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'I CAN'T BREATHE'

Metabolising (im)mobile antisocialities

Anna Reading
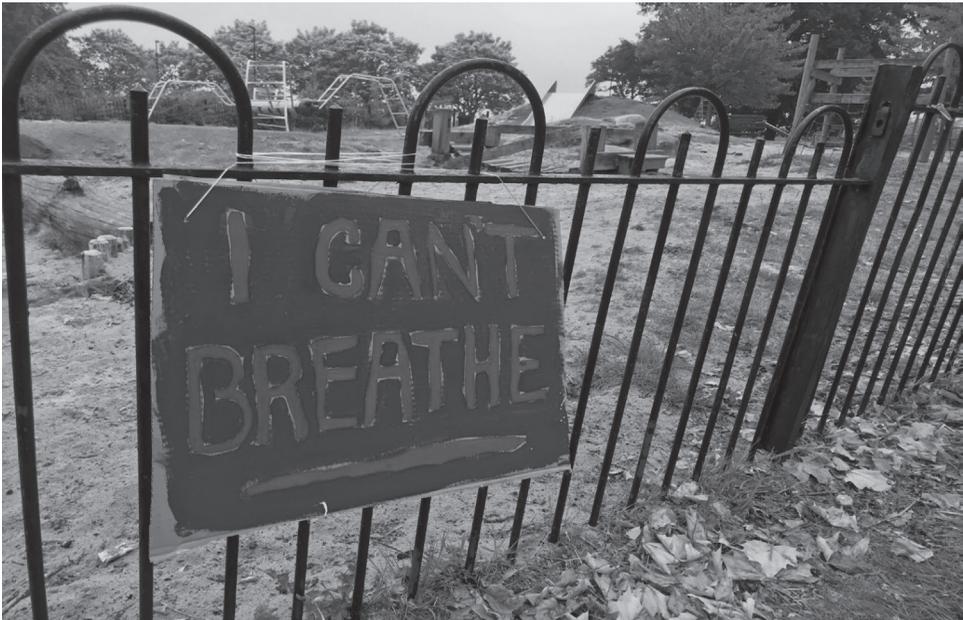
Figure 16.1   Children's playground, Brockley, London. June 2020.
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Introduction

'I can't breathe' were the words repeated multiple times by George Floyd, an African American man who was held down, immobilised, choked and killed by a police officer in the US on 25 May 25 2020. 'I can't breathe' was the phrase politically socialised through #BlackLivesMatter and mobilised through globalised media coverage of demonstrations that erupted after George Floyd's death during the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns (Anon, 2020).

'I can't breathe' were also the last words of Eric Garner, who was also subjected to a choke hold by New York City police in July 2014. He said the phrase 11 times before dying of asphyxiation. At least 50 demonstrations took place in the US in response to Eric Garner's death, mobilizing and socializing the phrase 'I can't breathe'. 'I can't breathe' was the phrase circulated through Black Lives Matter (BLM) with the multiple names of other African American men who had died while placed by the police in chokeholds (Anon, 2020).

When a person is immobilised by being placed in a chokehold, if it is a carotid artery restraint, their brain is deprived of oxygen. They fall unconscious, and then they die. Or, if choked through a restriction to their airways, they become asphyxiated, deprived of oxygen and die. When checkpoints, barriers and vigilantes are used to immobilise and prevent the political socialisation of democratic protests such as BLM, it is an attempt to deprive them of political lifeblood, to kill off protests and protestors. 'I can't breathe' also thus signified the choking of the body politic, of democratic process and representation.

In addition and in parallel to the socialisation and mobilisation of 'I can't breathe' by #BlackLivesMatter, 'I can't breathe' was used as a slogan by climate protestors to capture the asphyxiation caused disproportionately within poorer communities in the Global North and in the Global South by air pollution (Simmons and Ahearn, 2017). 'I can't breathe' thus also became a slogan for this dimension of extractive capitalism, signifying a state of global emergency, drawing attention to pollutants in cities from London to Delhi causing breathing difficulties, health problems and – in some cases – death. As Jessica Rapson shows, racism and the climate emergency are structurally intertwined: the oil industry in the US is mapped onto the sites of slavery that produced sugar and cotton (Rapson, 2018).

