

## Slowdown and the future of living

"Just as nature is slowly reclaiming the streets and the skies outside the window, suggesting what our environment could be, the dreamlike psychological state of forced slowdown may be a loose sketch of what new forms of a community could be, what our economy could be, of other currents running deep." ([Dan Hill, From Lockdown to Slowdown, April 2020](#))

How is the Covid-19 crisis changing our perspective on our ways of living? Is it enabling us to recreate our future living and in what ways?

We are delighted to be joined by [Dan Hill](#), Head of Strategic Design at Vinnova, [Charlie Leadbeater](#), Author and public innovation thinker, and [Cassie Robinson](#), Senior Head, TNL Community Fund & co-founder of the Point People.

### ● [Watch the recording of this call](#)

If this link breaks, please email [james@states-of-change.org](mailto:james@states-of-change.org)

## This is collaborative. How you can help.

- Add questions you think we should be asking.
- Add your comments/thoughts on the notes.
- Add examples! Seen something interesting/relevant?
- Connect with each other. Follow the [attendee twitter list](#).
- Don't want to miss the calls? [Join our mailing list](#) or [follow us on twitter](#) for updates.

## Notes from our other sessions:

1. [How not to waste a crisis](#) with Geoff Mulgan, Gabriella Gomez Mont and Marco Steinberg.
2. [Time for a new social contract?](#) Panthea Lee, Penny Hagen, Angie Tangaere and Louise Pulford.
3. [Leadership in a time of crisis](#) with Andrea Siodmock, Christian Bason and Sam Hannah-Rankin.
4. [Experimenting in a time of crisis](#) with Hefen Wong, Giulio Quaggiotto and Mikko Annala.
5. [Playing with the future](#) with Noah Raford and Anab Jain.

## How has the pandemic changed how you think about the way we might live?

Please add in your thoughts here too...

A quick and coordinated response to Covid demonstrates that we could do the same for climate change
Change is more possible than I realised
Changing the way we use, perceive, use and design our public spaces and streets
COLIVE!
consume less, new challenge: being a radical vegetarian
Faster adoption of active travel for commuting?
focus on important things, we need some services more than others, less traffic relieves
Gave me a sense of urgency to act in reducing inequalities in my country.
has confirmed the need for change. Less consuming/growth/busy-ness - valuing those who contribute over those who extract
How to keep the brakes on?
<a href="https://www.publicservicetransformation.org/2020/04/the-days-after-a-learning-community-to-build-back-better/">https://www.publicservicetransformation.org/2020/04/the-days-after-a-learning-community-to-build-back-better/</a>
Hyperlocal woven together in networks to enable scale for things like food, micro grids, care
I always knew we had to change but now I actually think it is possible to make that happen.
I might more like to go outside to have some fresh air, meet people, enjoy sun light rather than keep staying at home being busy
I no longer want to live in a big city
I think we may learn to value what we have a little more than we did and realise we may not need as much as we thought we did
It feels there is more at stake, more jeopardy, than ever.
It has broadened the space of possibility - I see it as regressive and progressive visions of the future battling it out.
It has given me faith that we can in fact change our behaviours fast and hope that we can learn from this
it is possible to slow down and still live a full life
It opens a window for vastly different versions of our household configurations, education of children, and building cities.

It's reaffirming my commitment to global solidarity, e.g. making microloans through Zidisha.
Less travel with a new appreciation for local and those in the profession of caring.
More extremes in our lifestyles, values
More people will work remotely, but many more will loose their face to face jobs in the economic crisis. Lots of work to be done
More sustainable lifes
More value to relationships and experiences that build them, more remote work allowing more time for hobbies
Opportunity to reclaim public space, reduce carbon-based transport, ramp up community-led initiatives
opportunity to slow down, consume less and think about retooling the workforce for more sustainable and equitable lifestyles
Pandemic has made us more vulnerable and question what how we can contribute to society
Patient
Reconnected streets
Reinforced the need for simplicity.
resist the online life even more!
Simultaneously more optimistic that progressive things can be achieved and pessimistic that disaster capitalism might will out.
Slowing down. Consolidating not-for-profits, taking a systems approach. Work less hrs, earn+ to basics, the great re-training.
that we need a radical politics of care and transparency
The life we must live - better for all, no inequality, better aware of our nature and natural environment
The world has become smaller and bigger at the same time.. think global, act local has become a way of life
The world is smaller. This has implications for post-carbon societies and the far right.
There won't be as many social, more control between peers and top down
Thinking we'll be slower, more connected and compassionate moving forward.
To consider how we might work with nature, rather than against it, to prosper as a society.
We have a lot of choices to make and not a lot of time in which to make them.
We have realised how much travel was unnecessary, how much work can be done remotely, AND the importance of physical presence

where to live in the uk and how to work

With much kindness , by strengthening connections, and being intentionally inclusive

yes - self-resilience, new cultures of care, revisiting networked systems

Yes. Travelling for work!

