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**MOLLY:**

Okay, first of all, thank you for those very, very nice introduction. And also, I would say to any of my colleagues and friends from the Collegium here in Helsinki, I have to make an apology already in advance because this is really just a more enhanced version of the paper, I gave two days ago.

But I will say that was a really exciting event because here we really saw the wide range the power of multidisciplinary perspectives on this quite extraordinary moment that we are living through and although Dario said that the Theme is borders and I understand that I had initially been told that the lecture series was being convened also around the topic of the pandemic.

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So that was how I decided to give this talk. Although, as you'll see in this talk, I don't think the question of borders is really that far away because I will be talking about the relationship between what is real and not real and the imagination.

And my goal here is to talk for no more than 40 minutes, ideally quite a bit less because by far the most interesting part of these exchanges from my point of view is the discussion, especially in this current context where I'm sitting completely by myself in a room basically talking to myself.

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So I look forward to us talking together. I will get started here first. Let's see here. The first thing really to say is to identify a challenge for academics as we try to talk about this moment that we are living through and as Dario rightly pointed out this is a picture of a hurricane and I think that there is a real challenge here for us as academics to both figure out what if anything we have to say that can be useful, especially those of us who are not hard scientists, so those of us who are not contributing, for instance, to finding a vaccine or something of that nature, but especially those of us in the humanities, the social science and other disciplines.

What, if anything, do we have to contribute to our understanding about what we are living through and even as, I first wrote this paper just a few weeks ago, actually, and some of the numbers that I'm going to present, which are very few, it's really just a snapshot of where we are, they have already changed so dramatically, even the moment that you try to say, "Okay, here's where we are, it's already in the past."

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Even from when I was updating these slides yesterday. For the presentation today I updated the numbers yet again, 15 minutes ago, because sadly, they are fast and furious and changing.

So how do we-- what, if anything, do we have to contribute to this moment? And how can we both try to be contributing and in dialogue with each other, but much more importantly with the outside world, but at the same time to hold on to some sense of humility.

Okay. But actually, what does it mean to be a scholar in a moment of acute uncertainty? And I think that both of these things are really important to try to hold on to.

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I'm going to discuss the current challenges in terms of the narrative imagination. So back in 2014 as Thomas mentioned, I published a book called Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life.

And in that book, I posited that several things come into clear focus if you bring these together. Clearly, not all narrative is connected to imagination, not by any means, sometimes we might have a narrative about even the most mundane things, going grocery shopping or whatever. And equally many manifestations of imagination have nothing to do with narrative or at least not spoken narrative.

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So what happens actually when we bring these two together was the focus of my book, and I argued that there were three clear axes that has become our focus. And the first, as you will see, is the dynamic nature of the temporal.

Second is the mediation between the real, the not real, and what Sartre calls the not yet real. And third and finally, the complexity of constructing the other.

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I'm going to talk about this current pandemic in terms of these three dimensions in turn. I will start first with talking about the dynamic nature of the temporal, or what I've referred to as time traveling.

This involves clearly a revisiting of the past in light of what we know in the present, a reimagining of our present lives, and also, the creation of new futures, be they absolutely feared futures, nightmares, if you will, or indeed new hopes for a future.

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And this is very much in line with general narrative theory and epistemology, that time is fluid and one flows into the other. And yes, while we have chronological time, we also have a fluidity where different moments inflect on our understanding and indeed our meeting making of the others. So let's look at each of these in turn then.

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We have seen a lot of revisiting of the past in these past three months in various ways. At one level, we see that we reimagine the present as really only one of many possibilities. Some time back at moment X, the pandemic was a possibility, but not a certainty, if you will. There were various pathways which were open to us, and we traveled the particular road in which we did and have landed in the present moment.

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But if we go back, as it were, time traveling to the past, it's quite tempting also to think what would have happened if only we had done this at this particular moment? Okay, knowing what I know now, if I could go back, would I do things differently? Not only ourselves as individuals, but indeed as communities.

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And indeed as members of countries and as global citizens. With this also happens on an individual basis. You hear it all the time, friends telling me, I thought I was going to go to this festival last year. In fact, I decided to go this summer. If I had known that all festivals were going to be canceled, I would have gone last summer, whatever.

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So we see this reworking on individual levels all the time. But critically, we see it also in terms of the movement of wider groups. I'm going to return to some of that later as well. We also see an interest, a revived interest, if you will, in past pandemics, despite that President Donald Trump keeps saying this is unprecedented and nobody ever thought this could have happened, et cetera.

