A World After the Pandemic

COVID-19 Narratives, Environment, and Histories of the Future

Jim Scown, Keir Waddington, and Martin Willis

In this chapter, we offer the first examination of a new corpus of pandemic-inspired predictions from the anglophone world of our global shared future. COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic offered a fertile arena for prediction, refocusing attention on the limits of humanity and how societies should manage the long term at a moment of considerable uncertainty. Across a wide range of media, which included news articles, opinion pieces, blogs, social media, and creative outputs, commentators in the first two waves speculated on life after the pandemic. Those making these predictions seized on the collective sense of crisis to present narratives that reveal a complex layering of different interpretations. These are overdetermined by varying social, political, economic, or ideological positions. What the future might hold is core to the analysis presented here. Specifically, the corpus reveals the centrality of climate, the environment, and the workplace to those who were offering a perspective on what the post-pandemic future might or should hold. These are the themes we interrogate in detail here; first with a wider lens to explore COVID-19 and the global environment and economy, and then through a narrowing of focus to investigate predictions based around the urban workplace as an environment and site of capitalist response. As we do this, we extend recent work in the area of critical future studies. We conclude that narratives compete with one another to take control of the post-pandemic future. While there is a great deal of emerging scholarship focused directly on COVID-19 and the pandemic, our intervention offers a new understanding of how the future beyond COVID-19 was understood in the lockdown years (2020–2021).

In an opinion piece for the *New Yorker* in May 2020, Kim Stanley Robinson, science fiction writer and the author of *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), a novel depicting climate action in a carbon-fueled and chaotic future, connected COVID-19 to the climate crisis. Robinson saw COVID-19 as a harbinger of climate shocks to come at different future moments. Connections between the pandemic and anthropogenic climate change are evident across numerous predictions for a post-pandemic future, whether commentators were considering a near future with dangerous climate tipping points or a more distant point in time depicting cataclysmic climate break-

down. The narratives explored in this chapter highlight how, when it came to environmental and societal crisis, many commentators during the first two waves of the pandemic saw a clear link to the climate emergency and ecological breakdown associated with the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene and its lasting–and potentially irreversible–influence on the planet's ecosystems, and biodiversity. In making this connection, the virus and the pandemic were used to imagine a different future relationship between humanity and the nonhuman world, but they remained imprecise as to when this future would occur. In these narratives, the virus was presented as a last warning for society to change course, a precursor of future crises to come. Yet, as our analysis reveals, both virus and pandemic were constructed as a moment of transformative change; an example of the speed at which nations could act to step back from catastrophe or individuals could see a different relationship with the nonhuman world emerging. What becomes visible is both the varying social, political, economic, or ideological positions these predictions reflected and the temporal dimension of each narrative: predictions changed depending upon the particular moment in the pandemic when they were created. Two key questions emerge: What do these narratives tell us about how the post-pandemic future is being imagined or predicted? What role do they play in promoting or making real the future they foresee?

At the start of the pandemic, academic commentators were quick to try to answer a fundamental question: what would the future look like? All aspects of society, culture, politics, the economy, and the environment were considered. In their predictions of a post-Covid future, dystopian and optimistic assessments competed for attention. Medical historians offered critical insights into the history of pandemics, from the Black Death to the 1918/19 influenza pandemic in Western Europe and North America, to draw lessons about what the future might hold. Environmental historians endeavored to provide context as the nonhuman crashed into the human world, highlighting a future where we needed to be more conscious of the interconnections between the human and nonhuman, as well as between social, political, racial, and environmental inequalities that the pandemic had further illuminated (Alagona et al. 2020).[1] Literary scholars thought about the role of metaphor to enable both analysis and representation of a time to come (Craig 2020; Kohlt 2023). Scholars also moved quickly to show that history does not simply repeat itself; pandemics differ in their social dynamics and political aftershocks (Arnold 2020). Others were more explicitly political, setting out a manifesto for change that attacked neoliberal models of healthcare, for example (Cooper and Szreter 2021). Many of these works drew comparisons with previous pandemics to outline lessons for the future. Yet

1 The American Historical Association has collected these responses into a resource: "A Bibliography of Historians' Responses to COVID-19," https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/everything-has-a-history/a-bibliography-of-historians-responses-to-covid-19.

while scholars drew on their own expertise to consider various potential futures, the pandemic was already generating numerous predictions of what a post-Covid future might hold. Such predictive narratives–written across multiple media and emerging from numerous sources–are an invaluable record of pandemic perspectives and demand both our curation and attention.

Before we explore the predictions embedded across a range of narratives, in the first section of the chapter, we outline our corpus and our methodological framing. In doing so, we consider the key typologies–forecasting, backcasting, and foresight–through which the future is predicted. Here we challenge simple binaries of utopian versus dystopian to show how thinking about the future enables on the one hand speculations on what might be different–undertaken by futurists or imagineers–and on the other forecasts that draw more from trends underway and quantitative data. The coronavirus pandemic provided a potent, shifting arena for imagineers and forecasters but, as we suggest, the future was open and precarious as different scientific, cultural, and political notions of the future collided or interacted in the face of uncertainty. The next two sections provide critical examinations of possible post-pandemic futures that focused on the environment and the interconnections between COVID-19 and climate futures and between COVID-19 and the future of the urban workplace. These sections unpick the temporality of ideas of utopia and apocalypse, concealment and illumination, transformation and reversion, to explore how familiar narrative tropes helped structure responses to the coronavirus pandemic and how different modes of prediction co-existed. Rather than seeing the future predictions operating somewhere on a continuum between utopia and apocalypse, we investigate what futures were at stake in the first two waves of the pandemic, and through them what political and ideological standpoints were being advanced. With multiple futures up for grabs, we argue that narrative forms play an important role in controlling the future, shaping how both overlapping and contradictory versions of the post-pandemic future are contested and realized.

Future Studies: Forecasting and Imagineerings

The Covid Future Narratives project run by the ScienceHumanities Initiative at Cardiff University examined narratives produced and published across a range of genres during the first two waves of COVID-19 (March 2020 to January 2021), which broadly corresponded to the project timescale and funding. Unlike other projects that used questionnaires or experiments to survey people about their expectations of life after COVID-19 (Lewandowsky et al. 2021), we were interested exclusively in narratives in the public domain that tried to predict the future. We did not limit our narrative choices with other restrictions, aiming to capture as much as possible in what we believed (or hoped) would be a short timeframe as the pandemic passed.