## WiP notes:

### Slowing down as a moment to take stock of our values, and maybe rethink where we go from here?

"The first lesson the coronavirus has taught us is also the most astounding: we have actually proven that it is possible, in a few weeks, to put an economic system on hold everywhere in the world and at the same time, a system that we were told it was impossible to slow down or redirect."

- Bruno Latour

#### Dan Hill:

Thanks for having me, I'm still learning to talk about this in public, so let's experiment together. Ironically when thinking about slowdown papers, I'm actually going to go quite fast. You can [find all the slowdown papers online](#).

*"We are taking 21st century challenges, evaluating them with 20th century ideas, and responding with 19th century tool."*

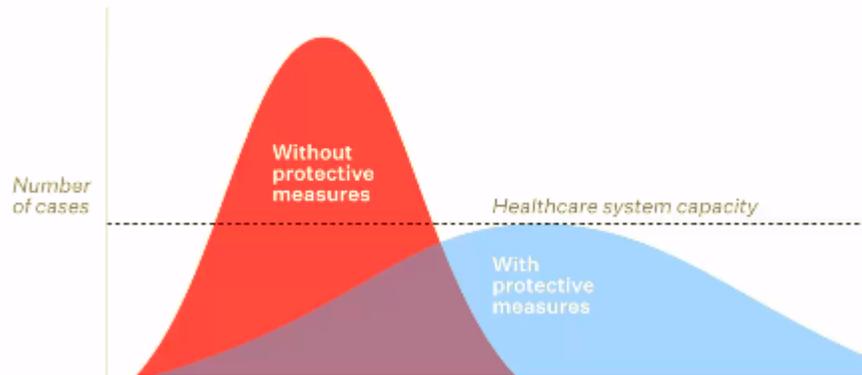
- Madeleine Albright, 2013

When this crisis started happening, I'm part of a whatsapp group, we've been observing this from early Jan. I was struck by people wearing masks, I'd been writing already about people wearing masks, from the bushfires in Australia, the apocalyptic moment at the start of the year.



Yet the world, didn't really pay attention to this. I thought we really need to observe this. **We need to write it into memory.** I did this in 2011 in the floods in Brisbane, the city shutdown for a few days. I was writing by candlelight when we ran out of power. I was trying to understand what was going on in real time. After about 2 weeks, people had kind of forgotten, the city went back to 'normal'. We're still building houses

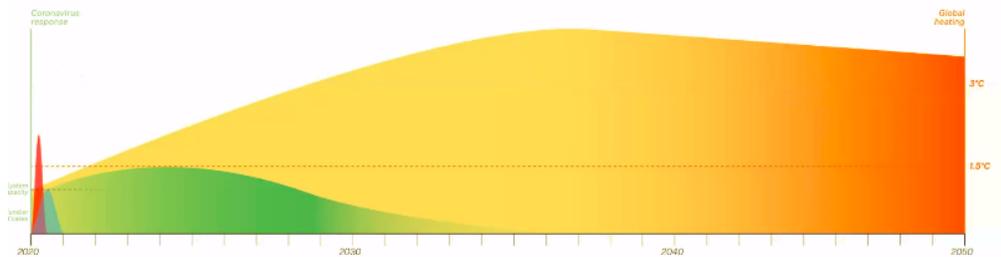
by the river. In the same way, we need to be observing, paying attention.



