefin[ing] who they are and where they are going” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1). Collective memory can affect how traumatized communities interact with other groups, perhaps being wary of change or newcomers to “preserve themselves against outside threats” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.4). An example of this is the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The American collective trauma post-9/11 resulted in the ongoing ‘War on Terror’, increased nationalism, distrust of non-Americans and harsh foreign policy (Hirschberger, 2018). How we remember COVID-19 and the narratives that stem from it will have repercussions for our ideologies. As Adam and Groves (2007) state, we are agents within the curation of our present future.

As discussed, a Pandemic is fundamentally traumatic; the effect of Isolation on this trauma is significant to how we remember our time during Lockdown.

### **The effect of isolation on trauma**

Debord's theory (1961, p.4) of “isolated inhabitants,” our estrangement from one another within the capitalist spectacle, became a physical as well as ideological reality during Lockdown. Similar to the 1663 British Plague (Tongnotti, 2013), the UK has been in varying states of Quarantining and ‘Lockdown’ since March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020. For us, quarantining in our Modern Society appears archaic and authoritarian and does not concur with our standards of autonomy.

Quarantining and isolation is reported to have severely negative physiological effects (Brooks, *et al.* 2020). Fear, loneliness, and depression (often due to a feeling of unfulfillment) are recurring themes in studies done on previous records of quarantined people, for example in the SARS outbreak (Brooks, *et al.* 2020). The psychological impacts of Lockdown on individuals is a major contributor to the Collective Trauma we are experiencing now.

As discussed above, the usual response to societal trauma is coming together, unifying and consoling as a process of healing. This solidarity informs our Collective Memories, with community and support

networks forming essential ways to cope with trauma (Hirschberger, 2018). With social distancing isolating us, accessing the support networks can be more difficult. "A crisis of loneliness is impending that may be one of the most fraught social consequences of Covid-19" (Jones, 2020) The loss of human contact may severely impact our societies future.

Furthermore, quarantining within our homes contributes to lack of temporal landmarks (Shaw, 2020). Isolation without new activities to inspire means a lack of memories, leading to a loss of fulfilment because we cannot separate distinctive moments. As we define ourselves by our memories and projected future (Heidegger, 2019), this can lead to a distorted sense of self together with a loss of self-identity. On a personal level the stripping of identity is worrying, however when it is magnified to a societal level the result is a population wide identity crisis. The stripping of our societal identity has impacts on our future as it could accommodate the creation of new identities, goals and values (Adams, Groves, 2007).

In several viral tweets (2020) over the summer it was declared that "We are all Edward Hopper paintings now" (The Guardian, 2020). Hopper is not a contemporary painter, as noted previously, society is examining the past to make sense of the present. The themes of alienation, isolation and loneliness in his paintings are hauntingly relatable to lockdown. Isolated in our homes, bored and unfulfilled, staring into empty cityscapes; just like the woman depicted in Hoppers (1952) 'Morning Sun' (The Guardian, 2020). You can also read the woman's stance as one of resigned endurance, waiting for life as she knew it to resume. In light of our situation, I choose to view the window, as a screen; we now gaze into screens to give us the information and connection we crave when facing our individual and collective COVID-trauma.



Hopper, E. (1952) Morning Sun. [Oil on Canvas]. At: Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art's Collection.

## Lockdown and Technology

During past pandemics, there were fewer ways to document and archive events. Where they exist, records show that during the plague, communities tried to document the numbers of dead eg. in church records (Plague Literature, 2020), comparable to our 'daily death count' on the NHS website, but they had few documentations of the experiences. Similarly, the Spanish flu had little accessible worldwide documentation of contemporaneous events (except for photography) (Fisher, 2012). Thus, as discussed above, most records in the previous cases of pandemics were made in retrospect, resulting in a "cultural amnesia".

In comparison, our perception of COVID-19 and lockdown is well documented by technology; "unlike the pandemic of 1918 we have tremendous access to information almost immediately" (Watson, *et al.* 2020, p.840). Technology has simultaneously been the saviour and a propagator of trauma within this Pandemic. It has allowed health organizations to collaborate worldwide, work to continue from home and enabled social interaction to continue during lockdown (Garvin, 2020).

Instant recording of information and stories is important for current archivists. We will collectively remember this time because of the instant archives generated by technology. Additionally, on a personal and community scale; social media has helped to document different landmarks and events within lockdown. The top hashtags on Twitter (2020) defining different 'lockdown eras': #toiletpaper, #tigerking, #GeorgeFloyd. Social media creates 'timelines', mimicking the construction of our temporal memories; ordering our photos and posts into linear sequences of events. Thus, helping us pinpoint the passage of time (Shaw, 2016). However, there has been some debate in how much these things benefit our real memories versus propagating false memories (Shaw, 2016). If memory is outsourced to technology, will we start losing the skills to remember and create our own narrative, but that is not to be hypothesized on here.