Being short of breath, and eventually unable to breathe without the aid of a ventilator, is a key symptom of being infected with the Covid-19 virus which attacks human lungs and airways. National and regional lockdowns, stoppages and confinement to homes during the global pandemic in 2020 and into 2021 were used to prevent its spread, along with the use of masks and shields over mouths and noses to filter the air from viral contamination.

This chapter cycles through some of the intersectional mediations of 'I can't breathe' as a starting point to breathe life into an emergent analytical framework for *im*mobile *anti*socialities, which I argue here is not separate from but part of mobile socialities. Drawing on multidisciplinary approaches beyond media studies to create a conceptual framework, the chapter gives air to elements that are *im*mobile and *anti*social. The chapter asks: how do we understand the experience of interruption and amplified displacement that may include frictions – accidental or deliberate – of locative, temporal and social breakage experienced during stoppages of movement which we might conceptualise as immobile socialities? How do we understand what happens to sociality when the possibility of movement of people, but not data or things, is curtailed, as in the Covid-19 lockdown, as result of protests and blockades or as a result of police or security checkpoints on top of the barriers of racist micro-aggressions and deeply inherited structural barriers which we might call immobile antisocialities?

The chapter's first part works outwards from the slogan 'I can't breathe' as inspiration for a metaphorical method to 'metabolise' some thoughtful vitality for the second part that develops a multi-disciplinary conceptual framework for (im)mobile antisocialities. I use the word metabolise and associated metaphorical language of metabolisation because although we might consider metabolisation to be limited to the transformation of food into energy, biologically it denotes a wider process that includes the act of breathing. It is the breath that supplies oxygen that is then transported through the blood into the cells of the body, where it plays a crucial role in the metabolisation of glucose into energy to fuel the body (politic). The waste products that include carbon dioxide produced during metabolisation are carried back to the lungs by the blood from

where they are exhaled in our breath. Humans – and, by extension, human societies (and the body politic, we might add) – need to be able to breathe air to create energy through aerobic metabolisation: Glucose + Oxygen $\rightarrow$ Carbon dioxide + water + energy.

Thus, the chapter is not seeking to conduct a traditional empirical analysis of the meanings of 'I can't breathe', but rather seeks to work outwards from this multiply layered and powerful phrase to develop insights through 'key metaphors, ideas, concepts, and relations' (Jabareen, 2008: 51) that can help us extend our conceptualisations of mobile socialties through a metasynthesis that suggests a conceptual framework for (im)mobile antisocialities. Two main ideas that are given life from 'I can't breathe' are suggested then for our conceptual framework: the idea of a 'respiratory ontology' to suggest how mobility and immobility, sociality and antisociality give life to each other, and as part of this the idea of radical antisociality. The chapter is deliberately written through the language and structure of the breath. We cycle through the various immobile antisocialities aspirated by 'I can't breathe'; at points we gasp, wheeze, before then catching a breath to see what then conceptually transpires.

'I can't breathe': giving life to immobile antisocialities

The mediation, political socialisation and mobilisations of the phrase 'I can't breathe' became *the* slogan for 2020. It catalyses the individual human everyday act of breathing as a shared human need and experience that is essential to all human mobile socialities. We begin to breathe the earth's atmosphere from the moment we are born. We continue breathing for our entire lives, however long or short. We spend a lifetime breathing in, breathing out, staying alive. When we die, our breath ceases. Thus, 'I can't breathe' oxygenates not just the shared experience of breathing but congests what it means when breathing is difficult or laboured, when we are physically choked, unable to breathe, dying, then taking our last breath. Politically and culturally, it both catabolises (breaks down) the knowledge of the ultimate emergency humans face of biological and social death, of cultural and symbolic annihilation, and yet it also anabolises (synthesises and builds up) hope of restitution and renewal.