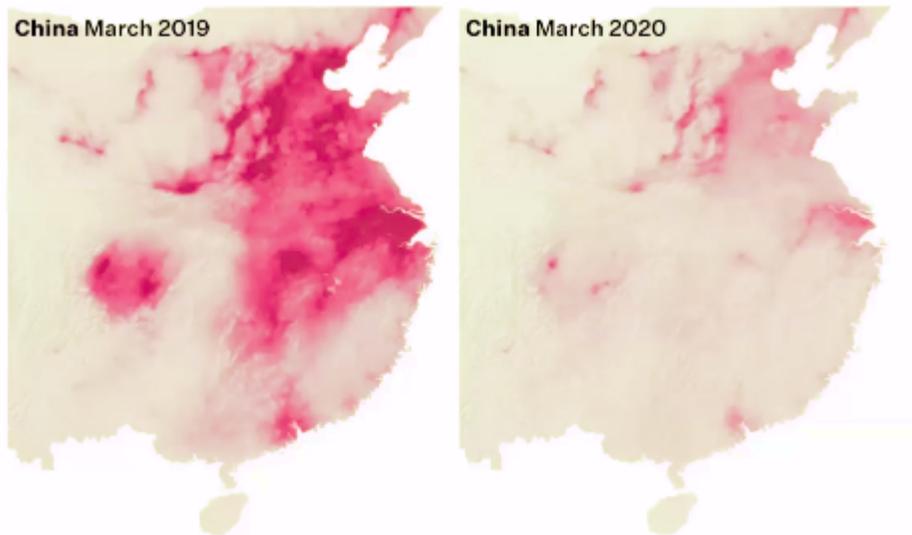
When Covid began, we all became very familiar with curves. The image that became clear was these curves happening. Drawing a virus is hard! It depicts collective action, and how that affects things. In the same way we're trying to depict climate change, this image has been really effective. We know that climate crisis is the same pattern of development - deforestation, biodiversity loss, urban sprawl, global trade, dirty transport - as zoonotic diseases. The response could be the same as well.



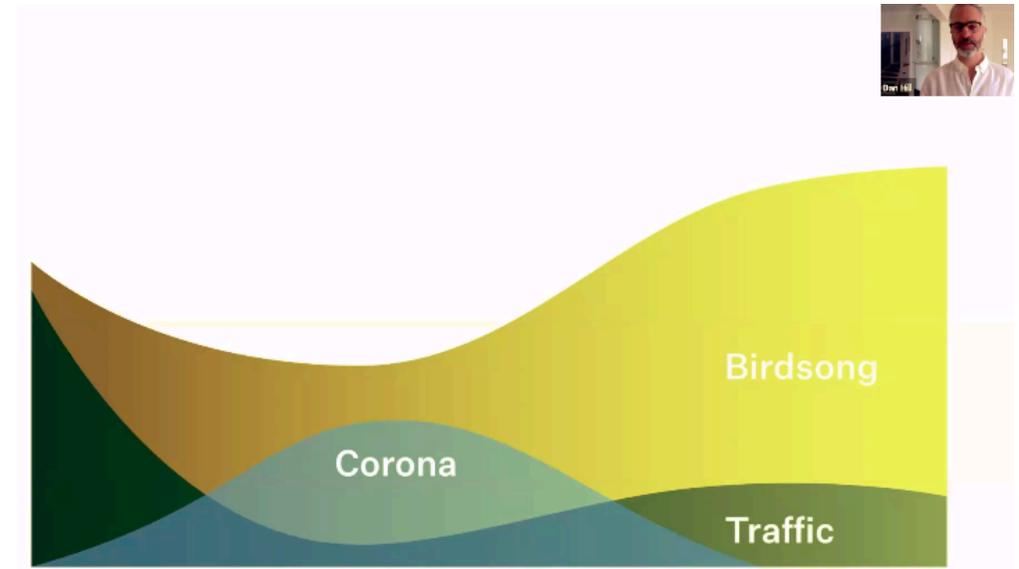
Is there a way to think about climate and covid in the same way? I drew this about a month ago, and already it feels like that window has closed a bit. It feels like there was an opportunity to talk about covid in the same way as climate crisis. But it feels like that is fading.



Can we look at what we're doing with covid and then address climate in the same way. Act quickly to flatten the curve? Keep below the 1.5 degree line?

