

The third great confinement

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As Iâ??m considering this for part of a future publication, I thought I should write the following in the past tense. I wonder if it will stand the test of time.

> I wrote most of this during the third great confinement, the global shutdown during the pandemic of 2020. Cities had to marshal their resources to defend citizens against an invisible combatant. Confined to our dwellings and neighbourhoods we learned to value what we missed: a stroll down the street, chance encounters with friends and acquaintances, a handshake, a hug. We learned to value heating, refrigeration, plumbing and rubbish collection, not to mention the delivery of food and medicines, lest any of this stopped suddenly.
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> Digital infrastructures assumed even greater importance to us. We worked from home, ordered groceries, binged on streamed media, and we relied on video transmission for precious moments of face-to-face communication. We enjoyed and envied the surge in family-sourced homemade music video talent and DIY survival tips.
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> At the same time, the forced confinement required citizens to learn afresh how to manage relationships between work and home, the public and the private, the crowd and the family, the mobile and the sedentary, companionship and aloneness, the secure and the unsafe.
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> We remembered that a decline in the rate at which something increases is a good thing. At the time of the pandemic, the University of Washingtonâ??s Institute for Health Metric and Evaluation (IHME) generated mesmerizing country-by-country graphs of deaths per day, rising and falling according to model projections, with the projections showing as a smooth bell-shaped curve. It seemed the most we could hope for was that the curve showing the daily number of cases would flatten to spread the distress over a longer period so that the NHS could cope. The Worldometer site provided further country-by-country tabulations as if Olympic medal tallies.
>
> We remembered how viruses function. By some accounts they are nanoscale machines that can only reproduce and multiply when they latch onto a living cell and inject their own RNA. There they would hijack the cellâ??s metabolism and reproduction. At the time of the pandemic, the

research chemist Laura Tripaldi wrote in a paper published in the radical philosophical forum urbanomic.com:

> â??the virus is also a model of how matter and information are in close and interdependent contact; an idea that, in the new digital age, seems less and less alien to usâ?• [2].

Biology, information and code coalesce into viral memes in social media and as computer viruses that infect and hijack data flows.

Who could forget that! For the view of an angry contrarian see an article in the Independent.



Notes

- The First Great Confinement has been variously identified, most notably by Michel Foucault as the period in European history when institutions such as prisons and hospitals offered the solution to the problems of crime, sickness and poor mental health. Legal historians such as Laureen Snider identify this period with the means of managing and subjugating a growing and increasingly unruly labour class during the industrial revolution. She identified the Second Great Confinement as a period of wage uncertainty, and policing policies:

  â??Seeing criminalization as the solution to problems of social disorder represents a turning away from empathy, a reversion to the attitudes and practices of an earlier timeâ?• [43].

- Does the current lockdown auger a â??third great confinementâ?•? Orders to stay at home assume an idealised bourgeois understanding of home as comfortable and safe. As if we didnâ??t already know this, the lockdown has revealed the plight of people who canâ??t work at home, people without a home, those unable to earn enough to pay the rent, those who already feel isolated, and those trapped in abusive domestic relationships. Curfews are alien to many

urban societies. Now people will be ready to accept them as solution to other urban challenges.
- Iâ??m indebted to Asad Khan (The Entropy Project) for directing me to the Urbanomic podcast channel PlaguePod Live.

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Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. Covi-19
2. home
3. meme
4. pandemic

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