By its very nature, the evidential basis for the corpus was broad: post-Covid futures were present in a wide range of epistemic objects and materialities. Although limited to Anglophone material, the project collected and analyzed everything from newspapers and magazine articles to academic writing and poetry to recorded media, film, social media, cartoons, and illustrations. The corpus included narratives written from the perspectives of the Global North and Global South, although we recognize that many of the predictions collected came from those in privileged positions that allowed them to reflect on what the future might look like. Issues of power–about who has the opportunity to predict the future, in what ways, and over what timescales–are never far away in these predictions. While book-length works were clearly underway during 2020, these were not published before the end of our selected period. There were also numerous narratives dealing with life during the pandemic, as opposed to the future beyond the pandemic.[2] These too were not considered for our corpus. Employing the concepts from future studies offers a starting point for analyzing this corpus but, as we reveal, a more critical reading that incorporates the temporal is needed.

As scholars working on the sociology of futures highlight, how different societies predict the future, and how that future is realized and contested, offers crucial insights into how societies view the challenges ahead. Where COVID-19 encouraged sociologists to lay claim to analyzing the future, future studies is the manifestation of the systematic and interdisciplinary study of social and technological trends, including environmental trends, and how they will impact people and societies in the future (Adam and Groves 2007; Andersson 2018; Beckett and Suckert 2021). As a loose discipline, future studies has its roots in the nineteenth century but emerged in the 1960s with a boom in various forms of prediction. However, rather than being a way to predict the future, future studies drew attention to future issues that had to be faced in the present. Rejecting what was seen as the fantasy and superstition of earlier speculations, the initial hope of future studies was to find a systematic and scientific approach to an "onrushing future" and the challenges humanity faced (Andersson 2012, 1411; Andersson and Rindzeviiute 2012). What was initially at stake was a desire to deal with socio-economic and political problems with the same confidence as problems in the sciences. Predicting the future–then as now–was constructed as offering a means of structuring action at a national, transnational, and global level (Helmer 1967, 50–51; Andersson 2012).

Future studies not only brings an awareness of the typologies used to predict the future–forecasting, backcasting (how actions in the present might bring about specific futures), and foresight–it also shows us two competing visions of how the

2 There were exceptions, such as Bethany Clift's dystopian *Last One at the Party: Her New Life Began at the End of the World* (2021), which imagines a terrifying pandemic yet to come and frames COVID-19 with a certain nostalgia.

future has been thought about and predicted. This is more than a simple binary of utopian and dystopian. As Jenny Andersson notes in the *American Historical Review*, one vision is "of the future as an is: an object of science of which certain predetermined traces could be found"; and a second of "the future as a becoming: an object of the human imagination, creativity, and will" that helps "generate visions to explore the action they can take to shape the future" (2012, 1413). What connects both is how the future is always political and an arena for intervention, even if there has been a radically different understanding of the ways in which visions of the future can control or protest against certain futures. This political dimension is visible in the work of the UK government's Futures, Foresight and Horizon Scanning team, part of the Government Office for Science (GO-Science), which is committed to future thinking, foresight, and horizon scanning as tools of government. For the GO-Science Futures team, "thinking about the future is fundamental to policymaking" (UK Government, Futures, Foresight and Horizon Scanning), an approach that echoes the implicit and explicit political messages found in a range of post-Covid narratives explored here.

While these different approaches are tied up with the history of normalizing the future since 1945, the coronavirus pandemic enabled each method of future prediction identified by future studies to thrive. The post-pandemic future—especially of social and environmental change—is both an object to be identified by science and also by a utopian- or dystopian-inspired imagination. In this sense, thinking about the future enables, on the one hand, imaginative speculations on what might be different—undertaken by futurists we might call imagineers—and, on the other, forecasting, which tends to rely more on statistical data analyzed by futurists we might call forecasters. The split between imagineers and forecasters often falls along lines of political power: as we shall see, those holding political power during the pandemic were more likely to stage their future narratives as forecasts. For imagineers, "[t]he future must be composed not only of the necessary or the possible, but also of the desirable and hopeful" (Andersson 2012, 1424). However, in both cases, anticipating possible futures also contains the need for some form of action in the present as predictions about the future are folded into the present. What is often at stake is different scientific, cultural, and political notions of the future, the limits of humanity, and how we manage questions relating to the long term. Such approaches are visible in the post-pandemic narratives examined in this chapter.

While future studies helps us detect the broad approaches of imagining and forecasting (and also techniques employing backcasting and foresight), the interdisciplinary field of critical future studies, as conceptualized by Luke Goode and Michael Godhe, encourages an examination of "the scope and constraints within public culture for imagining and debating potential futures" (2017, 108). For Goode and Godhe, if the ability to imagine an alternative future atrophied in the face of neoliberal hegemony, global events from the Arab Spring to Black Lives Mat-

ter sharpened contemporary sensitivity to possible futures (2017, 114). Mounting evidence of anthropogenic climate change and fears of transgenic pandemics in response to swine flu or SARS added further impetus, but this sensitivity to possible futures was heightened by COVID-19 as an emergent phenomenon. COVID-19 was an historical moment and crisis that generated a range of possible and shifting futures claimed by forecasters and imagineers alike. Yet critical future studies reminds us that imagined futures–or 'futurescapes'–are founded on assumptions from the past and present and are shaped by numerous contested and competing discourses. Within this framing, critical future studies asserts how the future may be more open–and perhaps more precarious–than previously envisaged, highlighting how 'futurescapes' are "found in almost any conceivable domain of culture" with our capacity to imagine, desire, or forecast the future as much an affective as it is a cognitive process (Goode and Godhe 2017, 120). However, as critical future studies also suggests, it is important to differentiate between future imagined and future imaginary. The latter, as Goode and Godhe suggest, is more negative. Equally, we need to be conscious of the tensions between future presents, which are both imagined and generated by present actions, and present futures, which are often presented as seemingly inevitable as they extend current perceived trends (Adam 2010). While it is easy to focus on negative representations that present the future as "a site of crisis" in Sherryl Vint's words (2016, 12), as Goode and Godhe show, we need to be equally sensitive to how radical alternatives of the future can be a form of "utopian thinking" that expands our horizons (2017, 118).