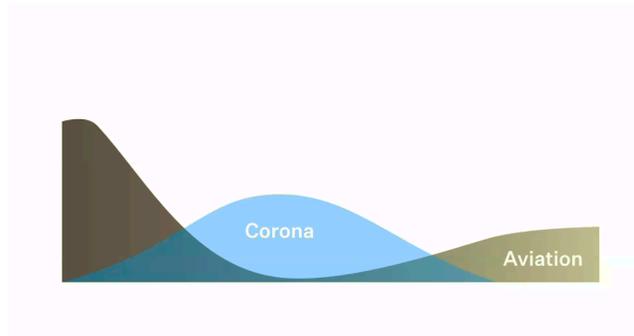


There was restoration happening, we saw the drop of air pollution almost immediately to some extent. Biodiversity started reclaiming spaces almost immediately.



Again, these graphs, the bump of corona and the action that it causes - we see birdsong go up when traffic goes down. Can we understand what is happening with covid and then make a decision. Cars - we didn't really make a decision about it, it kind of happened on mass, we didn't have a vote or anything, the city just filled up.

Now there's a choice. You see cities like Paris and Milan use tactical urbanism to minimise cars. There's a mode shift on the LHS then all dropping around Corona, what should we go back to? Retrofitting streets, it enables us to accelerate change.



**Aviation** - policy makers have never really made a decision about it. It essentially was managed through price mechanism. Now, there's a decision. Should we be bailing them out? What type of question can we ask about that? Do we want as much before as we had before? We didn't decide to lower demand it was a side effect of closed borders and travel restrictions.



**Food** - we import a lot of our food. There's global supply changes that are fragile as we're seeing. What percentage should be home grown and what should be imported. Dangerous convo there about nationalism though. But you also don't want to displace your carbon by showing exportation only. 'Shadow places' where often western countries export our problem to another country.

There are goods and services that must be placed **outside the laws of the market**. To delegate our food, our protection, our ability to care, our living environment, basically to others, is **madness**. What this pandemic is already revealing is that free health care and our welfare state are not costs or charges, but precious goods, essential assets when fate strikes.

— President Macron, 12 March 2020.

You can't have imagined Macron saying something like this even 6 months ago.



Universal basic infrastructures - this wouldn't have been talked about years ago. Infrastructure over income - there's a bedrock of foundations as opposed to income which implies consumption. What do we want to accept as a foundational

The way that we live - post traumatic urbanism. How they replicate structures to create redundancies on purpose. You have a hairdresser

on every block, because you can't rely on being about to get there. It's not efficient, but cities have never been efficient.

*Mike Riddell*

*How's about an information infrastructure? Or a knowledge ('new' knowledge)?*



Architectures emerge too - they respond to crisis and have in the past. There's lots here about technology - and indigenous technologies. River outside of Calcutta, it's a technology, naturally made wetland systems - it's designed by people, using natural processes - which removes waste and provides many jobs. 700,000 million tonnes of sewage processed. Serves many purposes.

Then on the right there's a Gates foundation project building for sanitation. millions of dollars of R&D (not a bad thing) but only 14 tonnes of sewage a day. It only does one thing, and does less sanitation removal. There's a choice about how you think about tech.



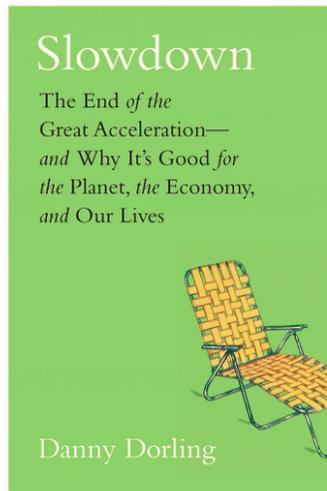
Back to the bushfires, they did one good thing - removed a top-soil layer and revealed a 600 year old eel farm - it started to rain, and then the farm started working again, a 6000 year old operating system comes back to life. With the rains it booted up again.