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We see that, in fact, pandemics are part of human history. Interestingly, it's not just that is empirically so which it is but people have, you find out that, one of the best, the most watched videos on Netflix is Contagion, or, which is in fact fictional, or you find out that John Barry's book on the Spanish flu published in 2005 has in fact been on the New York Times top 10 bestseller list for last, I checked it was eight weeks perhaps longer.

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People are interested what happened then? Okay, so these stories which seemed as if they were long ago all of a sudden have a particular currency And I am myself personally culpable of this. I've started reading about all sorts of aspects of these past pandemics learning things like, as I say here, the great plague of London killing at least 20% of London's population.

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As I told my colleagues two days ago, in these last few months I learned that London had a terrible time trying to bury all of its dead, and in fact, they had massive graves. And it doesn't take much to understand why the street at the corner of my own street, where my home is actually called pit field street.

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It turns out that pit field street was one of the largest pits where bodies were deposited. And this kind of thing becomes talked about in a much, much more everyday manner now. So the past we revisit the past in light of our current interests, but we also have to reimagine our present lives.

A lot of people have talked about the current moment as one of crisis, not only a global crisis, which surely it is, and not only an economic crisis, which it is most likely to be, but also a personal crisis, a crisis of our everyday lives.

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The things that we had once thought we could count on as our habituated practices, going out into the world and shopping and getting our hair cut or meeting someone and shaking hands or giving someone, you like a hug or an embrace, indeed, standing next to someone.

All those things of the once every day are no longer and we have to readjust who we are in these new present lives. People refer to, quote, the new normal. And indeed, for a lot of people probably really for all of us.

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As I say here, this is not the imagined future we thought we were moving towards. I also say that as a mother of two recent university graduates, they thought they were working hard towards going out into the world with these new jobs, et cetera. What kind of jobs will there be out there?

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And what kind of a future awaits our young people who have newly qualified. And they believe and have believed for a long time that they were working towards a certain thing and then that moment arrives.

And it's a very, very, very different one than what had been anticipated. And of course, this is happening not only in their personal lives, but indeed in a world full of chaos and rupture.

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So this is in fact, the new normal, this still life. Of course, I say that sitting in Helsinki where life is becoming less still as Thomas mentioned the country started really to ease some restrictions a few days

ago, so I've had my first visit in a pub and all the rest of it. But it is really quite remarkable the extent to which life, not only around me, but around the world, has actually stood still.

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And I'm sure all of us have probably seen these pictures of the Trevi Fountain or Niagara Falls or wherever. Oxford Street, just completely empty. My hometown of Cambridge, England, it's extraordinary to see absolutely not one person on the backs. A place which is usually absolutely crowded with people. But that's not how it is. This is how it is.

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I don't know if you saw Spike Lee's recent very short video, what he calls, "A love letter to New York City." But it really brought tears to my eyes. It is just the most beautiful and moving and deeply touching rendition of New York City. It's not this city that never sleeps. It's sleeping.

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And so, this is the new present. And yet we find that people do all sorts of creative and unexpected things, even in these contrived conditions.

So this was one of my own favorite moments in the Alone Together concert that Lady Gaga put together and yes, I probably showed my age by saying that I did and do still love the Rolling Stones, and was I moved by watching the four of them perform You Can't Always Get What You Want from their homes.

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Even Charlie Watts, who found himself at home without his drum set, nonetheless pretended as if he was playing them. Yes, you can't always get what you want, but this current moment has been for many people also one where different kinds of creativity have been realized.

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What about the future? As Rebecca Solnit says, we're being asked to find another version of who we are. We need to equip ourselves for an unanticipated world. And part of the profound question that we have to ask ourselves is really who am I in this new present world in relation to the person I would like to be, the plans that I had in place are not necessarily ones which I can still follow.

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So what happens to me now? We also might ask ourself what does this current moment mean for my own identity. What kind of person will I later want to look back on and think, "Yes, this is how I behaved

during this pandemic? This is how I served other people or was in company with other people even when I could not be physically with them or whatever.”

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And the new feared and hoped for futures also include perhaps new impossibilities. I have here a picture of a festival, music festival, something I myself love. I love going to music festivals. Will we ever do that again? Yeah, hopefully, but when? That picture, looks to me as it is of a very different time. Indeed, it is.

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That might be a time that comes again, but I was looking at a survey. Some of you might have seen it, a survey of 511 epidemiologists. So it's not a scientific survey of what one should do. It was instead a study of their own views.