These approaches offer a starting point to analyze our corpus of post-Covid narratives. Future and critical future studies provide a critical framing that reveal multiple and overlapping discourses, how they appear across multiple cultural domains, their power to control or subvert possible post-pandemic futures, and the political salience of these narratives. Where future studies and critical future studies draw attention to how utopian and dystopian modes co-exist, they overlook the importance of recognizing that possible futures are, as our analysis reveals, also precarious and have shifting temporal frames, something overlooked in work which has surveyed people's expectations of life after COVID-19 (Lewandowsky et al. 2021). These temporal frames operate in a number of ways. For example, when a post-pandemic future would start was seldom defined in the narratives examined as, in the words of James Mattis, former US defense secretary, the horizons being scanned remained "uncertain" (Charters 2020; "COVID-19" 2022). This uncertainty and the period of crisis generated by COVID-19 offered a productive space to explore starkly different visions of a post-pandemic future to create a complex over-layering of predictions as imagineers and forecasters jockeyed for authority over what a post-Covid future might hold. The future, whether that be near or distant, operated as a space that could be staked out or conquered. But our corpus also reveals how, when future relationships between humans and the environment were envisaged across multi-

ple contexts, larger questions were being asked about where the planetary and the personal are placed. Equally, they draw attention to tensions between a sense of inevitably in the predictions being made and, as the British poet Kae Tempest asks, "the scope for hope" in the future, imagined or forecast (2021). The next section of this chapter provides a critical examination of how COVID-19 and the climate emergency and economic response were interconnected in predictions of multiple post-pandemic futures before we turn, in the final section, to a different type of environment, the urban workplace.

Covid and Climate Futures

The coronavirus pandemic provided renewed opportunities for commentators to argue that transgenic pandemics, the climate emergency, and the destruction of nature were inextricably linked. Such claims echoed fears that have been manifest since at least the 1950s of the threat of looming ecocide in the future. In the early months of the pandemic, when uncertainty was at its most acute, and against a background of increasing calls for precautionary action to limit the possible and imagined futures of anthropogenic climate change (Adam and Groves 2007), the future was imagined at a global level in apocalyptic terms. Canadian cartoonist Graeme MacKay (2020) captured the parallels between the COVID-19 and climate emergencies that characterized this strand of thinking about the future. The threat of climate breakdown and biodiversity collapse was visualized via a familiar rhetoric of the pandemic: the waves to come. MacKay's initial political cartoon (Illustration XII.1) drew on the recognizable visual language of a tsunami or tidal wave to envision an economic emergency following the health emergency. The cartoon lent itself to being memed and went viral. Twitter users developed the imaginary of the crisis, adding future waves. In response, MacKay modified his cartoon in May 2020 to create a new authorized version that added much larger, less manageable waves of climate change and biodiversity collapse. The final cartoon (Illustration XII.2) borders on the apocalyptic, visualizing a narrative, put forward in plain terms by the World Economic Forum, that "more planetary crises are coming" (Dixson-Declève et al. 2020).

Simultaneously, these crises were seen as symptoms of the same underlying cause. The complex origins of the pandemic, likely the result of a virus caused by a zoonotic spill-over event that many have traced to the same extractive global economy that is destroying wild places and warming the planet, presses at any easy separation of these emergencies as separate events. This is at the heart of Bruno Latour's identification of the coronavirus pandemic in terms of "an ongoing and irreversible ecological mutation" (2020)—a mutation in Earth systems and humanity's relationship with them, but also, and perhaps more optimistically, a mutation towards more ecologically attuned relations between capitalist society and the non-

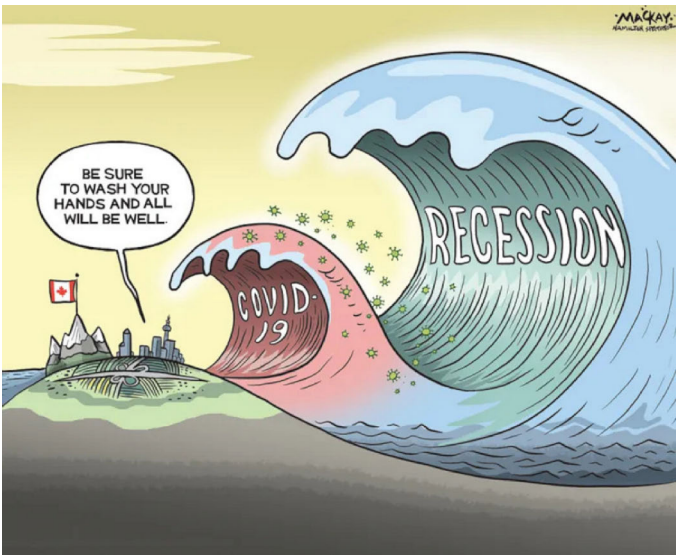
human world. In such predictions of the future, the apocalyptic, the desirable, and the hopeful could overlap. This was especially evident in the spring of 2020, when both the near and far future seemed most uncertain and the temporal space for imagining alternative futures was, therefore, most open. For the English primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall, COVID-19 was thus both an expression of wider socioecological breakdown, brought about by a diseased relationship between humans and the rest of nature, and a chance to reset that relationship: "We may think that nature is something separate and we can distance ourselves, and live in our little bubble—it's not true," she says in the short documentary film *We Are Nature* (Hodgson and Challenger 2021) alongside slow-motion footage of a bubble popping. Goodall's words draw on an implicit organicism that historically constructs and frames the relationship between the human and nonhuman world in terms of unity and wholeness, as do many post-pandemic narratives of the relationship between society and the environment. These narratives develop from a sense that all life is interrelated, a vision of nature as an ordered system thrown out of balance by human action or, in more focused diagnoses, the extractive and exploitative workings of global capitalism. In narratives such as Goodall's, the spread of COVID-19 reveals an organic unity belied by the false separation of the human from the nonhuman world, a separation that is in turn considered part of the lineage of the pandemic's emergence.

This mode of thinking about a range of post-pandemic environmental futures nevertheless supported starkly different visions. The documentary in which Goodall made her diagnosis of socioecological breakdown argued for new-found appreciation of the intricate connections joining the flourishing of humans and other species, making the case for an ecological holism. By contrast, a BBC article on the future of work—which is explored in more detail in the next section—envisioned an environment where the many connections between human and nonhuman life are limited and carefully policed (BBC Visual and Data Journalism Team 2020). Bacterial sprays, antimicrobial surfaces, and touchless technology maintain a sanitized workplace and a future that is the antithesis of Goodall's message; a world where life is lived in a bubble, as the article's aesthetics seems to imply.