*From Trish Hansen to Everyone: (09:26 am)*

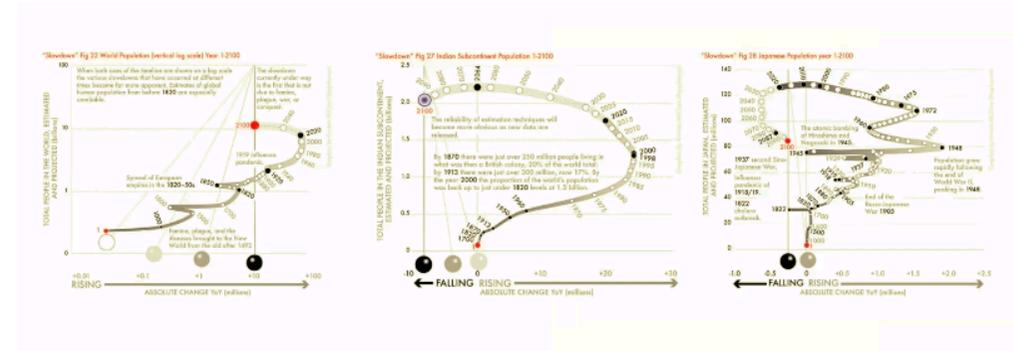
*A beautiful body of work. [Julia Watson. Lo—TEK, Design by Radical Indigenism](#)*

*From Jethro Sercombe to Everyone: (09:27 am)*

*Bruce Pascoe- Dark Emu details some of these Aboriginal technologies*



Danny Dorling - 2020 Slowdown - the end of this period of great acceleration. He argues using lots of data, we are dee-accelerating across all our societies. Lots of resources on his website - everything is flowing to a position of stasis - GDP / population / productivity / improvement - all the things we're straining to achieve, it can't go up anymore. All these diagrams, the curve and spiral back on itself is something coming to a plateau. This undercuts everything we've been led to believe about permanent growth.



I took this idea for a walk.

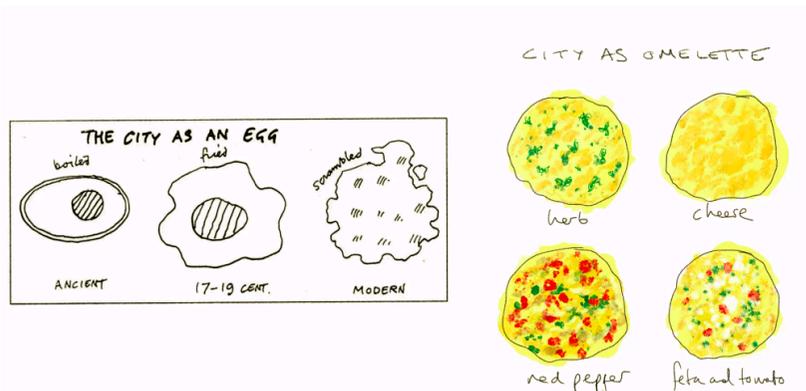
*“Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context - a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan” - Eiel Saarinen*



Let's look at our living spaces. How is it changing? Our spaces haven't been set up to 'work from home'. There have been some examples of this, studio, garden and living room. Actually places where you'd

want to live and work in the one spot. You see the city centre drop out.

The week before the lockdown, we see the commute into London already dropping. We know that research says commuting is incredibly disliked. There are garden cities, places where you'd want to live but then they cut it up, put a HWY down the middle. We have the opportunity to think about this differently.



This is

Cedric Price's model, going from the walled city on the left with the yolk of the castle on the middle, to the fried egg of the 17-19th century and you end up with a scrambled egg for the modern city. Maybe we go for the city as an omelette, with flavour evenly spread across a city?

These curves show how we think differently about building, infrastructures and cities. We can have decentralised cities - distribute playgrounds unlike the central park idea.

If you recognise what crowds are what cities are - if you move from 3 markets in a city (eg) then distribute it to multiple markets it's much more equitable and inclusive. Rotterdam (see below) Large markets on the left (good if you are close vs many spread evenly over a city, close and accessible to everyone).



It extends outside of cities too - there's other ways of thinking once you unlock place based thinking. Build resilience and local supply chains in place. You don't need to sell up and go to London (eg).

It doesn't mean you all move to the city, or all move to the countryside - it's about balancing between the systems. Making it less top heavy. People don't often want to move they just have to find what they are looking for.

Tokyo is a perfect example of slowdown city. Based on lots of different pockets. More equitable. It's not Just In time and efficiency. Work towards different type of growth. Tokyo is always growing, but in the same plot. Slowdown doesn't mean everything stops. It's just means

we can continually adapt and re-organising on the same plot. It's the opposite of constant growth.

Slowdown gives us time to worry more about one another and less about what we will ourselves receive in future. Slowdown means more time to question all that our grandparents never had time to question, because they were dealing with so much that was new. Slowdown means goods lasting longer; it means less waste. It means that many of the things that we currently think of as great social and environmental problems will not be problematic in future.