The same technology that allowed the beneficial instant documentation also generates instant news updates. Alongside COVID-19 the World Health Organization has declared the "access to a wealth of information, perhaps false information, as an epidemic itself" (Watson, *et al.* 2020, p.840, citing the World Health Organisation). Unbridled access to information allows false information and harmful community narratives to breed; this contributes to our collective memories. The continuous streams of social media and news outlets talking about COVID-19; discussing traumatic events and the fall out surrounding the pandemic can propagate fear and anxiety, causing indirect Collective Trauma. "Increased

media expositor to collective trauma including COVID-19 ... has been associated with heightened physiological distress and impaired functioning over time” (Chao *et al.* 2020 p.2). The physiological effects of the media expositor to trauma is significant as they impact our collective experience and memory.

Technology, in particular the development of communication technology has altered how we perceive ourselves and the world (Garvin, 2020). We are living in a paradox where, the same technology that is helping us cope with the responses to Collective Trauma, simultaneously aggravates the cause of trauma. To combat this, we must use technology wisely “mak[ing] mindful and intentional choices about how to leverage technology to improve our lives” (Garvin, 2020, p.557). Technologies can create and store memories, they also contribute to the scrolling sense of time we remember from lockdown. As Shaw comments without disparity in how we use technology, we may experience ‘lockdown-memory-loss’ (Shaw, 2020).

As we have seen with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, fuelled by the spreading of information during lockdown (Burchanan, *et. al.*, 2020), these new technologies are incredibly useful for healing and creating social change. However, obsessive monitoring of traumatic news will only increase the effects of personal, and Collective Trauma (Garvin, 2020); subsequently impacting our collective narrative and the future trajectory (Adams, Groves, 2007).

To discuss how we are collectively reacting to the COVID-19 lockdown we must look at the media responses. These responses dictate the reactions and beliefs of the public.

### **The Importance of Media Narrative**

In our postmodern, consumer-capitalist society, the predominant aim of many of our news sources is to sell itself. As Katherine Viner states in the Guardian (2016), there is “a fundamental change in the values of journalism – a consumerist shift.” With a free-press, the sources are constantly vying for our attention. Each company must produce the most dramatic stories to capture public attention. Even the BBC, which is supposedly politically and commercially independent, must consider viewing figures to stay relevant. With many information sources, stories have got more dramatic as the years go on, proliferating ‘The Spectacle’ and the loss of realism (Debord, 1994). We are overwhelmed daily by the competitive postmodern craving for narrative (Debord, 1994), leading to over-dramatized COVID-stories, each vying

for attention. Furthermore, because there was a drought of events to report on during lockdown, the media was engulfed by COVID.

We remember things based on narrative, the most dramatic articles are more memorable and get more recognition through 'likes' or 'shares. These stories do not need to be truthful, balanced, or logical to create narrative and thus shape our views. People then internalize these narratives, accepting them as true. Shaw expands on this, explaining how we try to fill gaps in our memory with outside information; "Our memories are likely already being contaminated by the false information that circulates online" (Shaw, 2020). Therefore, the ideas of truth and fact has become "socially constructed as well as socially constructing" (Adam, 1990, p.7). The views and narrative propagated by the media will impact our collective memory of this time.

To elaborate, the news we were consuming is extremely important to consider when discussing our collective perspectives, memories and narratives around the topic. Due to the lack of temporal landmarks, and thus the void within our own memories, we are susceptible to external direction of the media (Shaw, 2020). We remember and internalize the narratives we consume to replace our personal narrative (Shaw, 2020). If we allow detrimental narration to engulf our personal accounts; we continue to allow the 'Spectacle' to shape our collective memory, thus the Collective-COVID-narrative (Debord, 1994). If we do not want a continuation of the 'isolated inhabitants' of consumer-capitalism in which our society has resided, we must sculpt our own narratives (Adams, Groves, 2007; Debord 1994).