'I can't breathe' aspirates and expels the multiple biological, cultural and social impacts of the Covid-19 virus. Like most viruses, the coronavirus thrives on human sociality and flourishes within late capitalist mobilities. It causes infection through droplets of moisture from exhaled human breath in the air and excreted sweat left on surfaces touched or handled by an infected person (Shabir, 2020). Covid-19 then enters the human body through the mouth, nose or eyes and moves within its host to its favoured environment, human lungs, which are transformed into a pathogenic home as it feeds and reproduces (Zu et al., 2020). We humans are its chosen medium and squashy vehicle. And we can see why: it is not only that our lungs provide a perfect home and we are adept at pedestrian movement, but technologically we are supported for hard shell mobile socialities. Planes, trains and automobiles were key to the globalised transportation of the virus and its rapid transmission, creating a pandemic (Zheng et al., 2020). Although the Spanish Flu of 1918 was spread rapidly as a result of troop movements and concentrations (Webel and Freeman, 2020), nowadays 'connected world with air travel and denser populations . . . make the spread of COVID-19 easier and faster' (Terry, 2020) At the same time, human knowledge and understanding of Covid-19, its numbers of deaths, its spread and the tactics of governments to combat its global spread through immobilising human hosts has been mobilised through social and mass media (Costigan and Xin, 2020; Ducharme, 2020). 'I can't breathe' then oxygenates the difficulties of dividing and locking down life from non-life, sociality from antisociality, mobility from immobility. As Povinelli (2016: 42) suggests, 'human lungs are constant reminders that this separation is imaginary. Where is the human body if it is viewed

from with the lung?' She cites how the lungs know intimately 'the larger, massive biotic assemblage – plants, bacteria, animals, microbes' (Povinelli, 2016: 42). The lungs are a medium of mobile sociality, yet they are choked by pollution, and they turn us against each other through the incursion of contagious pathogens. The lungs can also be stopped all together through the deliberate racist strangulation and crushing by another human being that intersects with a world running out breath, suffocating through polluted air, the killing of phytoplankton in the world's oceans and deforestation (Keller, 2020). 'I can't breathe' brings attention to how human lungs are at the interstices of global eco-asphysia, and in so doing, analytically metabolises how mobile sociality breathes life and gains energy from immobile antisociality.

'I can't breathe' is also a slogan used in demonstrations and in graffiti by climate activists from around the world (Simmons and Ahearn, 2017): it anabolises the impact on the planet's biosphere of extractive capitalism with its dirty, global travel and greedy hyper connectivity (Chow, 2020). It inhales and exhales the planetary sighs of relief in multiple locations during national and regional pandemic lockdowns: media reports suggested that the pausing of the world economy created a cleaner and easier breathing experience (for some). Some media reports suggested that working from home led to the reconstitution of hyperlocalities that were less frenetic, less driven by consumerism and the tertiary economy of restaurants and shopping centres and in which people relearnt new kinds of connection and being as a result of forced immobility and reduced face-to-face sociality (O'Connor, 2020; Leggatt, 2020). Social media posts bore witness to how cities and people from Mumbai to Venice savoured cleaner air and clearer water as result of a reduction in tourism (Brunton, 2020), the closure of factories and the grounding of the world's airlines (Slater, 2020). Media and social media posts celebrated lockdown rewilding: birds returning to sites they had long abandoned due to human activity; goats descending the Welsh mountains to gather on a village high street (Stuart, 2020); seas, rivers and canals running clear (Capovilla, 2020); the celebration of a quiet sky filled with stars visible in cities from England to India (Bhagat, 2020). At the same time, the media created new supplements, new assemblage production forms and public service initiatives. The UK saw the development of what became dubbed quarantine culture with the BBC developing a new on-line site dedicated to this and newspapers such as *The Guardian* developing a special on-line section entitled Lockdown Culture. Such media reported on how people missing the face to face social contact of cafés, bars, gyms, concerts, films and arts venues, creatively sought to connect through virtual online quizzes, cook-a-longs and avidly shared and engaged with free online content disseminated by physically closed galleries, museums and theatres, as well as creating semi-professional creative outputs that included videos, songs and street operas.