Danny Dorling, 'Slowdown' (2020)

These questions? Corona threw them all on the table. We now have choices to make.



**Charlie Leadbeater:**

My first question is - will it be profound? What is it? **It will come in waves**, which will affect people and places quite differently.

We're already seeing in the UK the difference in place, there'll be waves in Autumn when the second wave comes and the economy won't sustain the bailout. Anywhere you are, the experience is so different. This is one of the big things of the whole experience - what we make of it.

New structure of feeling. There's a structure of feeling to different eras - why this is going to profound, there is a structure of feeling to this. It's physical. There's a bodily feeling to this, of shaking, possibility, uncertainty all at the same time. The *feeling* has broken through into politics. To hear Boris Johnson talk about the NHS being powered by love, that's new - now we're hearing this in politics. "Feelings of love, compassion and care have come into politics"

The Coronavirus and Our Future (and the structure of feeling).

New sense of value - we're all taking a holiday from 'exchange value'. That won't go away, the questions about who we value or what we value won't go away.

New experiences of time, space and relationship.

Carlo Rovelli - the order of time. The slow down thing, which is about space and movement, there is a time movement too. This idea of time being linear, is being deconstructed. It moves at different speeds, in different ways.

We're leading to new ideas and ideologies.



Renee Decartes. Cosmopolis. A structure of ideas helps to create a structure of experience.

You can't really understand Decartes unless you understand the 30 year war. The experience of everyone killing everyone and not trusting everyone. The idea that I think therefore I am, came from the structure of certainty in the self in that environment.

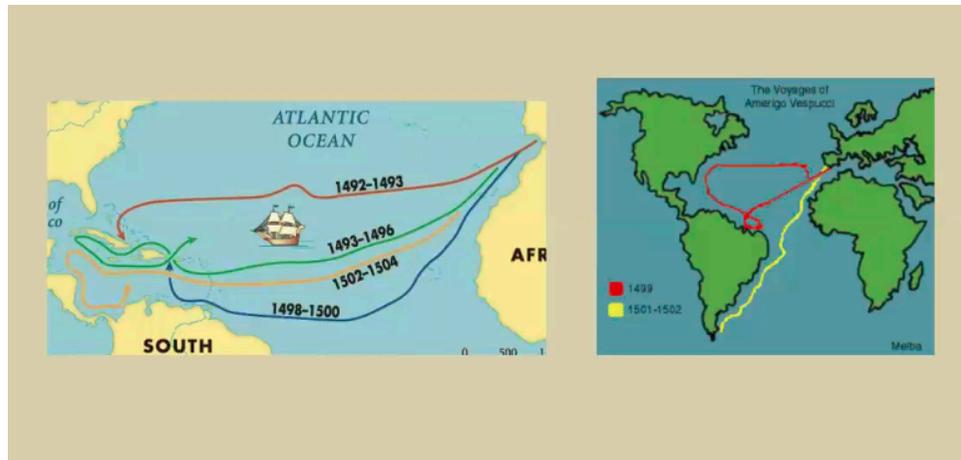
Do we need new maps or just a new way to find our way on the old map?

This is going to be one of the big debates. Many people say we have the map already, others say we need a new way of doing altogether.

*From Rowan Conway to Everyone: (09:45 am)*

*It is important to dwell for a moment - without criticism - on why it is all men (apart from Madeleine Albright) who are visible in the thinking. While I LOVE Carlo Rovelli - his writings illustrate why it is only dead white men make us understand ourselves. Important to ask where the womens' voices are [Where are women's voices in the coronavirus crisis?](#)*

Columbus - told to find a new route to the Indies. Sets off in a series of routes back and forth in straight lines. Whereas the Viesbutis journey it's not a new route, it's a new map. We need a new map of possibility? The line on the left are routes back to normal, the lines on the right are a look to a new possible?



What might be the new map?

- [The Return to Hyper Normality](#) - we're about to embark on a campaign to return to the new normal. We'll be encouraged to go back to normal. But there's a realisation that there was

actually nothing normal about the normal. This idea that normality has to be hyper, and carefully constructed, it always have to be. A restaurateur [reflecting on closing a restaurant](#), when actually in hindsight, she realises restaurants were terrible, shit money, customers were awful, brunch was a crap invention. She didn't want to go back to what it was before.