In this recurring rhetoric of bubbles and waves, the pandemic becomes a way of defining the future, a kind of pattern for responding. In the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), the *Guardian* newspaper ran a series of statistics on the climate emergency. The pandemic metrics of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths were repurposed, with the newspaper using an identical aesthetic to capture changes in Atmospheric CO2, Arctic sea ice, and the proportion of the UK's energy needs being met by low-carbon electricity. Approached as a series of narratives, readers of the newspaper's website were invited to see this climate data, not only as a catalogue of the past but also as an insight into the future. These graphs, as diagrammatic narratives of forecast, were designed to show the ongoing loss of

melting ice caps, the transformative hope of low-carbon electricity. Part of the terror of the line denoting atmospheric CO2 surely stems from the uneasy feeling that the viewer is looking at part of a wave–a wave that is a very long way from cresting. However, this presentation of climate data proved ephemeral: after COP26, the *Guardian* removed the data visualization from its homepage to its archive while the COVID-19 data remained. There are clearly issues of temporality and representation at stake, then: first in the aesthetics of the statistics generated for COP26, where the data was presented as two near-identical bars to generate an implicit comparison between COVID-19 and climate crises that inadvertently highlights their different temporal scales; second, in how the data visualization proved transitory–appearing and re-appearing at particular moments of political and global attention.

Illustration XII.1: Editorial Cartoon by Graeme MacKay.



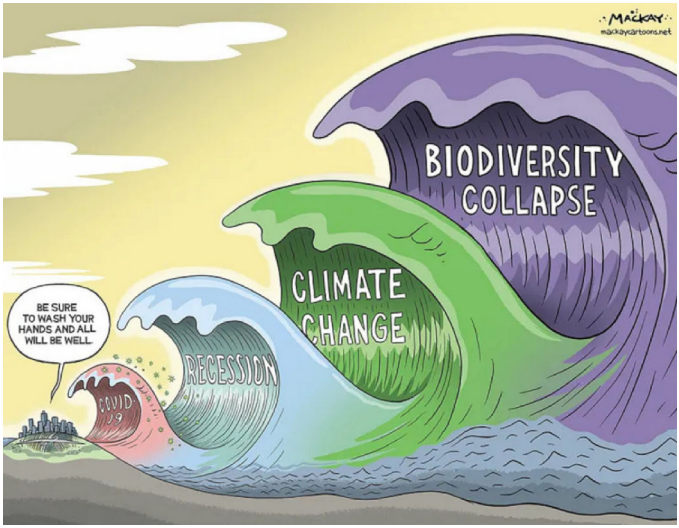
From *The Hamilton Spectator*, Wednesday, March 11, 2020.

The coronavirus pandemic also generated more hopeful, at times utopian, narratives of the future. This is especially prominent in writing from the early months of the pandemic when predictions of a post-pandemic future were framed against a pervading sense of crisis or trauma. Here the pandemic was repeatedly framed as a chance for "structural systemic economic change" (Dixson-Declève et al. 2020) and a "transformational leap towards a sustainable society" (Vince 2020). One Twitter user imagined an environmentally friendly city of tomorrow with lines from *Back to*

the Future (1985) and images of an unusually quiet Birmingham traffic control center (@Dongapalouza 2020). The Canadian author and journalist Naomi Klein (2020) expressed this idea of an environmentally friendly city of the future in the text commentary that accompanied the short film *A Message from the Future II: the Years of Repair* on the online platform for *The Intercept*, a US non-profit news organization. The film was a sequel to the Emmy-nominated short *A Message from the Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*, which launched the optimistic Decade of the Green New Deal in 2019. In her 2020 text, Klein explains how in conceiving the sequel as a response to COVID-19, she and the other producers wanted to explore the role of the utopian imagination at a time of crisis. Founded on workers' rights, reparations for racial injustice, and environmental action, *A Message from the Future II* presented an optimistic political message from four future commentators that highlight bottom-up radical transformative and environmental change. In her text, Klein asks, "Do we even have the right to be hopeful?" For Klein, COVID-19 had ushered in changes few had imagined a year before. For her, this provided a space to think about and imagine a "future worth fighting for" as an antidote to predictions that looked like "our present, only worse." As Klein explained, "If the only portrayals of the future we ever see are of some mix-and-match fascism and ecological collapse, the forecasts start to feel inevitable." Where the *Guardian*'s statistics served in terms of forecast, then, these examples are more in the imagineering mode of future studies–futures composed, to return to Jenny Andersson's words, "not only of the necessary or the possible, but also of the desirable and hopeful" (2012, 75). In response to the individual and societal sense of crisis and trauma in the early months of the pandemic, imagineers often thought on a global scale. They imagined hopeful futures that, rather than being exclusionary, presented the climate and ecological emergencies as opportunities to address various economic, social, political, health, and racial inequalities.

As COVID-19 shut down nations and economies, there came a renewed awareness of the agency of the nonhuman world. The virus exposed connections between "species, countries and geopolitical issues," explained the World Economic Forum (Dixson-Declève 2020), framing the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity for its 'Great Reset' agenda, which we examine in more detail in the next section. But for many, the action and spread of COVID-19 brought to light what was long hidden, the racist inequality and exploitative labor on which the global economy is built. These familiar narrative tropes–of disguise and illumination, revelation and withdrawal–were used to make sense of the purportedly novel coronavirus situation. For Klein, "Covid-19 acts as a kind of character in the drama" (2020). This agency is part of how the film *A Message from the Future II* seeks, in Klein's words, "to repair the broken stories–of supremacy and dominance–that brought us to this harrowing precipice."

Illustration XII.2: Revised editorial cartoon by Graeme MacKay.



From https://mackaycartoons.net

While many of these narratives focus on the grand scales of planetary crisis and historical process resonant with the Anthropocene, the pandemic 'pause' also supported environmental narratives that were more personal in scope. In the UK, the early months of the pandemic coincided with a glorious spring, a season loaded with the narrative symbolism of nature's emergence or–in widely circulated photographs from the town of Llandudno–goats reclaiming deserted Welsh streets (Stewart 2020). Writing for the BBC in June 2020, the media executive Emily Kasriel in her advocacy of Deep Listening mused on how the "feeling of awe that we experience when we spend time in the natural world"–as many did on daily walks during the UK Spring 2020 lockdown–might lead to greater environmental awareness and activism. At once haunting and reassuring, encounters with wild animals reappearing in urban settings were read as a reminder that even in a global crisis nonhuman nature was resilient. The claim 'nature is healing' quickly became a meme, drawing on ideas that because of the absence of people the disruptive impact of natural or environmental disasters left environments in peace, allowing them to thrive. 'Nature is healing' was used to represent everything from an imagined resurgence of the natural world, often (darkly) reminiscent of representations of a post-apocalyptic future, to the more banal recording of the return of pasta and toilet roll to British supermarket shelves.