When is the next time that you would feel comfortable shaking hands with someone, or going on an airplane, or whatever and what you find out from this survey is that it's probably-- if we were to act in the way that was similar to epidemiologists who are calculating the risk for their own lives and those of their family, then I think it's probably going to be a long time till we are engaged in a setting such as this one.

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Okay, second axis is mediating between the real, the not real, and as I said, what Sartre calls the not yet real. What is the real? As I said, updating these slides for this talk I really almost felt like crying because I gave a version of this talk two weeks ago, and that top pointer there, that top bullet point said that there were, that day there had just become five million cases.

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So in that short time we have almost 3.5 million new cases and tomorrow we may well, have more than 8.5 million cases. We have more than 450,000 officially reported deaths. Of course, we know that is a very serious underestimation, it's only those ones which have been recorded in hospitals, etc.

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All sorts of current reals, so there's no vaccine, there's a shortage of testing, shortage of PPE, skyrocketing unemployment, etc. I'm going to talk about the United States for quite a while. Not only is it the country of my birth, but it also offers quite an unfortunate and dramatic illustration of the points I wish to raise.

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So what the United States in terms of the quote, real is that it has with 5% of the world's population, the U S has 33% of the world's cases of the virus. One of, a U. S. citizen dying every 49 seconds. I have to say, that is also outdated. It's a lot, they are dying a lot more now. But there are other realities, which are also of the current moment.

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We have seen an extension of trade union activism and workers' rights, an extension of benefits for instance, in places such as Amazon, where workers protested that they were being forced to risk their own health and safety so that they could provide non-urgent items for customers.

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And there was a lot of very effective political organizing around that and ultimately that changed. Around the world, we've seen not necessarily large scale, but nonetheless significant instances of early release of short-term prisoners. We've seen different programs which are aimed at including the homeless.

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Okay, so sheltering the homeless. There's been a number of programs we've seen throughout the world in large cities such as Los Angeles, which sadly has one of the world's largest homeless populations, Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, Paris and other places as well whereby hotels have been temporarily used as places to offer shelter to homeless people.

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And we've also seen the granting of temporary citizenship for migrants and asylum seekers in some countries, not only Portugal, but Portugal led the way on this. These were things which used to be considered impossible and yet they have happened. So we see in this moment, this real moment quite interesting developments.

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But they're not all good, needless to say. As we know this current moment has also seen a very serious rollback of human rights in many, many, many countries.

And as one activist in Nigeria phrased it, the pandemic is a gift for totalitarian governments. We've seen police brutality, we've seen widespread surveillance, we've seen suspension of many democratic rights indefinitely suspended, I should say.

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If you want, that is far beyond what I can talk about here, but for a very good review of this, I suggest you go to this website, the COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker, which really makes for quite rough reading. Yeah, it really does. Anyway, so this is also the current moment. It's very hard to put it all just under one umbrella.

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Okay, but let's move from the real to the not real. We have, those-- some of you might recall the intriguing phrase used by Kellyanne Conway. In Trump's White House of alternative facts. Now we have here alternative realities. Some people, some, me might like to call these lies. The president of the United States has actually variously described the COVID-19 as a hoax, a political conspiracy.

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He's told us it's contained, it's unique in history, it's no worse than the seasonal flu. He's even suggested that it might be cured by injecting disinfectant. He's told us all sorts of things. He's also told us that there's sufficient PPE and tests for all. Needless to say, none of these things are true.

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That doesn't mean that they are not taken as true and that there are not real consequences when he says these kinds of things.

I've made a slide to the right here on the screen of one of his Twitter followers, very charming where the young man says, "All the people who are placing themselves under self-quarantine are posers looking for a few cheap headlines. Stop being a baby and go to the gym. Obesity is the real pandemic."

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So we can see, what Trump says has real consequences, and he has real followers. Another aspect of the not real is not only what is false, but is what is a determined resistance to knowing what is real.

And I borrow that phrase from a wonderful Harvard psychiatrist John Mack who talked about our resistances to knowing the nuclear age, the horrors that were possible were so awful that we manifested quite determined behavior not to know what was in front of us.

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And a third and final manifestation of this magical thinking is some kind of an expression that we can just really wish the virus away. It's like little kids when they used to put their hands over their eyes and say, "you can't see me now." If we act as if it's not there, it will simply disappear.

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So let's have a little look here at some of the claims made by Trump. I actually stopped collating them after a while. It was a list that goes on endlessly. January the 22nd, he says, "We have it totally under control. It's just one person coming in from China. We have it under control. It's going to be just fine."

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The next month. "We're going to be pretty soon at only five people." Can you believe this? "And we could be at just one or two people over the next short period of time. So we've had very good luck." February 27th. "It's going to disappear one day. It's like a miracle. It will disappear."