- [The permanent emergency](#) - there will be no return to normality. We are living in a permanent emergency. Whatever it will be, we're in a constant state of permanent preparedness for emergency. The emergency will shift - but it will always be there. For instance, Greece, the reason they've done so well is they've been in a state of emergency. Same with those who have had SARs. They've been prepared too.
- [Networks of digital fortresses](#) - we can exist within them or some people live in the shadows of them.
- [A post coronavirus Settlement](#) - a larger role for the public purpose in organising society/the economy. Competing for what type of map we want to choose for the future.

**Ideas and behaviours** - in the ideas business we've assumed that if you get good ideas behaviour will follow, but what we're seeing is behaviour changes and then ideas organise themselves to make sense of the behaviours. It's not a revolution of ideas, it's a revolution of behaviours.

**Deliberation and action** - the innovation in politics. who deliberates, governance, and legitimacy. Who gets to make these decisions and how?

**Learning from frugal systems** - holding onto things that are valuable will be just as important as creativity. And looking after things that matter will be more important than creating the novel.

**Trish Hansen**01:17:16

interesting question by Charles re the new novel. Perhaps we ask what would nature do? There is an vast opportunity for design to look to nature for inspiration (patterns, systems, behaviours, structures, relationships) - biomimicry/ Janine Benyus

**Dan Hill**01:18:22

Trish Hanson, I drew from Julia Watson's work A LOT in the written pieces ... Also Anna Tsing. Very useful.



**Cassie Robinson:**

The fact that I haven't been able to slowdown and reflect - its indicative.

What I appreciated the most about Dan's writing is the invitation to slowdown.

Who has the time to slow down? I'm doing a job with people on the frontline - who's voice, whose perspective are we not hearing. In my slowing down, I've been trying to go into spaces that I wouldn't normally go into. I've tried to go to different online zoom communities that I'm not a part of. In my slowing down that's what I've been trying to centre.

There's something about the different roles that we need right now, that isn't being spoken about. For instance **a healer** - there's so much grief and loss. If we do slowdown we won't be able to avoid the immense amount of pain and loss. There's something that makes me draw in a sharp breathe that makes me. **What is the role of healing in slowing down?**

How are building the capacity of others to slowdown? Rather than thinking about the new ideas that emerge, instead hold the space and building the capacity of others.

Someone really beautifully described this idea of co-sensing. We are all looking out at the same vista, we're all looking at it through a different window. All of us being aware in our co-sensing, slowing down, in trying to bring in other people's perspectives. Are we visiting other people's windows. Are we asking the questions and looking for

different kind of data that “**changes the shape of our window**”. How can we co-sense at this time?

**Cassie Robinson**01:25:25

The window metaphor. Looking through a window. Different windows on the same vista. The view from each window isn't enough for such a complex picture. It can't inform us fully. And also your window is informed by your personality and your past experiences and all the variables of your life. We need to borrow the perspectives of others. Visit other people's windows. Your singular perspective isn't enough when the landscape is shifting so quickly.

**M Lai**01:21:29

echoing Cassie; how might we learn to listen - to the negative spaces?

I like Charlie's idea of permanent emergency - the experience of this is so unequal to all this - some people will be in this state for a really long time. For those of us who can slow down, we need to ask what our role is in this permanence emergency if we can slow down.

*From Emma Blomkamp to Everyone: (09:54 am)  
It sounds like we need a better word for it than slowdown (based on those connotations) and regeneration (does anyone really know what this means?). Any ideas? Maybe by bringing in new diverse voices we can find better language for these ideas?*

*From Rowan Conway to Everyone: (09:54 am)*

While we may be in a crisis, as Dani Rodrik says: "no one should expect the pandemic to alter - much less reverse - tendencies that were evident before." It will befall individual decision-makers to act courageously with future generations in mind - sometimes pushing back on short term logics such as static cost/benefit analysis. The Treasury's green book has not been abandoned!!

**Mike Riddell**01:15:52

Emma - agreed. "Regeneration" is a word that's been over-used. Think urban regeneration and all that comes with that (focus on skyline not breadline). Yesterday I heard the phrase 'the Great Reset'. ?

**Kat Hanna**01:18:42

Agree re regeneration not being quite right - not least because of existing connotations, but worry that also limits thinking to a defined urban geography, when actually a lot of this 'reset/renewal' will be about recalibrating relationships, 'contracts', conditionality etc that is not necessarily place-based.