But Kae Tempest was less optimistic, asking "What scope is there for hope?" Tempest used poetry to formulate future possibilities for the excluded, employing

what she calls "radical empathy" to engage her audience with "an idea of the future that informs the present" (Spiers 2019, 108). As Emily Spiers notes, the present and the past are "linked with the future through her self-stylized embodiment of the poet-prophet figure" (2019, 108). In Tempest's poem "2020," she draws a Biblical parallel between "Noah stood back from the boat / Drowning in the doubt that his own hands could make it float," and the experience of living through a crisis of uncertain duration and impact, with the uneasy feeling of more to come. This not only connects the mythical past to the present but also the need to imagine a future that is "embodied and embedded in processes and events" (Adam and Groves 2007, 11). By drawing on an imaginary of waves and rising waters–latent in Tempest's verse–parallels are invited in "2020" with melting icecaps and the ecological crisis unfolding alongside, and through, the coronavirus pandemic.

As we explore in the concluding section, negative and positive predictions of post-pandemic futures continued to be changeable within the pandemic itself. The optimistic predictions of imagineers aimed to instill hope just as forecasters made connections between COVID-19 and climate change to predict a more dangerous, darker future in which the political implications of inaction were clear. At the same time, as imagined futures also drew on apocalyptic visions of staccato climate disaster, some forecasters saw in the spread of COVID-19 and rapid economic response to the pandemic data support for action on the climate emergency. Amidst talk in Britain of 'Building Back Better' from the pandemic (HM Treasury 2021)–or, as the then British prime minister Boris Johnson stated in his keynote address at the 2021 Conservative party conference, "Building Back Beaver" (Curtis 2021)–multiple visions of the future relations between humans and other species, economics and the environment, society, and the nonhuman world, were advanced. It was in this narrative space, in the crossover and competition between these narratives, that forms of environmental and climate action took shape. And, as the 'Build Back Better' agenda with its promise of a more equitable and sustainable future suggests, the future of the urban workplace was an important component of these narratives of COVID-19. In the next section, we turn our attention to how the post-COVID-19 workplace was forecast and imagined as a discrete but also interconnected environment.

Covid and Workplace Futures

Writing toward the end of March 2020, Bruno Latour explained how "it is right now that we have to fight so that the economic recovery, once the crisis [of the pandemic] has passed, does not bring back the same old climatic regime against which we were, rather vainly, battling until now." In explicitly linking anthropogenic climate change to how during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic it became possible to put the global economic system on hold, Latour not only imagined a different fu-

ture but also reflected a body of COVID-19 narratives that focused on the future of work and the workplace. While Latour's desire for a different economic future offered a vision on a grand scale, most narratives of the future of work were much smaller in their ambition; they reflected on returning to the workplace and speculated on potential changes to work environments. Inevitably these narratives of the future workplace coincided with the future of the environment: they recognized (and sometimes elided) the relationship between commuting for work and fossil fuel use, of the inhabitation of cities and their use of energy, and the interchange of global business and its reliance on carbon use through air travel. Written against the backdrop of global economy disruption, and during periods of social restrictions to control the pandemic, these narratives were also focused on a relatively near future; a return to the workplace that was a matter of months or a handful of years away, rather than the further future of human/nonhuman restructuring imagined in the narratives examined in the previous section. As narratives construct these workplace futures, they most commonly use backcasting to tell a story of what might be ahead of us by drawing on historic workplace change that had characterized the decades from the 1950s; with the drive to automation and the introduction of new technologies central. They are also forecasting narratives built on data rather than the imagination. This is the most unsurprising element of future narratives about work. As Jens Beckert showed in *Imagined Futures* (2016), forecasting has always been an important tool for understanding the functioning of the capitalist system in the here and now and in the face of uncertainty. In this sense, Beckert's work suggests that what was already happening in the workplace environment during the first two waves of the pandemic can be seen as an effect of specific future narratives that center on the problem of the contagious human body.

In many of the narratives of work in our corpus, the influence of the social distancing of COVID-19 comes to the fore in workplaces forecast to be inhabited by a markedly reduced human population. At least in part, this emerged from a sense that future workplaces would be disinfected spaces given the heightened sensitivity in lockdowns of the human body as potential carrier of infection through human-to-surface contact. One result of the dis-infection of future workspaces are their turn towards automation–where potentially infectious biological organisms are replaced by safer mechanical/digital avatars. A clear example of this is in the work of Jason Schenker, chairman of The Futurist Institute and ranked first by Bloomberg News as the key forecaster in the world. His book *The Future After Covid* (2020) was published early in the pandemic. It argues for taking measures in the present to create a specific and predictable future, or at least make that future more probable. In his chapter on the future of work, Schenker argues that automation will expand in the workplace, leading to a technological acceleration bordering on a further digital technological revolution. Schenker's perspective is likely to be marked by his own investment in such a future. He is also the author of *Jobs for Robots* (2020) and in pre-

vious books on the future has predicted the rise of robots in the world of work. The future forecast by Schenker is one that was already underway for many global businesses and, like those businesses, Shenker's own success is linked with the likely success of that already plausible future. This type of forecasting uses COVID-19 narratives to extend an existing vision of the future rather than forecast or imagine one afresh from new circumstances. It shows how those individuals and organizations perceived to hold power were able to forecast and thus use the coronavirus pandemic to engineer, rather than imagine, a certain future that legitimized the allocation of resources, both in the present and in the future.

Although COVID-19 appeared to threaten high-carbon, high-consumption industries, Schenker was not alone in forecasting the rise of automation in the workplace. The British-American management consultancy company Willis Towers Watson (2020), in their infographic on the future after the pandemic, also claim that automation will rise. Management consultants appear particularly invested in post-Covid automation. One of the most powerful, the US consultancy firm McKinsey, in their "Future of Work After Covid-19" web presentation (2021), argue that "The pandemic accelerated trends in […] automation." Because of the "disruption" to "physical proximity," "remote" and "virtual" working are much more likely future realities in the workplace. For McKinsey's consultants, this is positively regarded as a new "flexible" mode of conducting business, which they enmesh within a "faster adoption of automation and AI." In order to further the cause of the disinfected workplace, argues McKinsey, "work arenas with high levels of human interaction are likely to see the greatest acceleration in the adoption of automation and AI." Such visionary insight is recursive; McKinsey and Willis Towers Watson aim to monetize their forecasting through providing further consultancy support to companies who will make their initial vision a future reality. As Willis Towers Watson argue in their advertising, "You see the future. We help you get there" (2020). This clearly parallels the findings of Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington in their book on management consultancy, *The Big Con* (2023). They argue that management consultancy firms have always repurposed their existing advice to take advantage of new business opportunities, regardless of whether these are effective and productive strategies for future work.

