

## **Undoing the Future ~ Phil Smith**

**Death** – we suddenly see it. Now, we can celebrate it. Keep it in view.

**Immortality** – it's this that creates the inflated sense of human selves as separate from time and space and other species and other things. By honouring Death we can at last culturally escape from the millstone of immortality; ecologically prepare for passing on the torch.

**Not Progress but Fold** – we are not ever going upwards. Instead we fold back into the soil, under the forest, along the rhizomes. Not ascension but rot into everything.

**The Body is Key** – as the agent of mobility; as the criterion of movement. If our bodies are moved mechanically we have not travelled; a plane ride does not change our position, it misplaces us. We travel by body; wheeling ourselves, cycling, riding on a horse, walking. Other bodies can move us – an adult carrying a child, stretcher bearers carrying an injured player. But not planes, not cars.

**Robots** – their presence has been exposed. In the streets they find it challenging to change their ambulatory trajectory when it accidentally locks on to another's. They lack patterning and spontaneity skills, they plough on helpless to change their course, uncomfortable about their behaviour. Products of an education system that prefers its students not to analyse rigorously but to achieve targets, learn by rote and reconfigure model answers; they are susceptible to single phrase commands like “three for the price of two” or “take back control”. They put collective social action (crucial for the minimizing of infection spread) under threat.

**Other Ways To Spot A Robot** – those who are most convinced that others are robots are those who have been programmed by Alt-Media to think that way. Today the Separations (see below) are cut in a different way. Our only way out is with the robots.

**The Village** – and then there are those who have learnt the street choreography of anticipation and diversion; even though we are in the middle of a big city they catch your eye, mouth ‘thank you’ or ask after your health: “y'alright?”. We live in small villages again.

**The Essence** – the Virus has usefully posed the question ‘what is essential?’ Is it the same as ‘only what is necessary?’ Or is there another kind of essence, less defined by functionality, a stripped down version of ‘what is’ that delivers greater intensity by concentration? Again the Body is Key as the means to distinguish between intensity and distraction. One essential is the non-essential, the excessive; it is not pleasure that needs to be cut away, but routine, the order of events.

**The Quiet** – in the absence of cars, terraced streets and even tarmaced roads have begun to step forward as places; the birds sing so loudly it is no longer necessary to listen to the News so much.

**The Blue Sky** – without the contrails the colours deepen, up becomes down. The world turns upside down. How do we keep it somersaulting?

**Separation and Connectivity** – these have emerged in a new relation. Separations by novel criteria; less by class, wealth and power and more by location and essence. Many powerful men turn out to be non-essential. Many low status and ethnically diverse women are essential. The Virus kills disproportionately among the working class and ethnic minorities; a new kind of separation is necessary to protect their lives; both for their own preciousness and their importance to everybody. That includes separating the wealthy from their money. More egalitarian societies are the ones best capable of creative separation along non-hierarchical lines and so resisting capitulation to the hyper-infectiousness of Covid-19.

**Choreography** – Separation and Connectivity are a creative binary-model at odds with its shadow in digitalism. Rather than an oscillation, an either/or, it is a spacing, a representation by what is not there, a drawing of the gaps.

**Repetition and Difference** – the disruption, the V-effect of the Virus (*die Verfrempeffekt*), reveals unexpected processes. Without football, there is less desire for football; similarly with the cancellation of new episodes of long-running soap operas. These products of the ‘creative industries’ are exposed as not gratifying desires (which were not there in the first place) but fabricating desires for repetition. Suspense, competition, close run things; these appear to generate energy, but result only in closed circles. The Virus halts culture, which judders, stutters; it becomes capable of a difference which disrupts the order of events. The body does not perceive the static, but only when a change occurs; let the Body be the cultural Key.

**No Rebellion** – displays of defiance and extrovert refusal during the Time of Virus are completely in harmony with reaction and conservatism. This exposes the nature of rebellion in hypermodernity. It is not what it says it is, when every manifestation of revolt is commodified immediately on appearance.

**Skulking** – the Virus creates an opportunity for skulking, for the enactment of the non-essential excessive within the appearance of (and with the same effect of) the safely essential. This is the model for future essence, and the negating of rebellion’s negation: a core of excess and indulgence within the frame of responsible social distance.

**Drones** - in a surveillance culture everyone is born a spy. That is not necessarily a bad thing for subjectivity.

**Reticence** – in the age of algorithmic invasion, hold your Tarot close to your chest.

**Nothing Happened** – many things stopped, but many things continued. The lack of consequences as a result of what stopped and the manic efforts of others to redouble their activities spoke to the same thing: that vast swathes of ‘industries’, the service sector and information technology are spectral. Frantic passivities that collect data or service the production of desires for unsatisfying things; they are only missed when they are present. In their absence they become clear for the unwanted illusions that there are. The Virus has exposed much of GDP as a mirage by which the resources of corporate empires are exchanged via ‘creatives’ and recycled to sections of the middle class as profits.

**Icy Gaze** – as the sun falls, the bluer sky turns to a blacker night. Beside the great spectacle of The Plough, from the allotment a chain of Elon Musk’s satellites processing through the stars is visible. It’s an illusion; they are very close and puny things against the galaxies and nebulae. They are weapons modelling a particular kind of ‘non-agency’; passive data that pattern infiltration and intelligence gathering into the mirror of terror and crime. In these systems, myths are neutralised. There are no prices to pay. The cop is the rebel is the thug is the businessman is the general is the celebrity. There are no horses, serpents or goddesses. The chain of satellites is the final spurt of the Warrior Myth. The Hero’s Journey in conclusion. No decisions remain to be made. No knots to be severed or dilemmas to be defeated by. No one loses. Nothing happens. Data is collected and uploaded into machines. Life becomes inert. The landing of Death is permanently delayed. The boatman refuses to dock.

**Death** – don’t let it slip through our fingers again. Don’t wave it away. This precious moment when we stop ignoring the deaths of those not immediately adjacent to us. Death is more present, more dispersed; and when the dying has decelerated, hold close the dearness and celebrate the generosity of good ol’ Death.

Phil Smith is a prolific author ~ details of some of his work can be found [here](#).