Yet, 'I can't breathe' simultaneously catabolises – breaks down – and takes us into the traumatic and claustrophobic dissociative disorder of a lockdown immobilising human beings, with states and institutions directing requirements for social distance from others that go against neurotypical modes of sociality. It catalyses lockdown claustrophobia and isolating cruelties for a human species that neurotypically propends to sociality, to physical and spiritual congregation, to our love of being together, face to face and day to day. It reminds us how neurotypical humans are physically demonstrative in friendships, especially in acts of care and rites of passage. It draws our analytical breath to the congestion of lockdown isolation and distance, of state enforced immobile antisocialities: children prevented from visiting elderly parents in care homes; the dying child unable to be attended to by his mother in hospital (Murphy, 2020); mothers giving birth without their partners (Collinson, 2020); those already living alone forced into unbearable loneliness to the point of mental collapse (Shepka and England, 2020); funerals and weddings unable to be conducted except virtually or with limited family members in masks, gloves and gowns; masks and screens thickening sociality of expression and touch; singing together banned

because of the viral load in the release of collective breath, the prevention of prayer and worship being corporally conducted together, assembled instead through data connecting distanced human beings; shopping reduced for most to socially distanced queues to essential food shops and expanded for the well off into amplified online delivery; sports activities ceasing all together and then restarting with games played without spectators in closed stadia.

'I can't breathe' also metaphorically inspires and exhales a number of intersectional inequalities that stretches our understanding of (im)mobile (anti)socialites. One report said that the Covid-19 lockdown was enabling some people with disabilities to take part in work, culture and socialising from their own home for the first time (Ryan, 2020). When I complained that I was finding it difficult to interpret the complex feelings and expressions of masked people in shops or disembodied colleagues' faces on screens, my autistic son astutely replied: 'Welcome to my world. For me, it has always been like that'. A friend with multiple sclerosis said lockdown was an equaliser: since no one was going out, she did not feel she was missing out, and social distancing meant she felt less anxious when she did go out since people gave her space. 'I can't breathe' also breathes life into the temporal relativity of the immobile antisocialties of lockdown: two months of quarantine is phenomenologically much longer for the elderly, near the end of life, and the toddler at the start of life.

'I can't breathe' is also an anabolic reminder of the disabling impact of the Covid-19 virus on the organs, and especially the lungs of the most extremely affected patients, many elderly and vulnerable, but also those with underlying health conditions, who then had to be immobilised for weeks or even months through medically induced comas in order to be hooked up to ventilators, machines that do their breathing for them. 'I can't breathe', then, suggests we think about the intersectional inequalities that run through immobilised antisocialities: many of those directly affected and a disproportionate number who lost their lives in the US and UK were those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who were on the front line as care workers, cleaners, nurses and doctors (Keller, 2020; Razaq et al., 2020).

'I can't breathe' gained its most powerful momentum as a slogan mobilised in June 2020 by the political movement BLM catalysing a new generation to antiracism. Despite the lockdowns, and the regulations preventing people coming together outside of their households, BLM protests burst bodily onto the streets of cities and towns not just in the US and then the UK, but globally (Maqbool, 2020). 'I can't breathe' was chanted by angry and grieving crowds to commemorate the dying words of George Floyd, recorded by witnesses as he was killed by a police officer who knelt on his neck for nine minutes, several minutes after he took his last breath (Liubchenkova, 2020). 'I can't breathe', which were his last words, was subsequently inhaled and exhaled by multiple others; the phrase was mediated, mobilised and socialised, and was used on banners and billboards, and during protests. The phrase was given its own entry in Wikipedia, showing its links and origins with the last words of Eric Garner. It brought into public consciousness multiple deaths and police brutality against black people in the US and developed into a wider call against to integrate and understand the global legacy of probably the most shocking mobile antisociality of human history: the transatlantic slave trade.