Forgotten in this drive toward a techno-utopia for our working future are the environmental implications of the increasing use of energy by automated and computer-driven technology, or of the mining necessary to support this AI revolution, or even of the pollution generated. Notwithstanding a strand of predictions that linked work to environmental change to imagine a greener post-Covid future (Dixson-Declève 2020; European Commission 2020; Klein 2020; Tagliapietra et al. 2022), no consideration is given in management consultancy visions of the post-Covid future to whether a reconceived workplace could offer green solutions. While reductions in the travel of people for work is often signaled as reducing carbon emissions, there is

no connection made to the introduction of other environmental concerns that come with an increase in the usage of technologies.

Nevertheless, there are visions of an automated future that strike a more cautionary note. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group, for instance, undertook a survey on work after COVID-19, which they also released as an Infographic (2020). APEC is an inter-governmental forum for member economies in the Pacific Rim that promotes free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region. APEC also identified technology as a key factor in the future of work–the fetish of technological solutions for social and economic problems is very much at the fore in future of work narratives. But in their forecast, there is a clear sense of the potential consequences for the vulnerable communities of Asia were this future to be implemented. APEC claim that any speeding-up of automation (which they identify as the fourth industrial revolution) would see certain vulnerable groups disadvantaged: women, youth workers, those with chronic health concerns, and the elderly. Their concern is the long-told historical story of automation leading to joblessness; not a consideration of those promoting an increasingly automotive or artificially intelligent future. As a counter to the perspective from Global North management consultants, APEC's post-Covid future narrative is more expressly cautious. This emerges from its focus on the powerless rather than the powerful. Their narrative reveals the different potentialities of the future after the pandemic and expressly highlights how forecasting springs from specific political positions as well as from data.

More obviously in the territory of the imagineer than the forecaster, the BBC's analysis of the future of working lives aimed to avoid advocating for or opposing any particular form of AI or automotive working future (BBC Visual and Data Journalism Team 2020). Instead, it drew inspiration from the early months of the pandemic to consider how the abandoned workplaces of the UK might, in the near future, be re-inhabited in new ways. The BBC imagines the future through a largely dystopian aesthetics. Using a combination of text, illustration and animation, the BBC's vision of the office of the post-pandemic future is of a space heavily dis-infected by health management protocols. Offices of the future, in this vision of workplaces to come, rely upon body scanners, digital viral monitors and temperature checkers–a technological health cordon–to sanitize office spaces. The article's illustrations make clear that this imagined future also depends upon self-isolation. The article's key human character, Laila, an office worker, is almost exclusively seen alone in the office of the future–she is imagined as the single inhabitant of a largely abandoned cityscape, a lonely biological body in a world of automated technologies.

In several other imaginaries of the future of work created approximately a year into the coronavirus pandemic (spring to summer 2021), there is a similar sense of the potential hollowing out of cities–especially of city centers. Another BBC web article from the summer of 2021 captured the views of a range of corporate workers from the UK's capital: "In the City of London, also known as the Square Mile, the

drop in people commuting to the offices of big firms has hampered shops, cafes and restaurants, which are reliant on workers to stay in business" (Race 2021). This sort of rhetoric, often repeated in similar news stories, gives rise over many narrative moments to images of abandoned cities reminiscent of apocalyptic film and tv. "The Office is Dead" exclaimed one commentator in such a narrative (Dishman 2020). Perhaps undead is nearer the mark as those narratives of city center abandonment interrupted only by the lone hero (like Laila the lonely office worker) coincide with zombie horror films such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and *I Am Legend* (2007) or the HBO series *The Last of Us* (2023).

These imaginative renderings of the future of work are opposed, however, by alternative visions that see environmental advantages to reduced commuter travel. When Apple, for example, decided that all workers should be returning to the office in the summer of 2021, some employees responded very negatively. One claimed that the company's Chief Executive Tim Cook had just cancelled the future: "And what about pollution? What about global warming? Does Tim Cook genuinely care about the environment–or does he merely pretend to do so for PR purposes?" (Jameson 2021). These individual responses were often joined by other voices who suggested future economies and future workplaces are the present-day battleground for an improved environmental future. Despite its references to the energy and confidence of the Victorians, this improved future is evident in the British government's net-zero carbon plan for growth, 'Build Back Better' (HM Treasury 2021), but this was equally visible in the corporate world. The World Economic Forum, to give one corporate example, argued in March 2020 that "we can do much better" (Dixson-Declève et al. 2020). Seeing COVID-19 as an opportunity for its 'Great Reset' agenda, the World Economic Forum, went on to explain, "Rather than simply reacting to disasters, we can use the science to design economies that will mitigate the threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pandemics. We must start investing in what matters, by laying the foundation for a green, circular economy that is anchored in nature-based solutions and geared toward the public good." These visions of a future where environmental protections succeed economic interest view the abandoned workplace very differently. For these imagineers, the empty office is a signifier of having chosen a better climate future–spaces of the undead are transformed into sites of green renewal.

What is perhaps most significant in these different renderings of the future of work, and in particular of the differing perspectives on the empty workplace of the future, is how they draw upon a very common trope in contemporary narratives that explore scenarios of environmental apocalypse. Often, climate apocalypse fictions–the film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), or, more recently, Jessie Greengrass's *The High House* (2021)–render the bleakness of environmental collapse through images of deserted cities. Such images instantiate disaster and are rendered to warn against the kinds of human activity that might

further accelerate environmental harm. Yet in visions of the future of work, this trope of the deserted city as a signifier of environmental disaster is inverted to signal a green agenda on working practices that no longer requires commuting into the center of cities. Imagineered or forecast futures of work, then, are already transforming powerful generic tropes for alternative purposes–a clear example of how powerful narratives of a post-Covid future are fundamentally changing perceptions. The implications of this we now consider in our conclusion.

"The Last Thing to Do Is Repeat the Exact Same Thing We Were Doing Before": Conclusions

From March 2020, the UK's Office for National Statistics began asking a large sample of people in Britain when they thought life would return to normal; effectively asking when a post-Covid future would start. Before January 2021, most thought in terms of a year, reflecting individual hopes that the pandemic would quickly be brought under control. As the virus mutated, repeated waves of COVID-19 challenged such assumptions. New variants pushed predictions of the shift from COVID-19 as a pandemic to an endemic disease forward in time. Within this context, optimistic predictions by conservative-learning commentators of getting back to normal by the end of 2021 may have offered an emotional lifeline, but they looked increasingly unlikely. In the face of new variants, new predictions started to be made from February 2022 about living with COVID-19 (HM Government 2022; Charumilind 2021), echoing James Manyika's earlier assessment for the International Monetary Fund in June 2020 that "the world after COVID-19 is unlikely to return to the world that was" (Susskind et al. 2020). The forecasting of a return to normal served to foreclose on the future in opposition to people in Britain and the United States broadly favoring a more progressive future (Lewandowsky et al. 2021). By predicting when the pandemic would end, these forecasters and commentators simultaneously neutered the potential futures of the imagineers and advanced their own agendas for a future they would prefer to inhabit. There was resistance to these efforts to claim the future. This resistance can be seen in the rather blandly unprophetic proclamations of having to live with COVID-19 or in ongoing alternative futures such as those that began to appear in slower, longer-form imaginative productions, such as Sarah Hall's novel *Burntcoat*, published in October 2021, or Ali Smith's novel *Companion Piece*, which reached bookshelves in May 2022.