As mentioned in the previous section, seeing, or hearing about a Collective trauma through the media is indirect exposure to trauma (Garvin, 2020). Since February 2020 the death toll, images of COVID-19 patients and stories of overworked nurses, has taken over our screens. These stories are inherently traumatic. They give the continuous impression that Corona is inescapable thus promoting the narrative and re-traumatizing society (Watson, *et al.* 2020). This differs greatly to past Pandemics; during the Spanish Flu our media was heavily influenced by government propaganda because of the First World War patriotism (Fisher, 2012). As it coincided with the aftermath of the First World War, there was already an air of fear and uncertainty within society. Promoting stress and fear was discouraged, preferring a resilient, firm outlook over dramatization of the situation. In this way the collective trauma created by

the Pandemic was managed. This allowed society to recover from and 'forget' the Spanish Flu, whereas we are stuck, constantly being exposed to the trauma (Fisher, 2012).

The Spanish flu was overshadowed by war (Fisher, J. E. 2012) whereas COVID-19 is being described as one. As Matt Hancock (2020) stated, "We are in a war against an invisible killer and we have to do everything we can to stop it." These metaphors create a plot that society remembers: the enemy is the virus, the warriors are the healthcare professionals, the home front are the people isolating and the deserters are the villains breaking social distancing rules (Musu, 2020). These metaphors appeal to a sense of comradeship and duty within a society but can also be dangerous. Politicians call for obedience rather than awareness, governments become more authoritarian, policing the freedoms of its people (Musu 2020). Instead of insisting solidarity it may hark to nationalistic patriotism; protecting our own (Musu 2020). This attitude may have impacts to future legislations and generations (Refer back to 9/11 example) (Hirschberger, 2018).

As discussed previously, we are uncomfortable in our COVID-trauma without a collective enemy (Hirschberger, 2018). The media and governments have endeavoured to provide us with some for instance; Trump (2020) blaming China, Hancock blaming the young (Tolhurst, 2020). We are described as being "at war" with COVID-19 yet the population have no control or autonomy, and no means to fight it. This feeling of alienation has repercussions for our agency within our 'present future' (Adams, Groves, 2007).

As mentioned above, the news we consume is extremely important to consider when discussing our collective perspectives, memories, and narratives around the topic. Due to the lack of temporal landmarks, and thus the void within our own memories, we are susceptible to external direction of the media (Shaw, 2020). We remember and internalize the narratives we consume to replace our personal narrative. If we allow detrimental narration to engulf our personal accounts; we continue to allow the 'Spectacle' to shape our collective memory, thus the Collective COVID-narrative (Debord, 1994). If we do not want a continuation of the 'isolated inhabitants' of consumer-capitalism, we must sculpt our own narratives (Debord, 1994). "Our contemporary situation entails that we understand ourselves not as objective observers... [but as] responsible for the future in the making" (Adams, Groves, 2007, p.8). In light of our COVID-trauma this means that to progress we must recognise 'the spectacle' and actively address our narratives that shape the present future (Adams, Groves, 2007; Debord 1994).

## COVID-19 as a catalyst for Conscious Alterations: Forget New Normal

The majority of this article is pessimistic about the impact of the virus, but there is a growing point of view highlighting that this could be a pivotal moment for us to reassess connection and our societal values, allowing us to finally combat our economic and political ailment.

The forced isolation and confinement we experienced broke the cycle of 'everyday life' for many people, just as Debord (1961) stated was a necessity for societal change. In agreement, Adams (1990, p. 106) states "The extreme fluctuations that characterise the process of life would pose a severe threat to the time structure of bureaucracy". We were removed from 'everyday life' and thus had time to evaluate it. As Debord theorized in 'Perspectives for Conscious Changes in Everyday Life' (1961), when time is not controlled by the regiments of work, we are free to develop skills and hobbies. During lockdown, there was reported a huge increase in the amount of art produced and new skills learned (Marchall, 2020). Perhaps this has given rise to people reconsidering the meaning of their own life and the foundations of our society. It can be theorized the BLM movement gained momentum because people had the time to educate themselves; the lack of any diversions combined with the ability to spread information online (Buchanan *et. al.* 2020).

There is precedent to believe change may be coming. As humans we inherently organize our future, when these futures are 'emptied' there leaves an 'Open future' "subject to human shaping and transformation" (Adams, Groves, 2007, p.56). As can be seen in history, with the 'post-Black Death' peasants revolution: The plague killed half the population (Plague Fiction, 2020) creating a socioeconomic collapse. This meant peasants, who provided the labour, had more power. Subsequently the peasants demanded sovereignty over their movement and property (Tognotti, E.). When a future filled with the expectations of the rulers and 'organizers' is shifted, and uncertain futures prevail, these futures can be moulded by the society (Adams, Groves, 2007). Only time will tell whether history will repeat.