'I can't breathe' then inhales and exhales how the industrial wealth that allows for present-day mobile socialities was and is accrued from centuries of exploitation and racism. African people experienced forced movement for over 500 years through the European and predominantly British-led traffic in human beings. This forced mobility was mediated through tools and technologies designed by white Europeans to immobilise and desocialise the African people they/we enslaved including the infrastructure of slave ships, prisons, docks and plantations, as well as symbolic culture articulated through advertisements, racist literature and political culture fixed through racist legislation. Integral to the (im)mobile antisociality of the slave trade was

the deliberate and cruel severance of family bonds and connections, or what Orlando Patterson (1982) coined as 'natal alienation'. Yet, this legacy which underpins the political, social and economics of mobile sociality is so often dissolved into the 'much more palatable tonic of the nation's role in abolition' (Manjapra, 2018). What 'I can't breathe' also apirates and then expels is a particularly perverse immobile antisociality – the principle of 'compensated emancipation'. Nineteenth-century English law did not allow for moveable chattel to be claimed as property: 'rights to moveable things such as household possessions or tools or livestock – were considered unstable, expendable or ambiguous' (Manjapra, 2018). So, slaves were aligned discursively by slave owners with immoveable land and buildings, and slave owners claimed that with abolition, states should be responsible for paying slave owners compensation for the loss of slaves in the same way they were paying landowners for land taken over for canals, docks, and roads. Hence the UK's Slavery Compensation Act 1837[1] compensated slave owners approximately £20 million in around 40,000 awards – while nothing was paid to those who had been enslaved. The model was copied by the governments of France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Brazil (Manjapra, 2018).

These metabolic pathways of 'I can't breathe' in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic and the BLM globalised campaigns takes us next to the toppling of fixed statues and monuments to slave owners and those associated with the slave trade. One example in the UK was when the memorial to slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down by BLM protestors in the city of Bristol and dragged some distance by protestors before being dumped into the docks. This was no coincidence – the monument could have been pushed into other more convenient bodies of water, but the Bristol docks are the site where slave ships traded in black lives (Farrer, 2020) 'I can't breathe' thus metabolises those mediated protests that led to moving the immoveable, to the toppling of multiple statues across Europe, the US and Australia. Sky news in Australia and the US reported this as antisocial cultural vandalism (Statue pull downs cultural vandalism, 2020), rather than acts to topple the antisocial legacy of racism and slavery (See Watts, 2020).[2]

'I can't breathe' metabolises the mobile socialities disrupted during Covid-19; it transfers the oxygen of our thinking to its wider immobile antisocialities: the isolation, disconnections and social destructions caused by extractive capitalism and its associated intersectional racist inequalities. But it also inspires pathways to regeneration and restitution. Cycling through the phrase 'I can't breathe' suggests two points of extension to mobile sociality. The first is a non-dyadic, non-dichotomous or respiratory approach to thinking about the relationships between mobile sociality and immobile antisociality. As Peter Adey (2006) argues, mobility and immobility are relational. To this, we might add that sociality and antisociality are likewise: they require each other; they threaten to choke each other while breathing life into each other. It is not simply that one includes the other, but that the constituent elements – mobility and sociality – break down and synthesise each other. This in turn inspires us to rethink and recentre antisociality not only to take account of its negative, destructive capabilities, but as valuable and generative in its own right.