What both connects and complicates the forecasting and imagineering of the future is the central influence of their temporal frame. There are two temporal contexts for each narrative, regardless of type. There is the time of the production of the narrative prediction. There is also the future time period being explored by the narrative. The longer the pandemic continued, the greater was the accumulation of

narratives with different temporal frames. They also came to varying conclusions, often through the accretion of data (for forecasting narratives) and the continual generation of novel experiences under pandemic conditions (for imagineering narratives). Attempting to offer a typology of Covid future narratives becomes an exercise focused on the granular detail of dates and time periods; a form of narrative stratigraphy.

Just as the binary of utopian and dystopian fails to capture the complexities of the post-Covid narratives explored in this chapter, one result of these different temporalities was that there appeared to be no single clear narrative direction of travel toward a homogenous future. This is where the organizing principles of future studies are at their most powerful. By developing the narrative paradigms of forecasting and imagineering, future studies provides a division of narrative that supports further analysis of our corpus. For example, forecasting narratives within the corpus focus on a definite and near future that emerges from the acceleration of trends already underway–be that climate change or automation. Conversely, imagineers looked further ahead to a more distant future. In their visions of a world after the pandemic, they set out possible futures in which the apocalyptic and the hopeful, the global and the personal, shifted and overlapped. As predictions of the future were made with greater confidence, and as there appeared to be more data available about what the future might hold, imagineers increasingly lost ground and control of the near future to forecasters. Many of the increasingly dominant predictions had a clear political or corporatist framing: uncertainty and crisis were being replaced by forecasts that gave the impression of data-driven reliability. Imagineering narratives, on the other hand, enable contemplation of a more distant future (sometimes drawing inspiration from a distant past, as Smith's novel does). These more speculative potential futures pose vital questions about the journeys we might take by inviting a consideration of the choices societies will make in the near future.

What we reveal in this chapter is how different narrative futures exist not just or simply simultaneously, but rather how they work as a palimpsest with considerable and complex over-layering of one upon another, some with extensions into further futures and others returning to the nearest possible future. Narratives could be oppositional to one another, certainly, as were some of those which read automation as either positive or negative, but they were not always or even often to be found in such simple binary patterns. Many did not contradict one other directly, but deviated away from each other, sometimes to return to common points. If the scalar nature of the changes predicted varied–from changes to the office and the nature of work to large-scale environmental and economic change–it is clear from the evidence explored in this chapter that throughout the first two waves of the pandemic, there was a battle over ownership of the post-Covid future and what that meant for the future relations of the human and nonhuman world. Such a reading offers new ways of understanding how reality and knowledge are created in a social way and in the

meeting of society and the more-than-human. Forecasting and imagineering both shape futures from particular ideologies and politics that are themselves shaped by the particular moments of socio-economic crisis that COVID-19 engendered and the resulting pandemic represented. It is in this interrogative territory that critical future studies sits. This interdisciplinary field reminds us that questions of potential futures are always questions of power. In predicting a post-Covid future, the very different social, political, economic, or ideological narratives examined here were all fighting for the virgin territory of the world after the end of the pandemic. Who has purchase on the future, where, and with whom, become key questions in determining the shape of dominant narratives. Future research, drawing on the work within critical future studies, is essential to come to a wider understanding of the role of narrative prediction in enabling different societies to understand their own journey both through COVID-19 and into the future beyond it (or alongside it). This first analysis of one corpus of COVID-19 future narratives is a point of departure, the first map of this critical territory. Further reflection, and in particular of non-Anglophone narratives, or of the territories of the Global South, is needed to understand how disease, environment, and the control of the future interweave.

Acknowledgments

All the authors contributed equally to the project and to writing this chapter. The authors would like to thank the Wellcome Trust whose support enabled a portion of the project to be completed (Grant Reference No. 214155/Z/18/Z).

Works Cited

Adam, Barbara. 2010. "History of the Future: Paradoxes and Challenges." *Rethinking History* 14(3): 361–78. doi: 10.1080/13642529.2010.482790.

Adam, Barbara, and Chis Groves. 2007. *Future Matters: Action, Knowledge, Ethics*. Leiden: Brill.

Alagona, Peter, Jane Carruthers, Hao Chen, Michèle Dagenais, Sandro Dutra e Silva, et al. 2020. "Reflections: Environmental History in the Era of COVID-19." *Environmental History* 25(4): 595–686. doi: 10.1093/envhis/emaa053.

Andersson, Jenny. 2012. "The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World." *American Historical Review* 117(5): 1411–30. doi: 10.1093/ahr/117.5.1411.

Andersson, Jenny, and Egle Rindzeviiute, 2012. "The Political Life of Prediction: The Future as a Space of Scientific World Governance in the Cold War Era." *Les Cahiers Européens de Sciences Po* 4: 2–21.

Andersson, Jenny. 2018. *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arnold, David. 2020. "Pandemic India: Coronavirus and the Uses of History." *Journal of Asian Studies* 79(3): 569–77. doi: 10.1017/S0021911820002272

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. 2020. "Infographic: COVID-19 and the Future of Work." July 2. https://www.apec.org/Press/Infographics/2020_0703_Info.

Beckert, Jens. 2016. *Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Beckett, Jean, and Lisa Suckert. 2021. "The Future as a Social Fact: The Analysis of Perceptions of the Future in Sociology." *Poetics* 84. doi: 10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101499.

BBC Visual and Data Journalist Team. 2020. "This Is What Coronavirus Will Do To Our Offices and Homes." *BBC*. August 6. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-dc2d6e2d-3ab4-42de-8d03-bb7eda5fff8e.

Charters, Erica, 2020. "How Epidemics End: A Multidisciplinary Project." https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/how-epidemics-end-a-multidisciplinary-project. Accessed October 14, 2022.

Charumilind, Sarun, Matt Craven, Jessica Lamb, Shubham Singhal, and Matt Wilson. 2021. "Pandemic to Endemic: How the World Can Learn to Live with COVID-19." *McKinsey & Company*. October 28. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/pandemic-to-endemic-how-the-world-can-learn-to-live-with-covid-19.