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Then, a few days later, "I just think this is something that you can never really think is going to happen. It's an unforeseen problem. Boy, what a problem. Came out of nowhere."

March the 9th, "The coronavirus blindsided the world." And then March 19th. "I would view it as something that really just surprised the whole world. There's never been anything like this in history. There's never been and nobody's ever seen anything like this." Okay, they're not real. It's really just false.

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Let's look at the examples of the resistances to knowing and these are really quite sobering I have to say. Not only did the Obama White House do as they were by law required to do, which is to walk the new administration through a pandemic training program as the turnover between the administrations, not only did they do that, but in fact they produced and this isn't on here actually, they produced a 60-page what they call a pandemic playbook in preparation for the president.

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There's no evidence that anyone in Trump's office ever read the playbook. It was very detailed about what would happen in the case of a pandemic and what kinds of needs there were and indeed current needs that we had in the United States, specifically about the lack of PPE and testing. As I say, there is no evidence whatsoever that was ever read.

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Okay, now we jump forward, we go to 2018, one year into the Trump administration, the president disbands the National Security Council's pandemic response team.

He actually, ironically, did this, I think it was the day before the 100th anniversary of the acknowledgment of the Spanish flu and Luciana Borio, who was the director for medical and biodefense preparedness at the NSC said at that acknowledgement of the Spanish flu that currently that is to say in March 2018 the threat of a pandemic flu is the number one health security concern.

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Okay. She went further, "I believe, and actually said it's not a possibility. It is a certainty that it will happen." Between January and August 2019 there was a simulated exercise by the Department of Health and Human Services, which was called the Crimson Contagion. And this report was delivered to the White House in October of last year, 2019.

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And this report described the federal government as, quote, "underfunded, underprepared, uncoordinated for a life-or-death battle with a virus for which no treatment existed." Okay, that's a pretty clear statement.

The following month, while many of us, including myself, were celebrating Thanksgiving in our homes in the last week of November that very same week, the White House was made aware of the contagion in China's Wuhan region by the National Center for Medical Intelligence.

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So there were reports of added and a marked increase in activity around hospitals in the Wuhan region. And based on this and wire and computer intercepts coupled with these satellite images, analysts told the White House that it could be, that Wuhan could be experiencing a quote, "cataclysmic event."

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Then, in early January to February, the White House received no fewer than a dozen intelligence briefings, warning of the threat of a pandemic. Finally, on February the 27th, the Senate Intelligence Committee stated that the virus is probably more akin to the 1918 pandemic.

So here we see the enormity of Trump's resistances to knowing. The evidence was there. It wasn't only there once or twice. It was repeatedly over. It was repeatedly put in front of him, and he repeatedly turned away.

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Again, I think we can say that perhaps he did this with the idea that if you could act as if it wasn't happening, maybe people would think it wasn't. And you will not have missed some of his wonderful self-assessments of the effectiveness of his policy, despite the numbers that I told you just a moment ago.

He says that the United States treatment of the pandemic is, quote, "a great success." When he was asked to rate his handling of the disease, he said, "Well, we did a spectacular job. I'd rate it a 10."

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Again, we've done a great job. Then on May the 5th, we're opening up our country again. Very controversial move as we know. This is what we're doing, and I'll tell you the whole world is excited watching us because we're leading the world. By this time, we really were leading the world, but in nothing like a way that anyone else would like to emulate.

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We were the case study of what could happen if you pretended the pandemic wasn't real. The following day, he made the crass statement, "For those people that have lost someone, nothing can ever happen that's going to replace that. But from an economic standpoint, purely an economic standpoint, I think next year's potentially going to be one of the best years we've ever had."

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Admittedly, that's not quite as crude as the extraordinary comment he made about George Floyd looking down from heaven and being happy with what he saw in terms of the uptick in unemployment rates. On May the 11th, he then says, "All throughout the country, the numbers are coming down rapidly." This was about the time that we passed the 100,000-case mark.

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Okay, so let's move to the not yet real. This is the place where we look at what are both possible and probable futures and think what could happen to us in this new present moment. So as we know, the pandemic has produced a lot of framing of conversations as countries sitting in relation to each other in terms of who got the virus first and where we can look to try to anticipate what is coming around the bend for us.

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And so there has been a lot of this. We can see that, people look at what happened, especially in Europe, at Italy and Spain and say if we can learn from their example in a country such as Finland where the quarantine was introduced very early on relative to the number of cases here, but this was actually based on looking at what was happening in other countries.