(Im)mobile antisociality: a respiratory ontology

Much communications work struggles to critique the assumption that there is a division between the self and technology, between the human dimension of communication and mediated technologies we then use to enhance, broadcast, connect or assemble our communications. Mobile socialities, particularly if derived from a Foucauldian or even Deleuzian approach, tend to be inflected with an idea of subject-technology relations that is based on a structural bipartition between the intimate (social) self and exterior mobile technology/media technology. Even if it

is understood that the relationship between the two is dialogical or relational (see for example in this volume, Costa [Chapter 8]; Hill [Chapter 18]), there is, nonetheless, an underlying assumption that the technologies that afford mobilities and socialities are in some ways separate from the human. Yet, the discussion of 'I can't breathe' suggests that media technologies – as well as those of capitalism, of slavery, of life-saving ventilators – are intimately connected through, into and out of the human subject. As I have argued elsewhere (Reading, 2016), the dimension of the human self related to memory not only changes through and with technologies, but, building on an approach to subject-technology derived from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, we might deduce that in the unevenly globalised digitised world of the 21st century, we are born, live and die within a techno-mnemonic ecology termed 'the globital memory field'. Humans are never free from media technologies – they penetrate the body (through the language we speak or through medical technology, for example) and extend well beyond the human subject as we listen to the interior of the planet or the origins of the universe. Miller (2008) suggests that to explain this we draw on the Lacanian idea of extimacy or intimate exteriority which refutes the idea of a clear boundary between inside and outside/ intimate and exterior and hence self and technology. But I would suggest it is in the figural image of the lungs conjured by the phrase 'I can't breathe' that suggests we bring to immobile antisocialities a metabolic understanding of its catabolic and anabolic instability, porosity and changeability, and between the (im)mobilites and (anti)socialities of the self and technologies.

Within the idea of respiratory ontology of immobile antisociality, the mobile and the social includes and is dialogue with its antithesis, in ways that may be characterised as being potentially exploitative. Mobility studies increasingly recognises mobilities interrelationships with immobility, stasis and stillness. As Craig Martin (2011: 192) argues, 'stillness cannot be disentangled from movement – they are always immanent to one another'. Martin draws on Michel Serres's classic essay on the 'spinning top' (2011: 200) which is running and yet stays in the same place, spinning yet not moving, rocking and yet stable.

Some work on immobility suggests the potential of immobility for renewal, for the development of new selves and new actions within stillness: this accords with reports of the pandemic pause and lockdown as periods for some of reflection and renewal (Leggatt, 2020). Coker (2011: 99) suggests that during deliberative and collective stillness at a local festival in Nottingham, UK, people witnessed 'a new social configuration existing alongside or even as an alternative to the more habitual or typical social assemblages operating within the city'. Her suggestion of the 'potential' of active and resistant forms of immobility and stillness were certainly part of what emanated from 'I can't breathe' when footballers and other prominent public figures collectively 'take the knee' to signal support for BLM. We see something similar in the uses of collective stillness by climate activists to stop the circulation and movement of people through physical blockades.

Yet, enforced stillness and immobility, such as that for the migrant, also constitutes chronic waiting. In some circumstances, it leads to death: trafficked migrants in conditions of cramped proximity in shipping containers who then suffocate and die. (Martin, 2011: 192). Drawing on Appadurai's work on 'scapes', Martin points to 'disjunctions of contemporary mobilities' (Martin, 2011: 195), arguing that there are different levels and speeds of mobilities: financial capital moves quickly; as does media data or immaterial information. For some, there is 'turbulent stillness' (Martin, 2011: 199) far from respite or calm, which involves acute uncertainty and instability. Indeed, the mediations of 'I can't breathe' take us to the ways in which nation-states during the pandemic used the anxiety of contagion and future uncertainty to lock down the movement of bodies across space and banned congregation and gathering. While the mediascape retained fluidity along with goods, and those identified as key workers were permitted to

move, the remaining populations were held still in a state of uncertainty and anxiety while on furlough or disconnected from loved ones.