Cooper, Hilary, and Simon Szreter. 2021. *After the Virus: Lessons from the Past for a Better Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

"COVID-19: Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going." *McKinsey & Company*. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/coronavirus-leading-through-the-crisis/covid-19-where-weve-been-where-we-are-and-where-were-going. Accessed on September 21, 2022.

Craig, David. 2020. "Pandemic and its Metaphors: Sontag Revisited in the COVID-19 Era." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23(6): 1025–32. doi: 10.1177/1367549420938403.

Curtis, Chris. 2021. "Building Back Beaver? Boris Johnson Is About as Unpopular as a Pigeon." *The Times*. October 8. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/building-back-beaver-boris-johnson-is-about-as-unpopular-as-a-pigeon-xsrjjj5l6.

Dishman, Lydia. 2020. "The Office Is Dead, According to Most Startup Founders." *Fast Company*. May 21. https://www.fastcompany.com/90507601/the-office-is-dead-according-to-most-startup-founders.

Dixson-Declève, Sandrine, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, and Kate Raworth. "Could COVID-19 Give Rise to a Greener Global Future?" *World Economic Forum*. March 25. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/a-green-reboot-after-the-pandemic/.

@Dongapalouza. 2020. "Roads? Where we're going we don't need roads…" *Twitter*. September 1. 2.18pm CEST. https://twitter.com/dongapalouza/status/1300769932947357696.

European Commission. 2020. "Europe's Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation." Press release. May 27. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940.

Hall, Sarah. 2021. *Burntcoat*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hodgson, Chad, and Melanie Challenger. 2021. "We Are Nature." Produced by Mirrorbox, Ltd. Short film, 10:21. May 12. https://vimeo.com/548356741.

Goode, Luke, and Michael Godhe, 2017. "Beyond Capitalist Realism: Why We Need a Critical Future Studies." *Culture Unbound* 9(1): 108–129. doi: 10.3384/cu.2000.1525.1790615.

Helmer, Olaf. 1967. "Science." *Science Journal* 3(10): 49–51.

HM Government. 2022. *Covid-19 Response: Living with Covid*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1056229/COVID-19_Response_-_Living_with_COVID-19.pdf.

HM Treasury. 2021. *Build Back Better*. London: HMSO.

Jameson, Robert. 2021. "Apple Just Cancelled the Future." Medium. June 11. https://medium.com/bobs-economics/apple-just-cancelled-the-future-ec4123afad8f.

Kasriel, Emily. 2020. "A 'Mass Experiment' for the Climate." *BBC Future Planet*. June 25. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200624-has-covid-19-brought-us-closer-to-stopping-climate-change.

Kohlt, Franziska E. 2023. "A 'War' Against a 'Devilish' Virus: Religious Rhetoric and Covid-19 in the UK." In *RecordCovid19: Historicizing Experiences of the Pandemic*, edited by Kristopher Lowell, 91–108. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Klein, Naomi. 2020. "A Message from the Future II: The Years of Repair." *The Intercept*. October 1. https://theintercept.com/2020/10/01/naomi-klein-message-from-future-covid/.

Latour, Bruno. 2020. "Imaginer les gestes-barrières contre le retour à la production d'avant-crise." *AOC*. March 30. https://aoc.media/opinion/2020/03/29/imaginer-les-gestes-barrieres-contre-le-retour-a-la-production-davant-crise/.

Lewandowsky, Stephan, Keri Facer, and Ullrich K. H. Ecker. 2021. "Losses, Hopes, and Expectations for Sustainable Futures after COVID." *Humanities and Social Science Communications* 8. doi: 10.1057/s41599-021-00961-0.

MacKay, Graeme. 2020. Editorial Cartoon. *The Hamilton Spectator*. Last modified on March 11.

Mazzucato, Mariana, and Rosie Collington. 2023. *The Big Con: How the Consulting Industry Weakens our Businesses, Infantilizes our Governments and Warps our Economies*. London: Penguin.

McKinsey Global Institute. 2021. "The Future of Work after COVID-19." *McKinsey & Company*. February 18. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19.

Office for National Statistics. 2022. *Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain*. April 1. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritaindata.

Race, Michael. 2021. "Goldman Sachs Delays Return to Office for Workers." June 16. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57494393.

Schenker, Jason, 2020a. *The Future After Covid: Futurist Expectations for Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities after the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Austin: Prestige Professional Publishing.

Schenker, Jason. 2020b. *Jobs for Robots: Between Robocalypse and Robotopia–COVID Edition*. Austin: Prestige Professional Publishing.

Smith, Ali. 2022. *Companion Piece*. London: Penguin.

Spiers, Emily. 2019. "Kate Tempest: A 'Brand New Homer' for a Creative Future." In *Homer's Daughters: Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, edited by Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos, 105–124. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stanley Robinson, Kim. 2020. "The Coronavirus Is Rewriting our Imagination." *New Yorker*. May 1. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-coronavirus-and-our-future.

Stewart, Andrew. 2020. "Goats Take Over Empty Welsh Streets During Coronavirus Lockdown." *Guardian*. March 31. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2020/mar/31/goats-take-over-empty-welsh-streets-llandudno-coronavirus-lockdown-video.

Susskind, Daniel, James Manyika, Jean Saldanha, Sharan Burrow, Sergio Rebelo, and Ian Bremer. 2020. "Life Post-Covid-19." *Finance & Development Magazine*. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/06/how-will-the-world-be-different-after-COVID-19.

Tagliapietra, Simone, Guntram B. Wolff, and Georg Zachmann, eds. 2022. *Greening Europe's Post-COVID-19 Recovery*. Brussels: Bruegel.

Tempest, Kae. 2021. "2020." In "Windows on the world: Pandemic poems by Simon Armitage, Hollie McNish, Kae Tempest and more." *Guardian*. May 8. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/may/08/windows-on-the-world-pandemic-poems-by-simon-armitage-hollie-mcnish-kae-tempest-and-more

UK Government. n.d. "Futures, Foresight and Horizon Scanning." https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/futures-and-foresight. Accessed on September 21, 2022.

Vince, Gaia. 2020. "After the Covid-19 Crisis, Will We Get a Greener World?" Observer. May 17. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/17/after-the-covid-19-crisis-will-we-get-a-greener-world.

Vint, Sherryl. 2016. "Introduction to 'The Future Industry'." *Paradoxa* 27: 7–20.

Willis Towers Watson. 2020. Company brochure. https://www.willistowerswatson.com/-/media/WTW/Insights/2021/01/seeking-out-brighter-investment-horizons.pdf?modified=20210210081630. Accessed on September 21, 2022.