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This not yet real also points to different possible futures depending on which actions are taken in the present day. So for instance in the UK the idea that we might actually the window of opportunity for developing a track and trace system might in fact no longer be possible. We might be running out of time.

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So futures which had once been possible futures can also the window can close on those possibilities. I would like to say that there are other examples of this. For instance, again, Finland where I'm currently living there's a lot of talk about the different strategies which were followed by Finland and Sweden.

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Who, as you'll probably know did not introduce a quarantine, a formal quarantine, and has a far higher death rate, and hasn't as yet anyway received the economic benefits that they had anticipated doing. So there is a comparison that had, I read this just a few days ago, had Finland not introduce the quarantine when it did the death rate would have been, and this was something like 12,000. Four times what it currently is.

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So this could have been our future had we not done this. And another example is in the UK where Neil Ferguson, the once leading scientific advisor of the government who then was made to step down for breaking conditions of the quarantine.

Neil Ferguson said a few days ago that if the government had in fact introduced quarantine when other European countries did, we would have seen less than half of the current deaths, which we have, which have now, as you might know, exceed 40,000. So really way out ahead in front of other European countries.

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So had we done this, we would have had a different present. Okay. So then again, anticipating what are future actions. Okay.

The third and final dimension that comes into view when we bring together narrative and imagination is this challenge of reconstructing the other.

And for many in the global North and for people generally of privilege, the 1%, we've never really had to confront ourselves as really being vulnerable to pandemics, to disease at this nature. We have regarded things like Ebola and SARS and MERS and indeed cholera and all sorts of other things as, yes, sad, but somebody else's story, not ours.

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And all of the sudden the pandemic actually makes us revisit this view. Actually, even Prince Charles, even Boris Johnson can actually be vulnerable. This has actually also led to a sort of mantra that we're all in this together. But that, of course, has also come under criticism because we're not really all in this together equally.

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We know that the pandemic has disproportionately affected certain sectors of the population for all sorts of reasons. So, it's a rather complicated coming to see likeness with the other. Still, we know that the pandemic is not unimaginable for everyone. Many people in around the world have already experienced things like this.

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And indeed, I heard one Kashmiri man saying, "We know about lockdown. We've been in lockdown since the autumn, so this isn't new for us." Okay.

Another other who we confront in this time is indeed ourselves, the selves we once were. The selves we were before the pandemic, before our sense of stability and certainty and marching step by step towards a predictable future, before all that was shattered.

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As I mentioned earlier, this is also a psychological challenge for us. The current pandemic has demonstrated most dramatically a global interconnectedness. I want to say like it or not. The theme of these seminars is that of borders. But in fact, the pandemic really shows that, how very artificial these borders are.

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And there's many reasons why we should worry about other people who have become infected in faraway countries, but not least because, as Samantha Power said, "We are only as well as the very sickest among us on this globe in terms of this virus." Finally, a fourth way in which we come to rethink our ideas of the other is something I already mentioned, which is revisiting of other pandemics in history.

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All of a sudden, they don't seem to be quite so long ago and far away, although, as Adam Kucharski has written in his book, *The Rules of Contagion*. "We have to take caution not to oversimplify and put all pandemics in the same box." Indeed, he says, "If you've seen one pandemic, you've seen one pandemic." So both respecting the difference and the continuity between these.

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This is just an example that we are not equally all in this together. There's a wonderful article by Aditya Chakraborty in *The Guardian* where he wrote about his recently deceased mom and he says he talks about her journey to the UK and he says, "They were plunged close to poverty, then saw their family land in East Bengal disappear after partition. Even now, as our world is turned upside down, it is worth remembering that some among us have lived through far worse."

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So this is not the most challenging experience for everyone who is living through this pandemic. So the challenge before us, as my slide here says, is to reimagine a new future. And here I'm going to draw on this slide and the next on the work of Rebecca Solnit.

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She talks about us as being at in a moment of a crossroads. "One of our main tasks now is to understand this moment, what it might require of us, what it might make possible.

There's no going back to 'normal' "The future will not, in crucial ways, be anything like the past." And finally, again, staying with Rebecca Solnit, she says, "When this storm clears, we may, as do people who have survived a serious illness or accident, see where we were and where we should go in a new light.

We may feel free to pursue change in ways that seemed impossible, while the ice of the status quo was locked up. We may have a profoundly different sense of ourselves, our communities, our systems of production, and our future."

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And so, I would like to conclude simply by saying that the hope for our future really depends upon a rethinking of our past. Thank you very much.