

Unmasked: The Virus and the Disease

by Roger Bowles

1 Log-line

The story of how, in the early months of 2020 amidst the world-wide coronavirus pandemic, Britain subjected itself to an epidemic of irrational fear and anxiety, doing itself untold economic and societal damage by shutting down its economy and failing its most vulnerable.

“Unmasked: The Virus and the Disease” will draw parallels between the medical and the memetic crises, uncover the some of the hidden impacts of government and individual responses, and take a cautionary look at the implications of the emerging “New Normal” for our culture and society.

2 Summary

SARS-CoV-2 (The Virus) was introduced to the the UK in late 2019 or early 2020 and is commonly understood to have originated in Wuhan Province in China and to have been carried and spread initially by air passengers from that region. Patients with COVID-19 (The Disease) began to present at GP’s surgeries and hospitals shortly afterwards, the symptoms mostly being mild and difficult to distinguish from those of the common cold or flu. After an initial measured approach to the new virus, the government, under pressure from the media and public bodies, and perhaps guided by private polling, set out a response to the so-called emergency that involved the imposition of the most egregious suppression of civil liberties in the United Kingdom in peacetime ever – the “lock-down”. This was intended only to “protect the NHS and save lives”, but the measures remained in place even when it became apparent that the NHS was in no danger of being overwhelmed by cases of COVID-19.

The economic impact of the shutting down of business and the government expenditure required to sustain the economy in deep-freeze have been so vast and extensive as to be impossible to quantify at present. The severity and extent of lock-down’s societal and cultural impact may well be similar, but the lack of open debate and the framing of such debate as does exist in terms of “lives verses money” makes it difficult in the current climate to assess or question that impact.

Today, following an easing of restrictions in July it is being intimated by government that in order to prevent a “second wave” a further set of restrictions may

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be imposed. This is set against the government's confusing, haphazard, and scientifically dubious policies with regard to "face-coverings", and quarantine arrangements with other countries. In the meantime uncertainty and fear prevail, businesses continue to go under, the NHS continues to turn away patients, and society is increasingly divided between the vast majority of people whose jobs and livelihoods are impacted severely, perhaps permanently, and those influential few for whom "working from home" is a positive development. The lock-down has been applied and experienced differently between the public and private sectors, between the young and the old, and between the nations of the United Kingdom. Division is fast becoming the most salient feature of this new way of life.

There are authoritative voices of dissent, largely unheard in the traditional broadcast and print media but vocal on social media and in scientific forums from the start of the crisis, and in private people are heard questioning what has been done to their country in the name of disease prevention. In this film these questioning voices will be able to make their case set alongside a calm assessment of facts such as they can be determined. Through extended interviews both set-piece and extemporaneous the film will explore how individual and social behaviour that once would have been considered pathological has been normalised during the crises, and, if this behaviour could be considered a "Disease", how to identify and protect ourselves against the social and political "Virus" that is responsible for it.

The film will not underplay the seriousness of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the disease it causes, but will seek to put them into perspective historically and with regard to the measures put in place to protect us from them. Where there is a lack of evidence-based understanding the film will acknowledge and contextualise that uncertainty, questioning whether the "precautionary principle" that some purport to embrace as defining the correct attitude to unknown risks can be allowed to stand unchallenged as a guide to policy and behaviour.

To have maximum impact it is necessary to move quickly and to commit to film the debates that are happening now in this supposed eye of the corona storm while the arguments are fresh, and to do so without the benefit of hindsight or through the fog of the inevitable rewriting of history that will begin once this crisis is over and the political and media roadshow move on the next. We are at a "goldilocks moment" where we can practically and logistically film, working within the law in such a way as to address subjects' real fears, but close enough to the perceived threat that we can get some of the flavour and heightened awareness of the surreal situation at the height of the crisis. For that reason it is proposed that primary photography gets underway quickly and that much of what would usually come under the title "pre-production" is

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done on the hoof. What is practicable will inform to some degree the overall shape of the film, and become part of its narrative structure.

Whereas the direct effects of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 may in due course be forgotten like previous outbreaks of seasonal respiratory disease, and the long-term economic effects of our response are certain and will be felt through increased taxes and a suppressed economy for some considerable time, social and cultural effects that may well be profound are barely now beginning to be discussed. “Unmasked: The Virus and the Disease” will be an engaging, informative and as near contemporaneous as possible a challenge to the orthodoxy surrounding the corona response, and a timely contribution to the debate.

3 About Roger Bowles

Roger is a cameraman and producer working across film and drama, and live entertainment. On the books of Arricrew, the prestigious crewing service for film and television, he has over 20 years experience working in high-end production.

As a member of the camera crew his credits include contributions to major feature productions such as Edge of Tomorrow starring Tom Cruise and RED II starring Bruce Willis, concerts for Madonna and the Rolling Stones, and live broadcasts such as the X-Factor Finals and the Royal Wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

Performing the dual role of cameraman and producer he has overseen and shot the short film “A Nice Touch” directed by Dick Jones and starring Paloma Faith and Dougray Scott, a commercial for Microsoft’s X-box, and the promotional shoot for Netflix’s “Sex Education” - each budgeted at around £35,000.

Roger had been active politically, contributing to Boris Johnson’s mayoral campaigns and to two general elections working for Toby Young’s Campaignwatch site. In support of Brexit Roger produced a short video “Brexit – The Facts”, also in collaboration with Toby Young, which accumulated more than a million views.

Six years working in news, mostly for Sky News and often based at 4 Millbank has given Roger a working knowledge of the “Westminster Village” and the 24H news cycle. He is widely read and takes his news from a variety of alternative sources as well as keeping an eye on the mainstream media.