**Emma Blomkamp**01:25:55

Recalibrate is a good word here, along with reset and renewal.

**Question - connection and proximity?**

**Cassie** - to talk very personally. I feel very disconnected from my friends at the moment, the bit of energy I have left after working every day, I know I need to go seek out different events, different things I need to listen too. It's strange, I feel more disconnected with our friends. But it's what I need to do. Right now, it's easy to go into our digital bubbles - we need to not do that. But I'm losing connections with my friends because of it.

**Dan** - for me, there's been so much more connection. But less ambitiously. I have been talking lots more of my neighbours. That's new. We have freedom of movement within my neighbourhood. There's so much more walking and listening. It's framing my thinking about local. My work has been engaged with groups who haven't been listened too. In Sweden, where the virus has hit, it's been for those people who haven't been served already by society - 'the new Swedes'. They have suffered this worse than anyone.

Let's respect the idea of care that Cassie brought up. It's becoming more and more relevant. It's being shown in a way that it's not always reflected in how we see how systems are run. Recalibration of relationships and recalibration of value. All at once.

**Sophie Isaacson**01:26:06

we have seen a lot of that too here in North of Scotland - by slowly down we are suddenly connected with our neighbours / local communities / elderly and vulnerable - how do we ensure we continues once everyone begins to focus on rushing back to 'normal' individualistic ways of living?

**Charlie** - when my mother died, 10 years ago, she said in a withering way, "you live a very funny life" in all the travel I did and not spending time with family. And now, I'm so curious about that, why did I do it all? I'm really pleased that I have the opportunity to show the care in place each day I make dinner for my mother-in-law.

**Cassie Robinson**01:26:19

I love this blog (old but still good re care) - [Why I Am Not a Maker](#)

**\*\*break-out to discuss proximity and connection\*\***

**Kat Hanna**01:03:00

*Thinking about political narratives and how the benefits of a 'Slowdown' could be encouraged. I worry that while the term itself may accurately describe processes of de-globalisation/de-population etc, it's not exactly a sentiment I can see a government (especially at national level) necessarily promoting. Narrative of networks of cities, towns and villages very powerful, as is thinking about how we can support both individuals and businesses to "thrive in place", or at least have the opportunity to do so. This should apply as much to reducing brain drain from rural to urban areas as it should to those who are excluded/displaced from efficiency-driven growth in urban centres.*

**Dan Hill**01:10:34

*Agreed, Kat Hanna - we have to get narrative right - slowdown doesn't mean stop, stasis etc. A different kind of growth*



**Jesper:** One discussion that is big in Denmark is this politics of the essential. A long overdue discussion of what work we value. What sort of developments can we expect to see in that space?

**Charlie:** the first thing that is striking is the lack of political innovation. In the UK we have this wall of government push and campaigning. And we might have an inquiry in a few years that offers up some limited lessons. There's political stasis. The US is deeply alarming. Three things: 1) an alliance of essential work, what we value, that could be fruitful, a realignment around that. 2) it won't happen if we don't create new places to deliberate. Where are we going to be thinking about this stuff, and can we start that now? 3) ideas around care. Care of the environment, each other. That might create a new political alignment. Feels like the biggest proponents of back to normal are politicians!

**Dan:** Surveys seem to be showing that people do not want to re-open and go back to what was before. That does seem to be a big P political move. Sweden has had a really different response to most countries. For a few reasons, one is that the national government doesn't have a legal right to issue a lockdown even if it wanted to. It relies a lot on trust and mutual respect. And that's working. 'It's a time for adults to behave like adults'. Using social norms rather than enforcing rules. Where the Swedish model hasn't worked is on the edges of those social norms. We've almost seen too much faith in science - the opposite of most other countries. Is epidemiology alone enough for this hugely complex challenge? Probably not.

Swedish model broke down when there was a lack of appreciation for the diversity of the country.

**Joni Sercombe**01:51:01

*Our organisation implemented a command and control approach with a covid response team with rigid roles and lines of command. However beyond the very short term requirements to stabilise our operations this approach has been rejected by our organisation's staff/culture. The formal covid response team disbanded in favour of a more distributed working group. This aligns to the Cynefin approaches and we are hoping for a designerly probing/sensing approach to how we move forward into the future*