But if we are to make the gains that could be possible we will need to be ambitious and cast aside the idea of 'new normal'. The phrase 'new normal' has been prevalent in the news since the start of Lockdown. The expression is detrimental to the type of fundamental progression that could be possible in a post-COVID world. The idiom 'new normal' is a pacifier, inciting an ideal pre-COVID 'normal', with just some minor adjustments, to which we are inspired to return. Encouraging the old, traditional and stagnated states of being instead of creating new ways of living.

By accepting the phrase “new normal” we accept the idea that we want to return to the pre-COVID way of living where, as a society we were “infected with the virus of everyday life” (Debord,1961, p.2). In this pre-COVID ‘normal’ we were stuck in a consumer-capitalist cycle of working so just we can live and acquire commodities, living an existence of little fulfilment, as we have not explored our full potential as beings outside of the ‘rat race’ of The Spectacle . Lockdown has allowed mental (if not physical) space to evaluate and reconsider the ‘normal’ society we lived in. As Debord (1961, p.3) said, “to fail to criticize everyday life today means accepting the prolongation of the present thoroughly rotten forms of culture and politics.” ‘New normal’ does a disservice to the imagination and ambition of society, why return to what we had before when we can aim to curate something so much better.

In a Post-COVID world much is going to be different, in quantitative economic terms of course, but also socially. People may be more aware about how they move in public spaces and how they interact with friends and relatives. This period of economic and social upheaval is an opportunity to redefine our society and shake up the stagnated ideals and systems that were in place in the ‘normal’ pre-COVID world.

To change the status quo of everyday life we “will have to renounce everything that Transends Everyday life” (Debord, 1961, p.5). we will never return to the full ‘normal’ of pre corona times, we must abandon the idea of ‘new normal’ and create an environment apart from ‘normal’ . In this way we can create a society that embodies the feelings of the communities within it, a society sustainable in a political and environmental sense. We do not want to return to the “reinforcement of modern slavery” (Debord, 1961, p.5).

Shaw reassures that “by recognising what influences your perception of time, you can regain some control over how you will remember this period of your life” (Shaw, 2020). Regaining our control over our memories will ensure the Collective narrative is one the society dictates. As Adam and Groves (2007, p.160) state we have a “collective capacity for creating long-term latent futures;” so during this time of uncertainty, with the possibility of societal change, we must focus on the “constitutive value of what matters to us, and therefore its embedded futures.” Adam and Groves (2007) encourage us to consider ourselves, in relation to the ‘future presents’ as artisans rather than architects, mindfully sculpting our future according to our ideal morals and ethics. Perhaps we will move toward a ‘green-deal’ inspired by the positive environmental shifts during lockdown, or perhaps we will be influenced by the war metaphors and move towards a nationalistic approach to border control. Whichever direction our society

advances will be dictated by our perception of time and memory, and thus the collective narrative that will be the legacy of Lockdown.

## Conclusion

To conclude an ongoing situation which is still in flux is premature, we cannot know what the end-game of our current Pandemic might be. I have come to an interim conclusion, a stance if you will, within my research, however I am not able to be fully conclusive as the Pandemic is ongoing. Reflecting on the present, without critical distance, is challenging but simultaneously grounding. The researching and writing of this article has created a personal memory; this has aided me to evaluate how my own perception of time and memories are influenced and how that affects our cultural narrative. This article has aimed to be analytical of an ongoing crisis without disavowing its magnitude.

My starting point was Shaw's insights on time perception and memory during COVID-19. I then explored past Pandemics and Collective Traumas to make sense and reflect on the present, this investigation granted me the perspective and distance needed to analyse our ongoing COVID-trauma. I was able to consider the similarities and differences of past Pandemics, concluding that technological advances have set us apart from the historical examples. These technologies have produced both positive and negative implications on our experience of time, memory and collective trauma. They have allowed communication which helps solidify memories and provide comfort in a traumatic time, yet simultaneously provoking fear, harmful narratives and misinformation. Throughout the course of my research, I have discovered the only decisive conclusion that can be made on the temporal impact of lockdown is that the time perceptions, memories and actions generated during the course of lockdown and this pandemic will affect the ethics and lives of future generations.

As this is an ongoing crisis, the repercussions of which will be felt for generations to come, the research is inherently open-ended. There is much left to be explored and analysed with the benefits of critical distance.

It is my hope that coming through the COVID-trauma society will come back stronger. As a society we must soon democratically decide what the narrative of our current situation is, with the understanding that, whatever narrative prevails will go on to fill our currently 'empty' future. This will have lasting impacts on future generations and the shape of our world to come.

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