Mobility scholars have argued that within capitalism moments of controlled immobility are deliberate acts to create more profit. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2011), in their essay 'Still Waiting, Still Moving', show in their logistical analysis of media data in the world's largest ports there is an absence of both movement and sociality of people. To them, 'stillness is not potentiality. It doesn't necessarily imply the capacity to struggle, subtract or constitute new subjectivities' (Neilson and Rossiter, 2011: 52). Rather, the pause – or what they characterise as 'the grinding halt' – is an occasion 'to discover new and unforeseen frontiers of capital regeneration' (Neilson and Rossiter, 2011: 52). In the case of 'I can't breathe' within the Covid-19 lockdown alongside immobile sociality which the media captured and replayed as citizen-generated opera singing from balconies and virtual cook-a-longs, we also saw the amplification of video call platforms. Every school, workplace, and home was penetrated to the core by cameras with every desktop, laptop, tablet and mobile phone blooming with newly downloaded apps for Zoom, Teams, Slack and Skype. During lockdown, worldwide sales of desktop cameras rocketed and downloading of video calling software boomed: Zoom, for example, reported an additional 169% increase in profits in the three months to 30 April to $328.2 million, with an additional 180,000 customer organisations with more than ten employees and a profit of $27 million in the pandemic lockdown period, which constituted more than the total for the prior financial year (Sherman, 2020) As Neilson and Rossiter (2011: 56) note, 'In software focussed supply chains we see how stillness as delay holds an intimate connection to the replenishment of capital'. At the same time every immobilised and de-socialised work-from-home worker from kitchen showroom designers, games writers, teachers and medical advisers was suddenly deskilled in embodied social communication and was catapulted into rapid proficiency in disembodied assemblage-mediated communication, rewiring our brains and bodies for capitalism's profit-driven next phase.

'I can't breathe' within the context of Covid-19–induced lockdown suggests that the pausing of some dimensions of mobile sociality did not simply mark the capacity to constitute new subjectivities, but was nonetheless an attempt to 'insert asymmetrical modalities' of racism and planetary destruction within this technocratic surge for capital and control. It is also notable that within the media coverage of the pandemic, it became apparent that beyond a certain duration, capital required movement. In March, April and May of 2020, politicians' messages in the UK were to 'Stay home. Save the NHS' within the consequent production of 'lockdown culture' that ranged from books to posters (See Bar, 2020). Then by late June and July 2020, furloughed workers paid for by the UK state, unmoved at home apparently 'doing nothing', sitting around in shorts and jogging bottoms, as the media put it, were suddenly required to get moving and return to productive work. 'Get Britain Moving Again' said the *Daily Mail* (Owen and Cahill, 2020). 'Get UK back to work' reported the *Times* (Parker, 2020). And once people were back at work (in theory, though most were working all along but through their computers), the message then was to 'Get out and shop, PM to tell Britain' (Elliot, 2020), reported the *Times*, and 'Shop for Britain' (Hiscott, 2020) shouted the *Daily Mirror*. As Bissell and Fuller (2011: 8) note, 'to be unmoved, unaffected is merely taken to be a provocation to be corrected and to be made movable, workable and accessible once again'.

Radical antisociality

The metabolic pathways of 'I can't breathe' were also suggestive of 'radical antisociality' as a tenet of departure from mobile sociality. Central to the concept of mobile socialities are ideas of both sociality and, relatedly, the social. The latter etymologically has its roots in the Latin *socialis*

'of companionships, of allies, united, living with others'. Positive approbation is given to the social and sociality within communication studies and media studies. Ontology from neuroscience to sociology and political science valorises the social arising from a normative assumption that all human beings seek to connect with one another in similar ways and prefer to congregate with each other's interests with studies that seek understanding of forms of social life in terms of discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), things (Appardurai, 2014), memory (Fentress and Wickham, 1992) and political movements (Cefai, 2007; Jasper, 1999; Melucci, 1989).

The specific term sociality, however, originates from the work of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern and colleagues (1990: 8–10), who conceived it as 'the relational matrix which constitutes the life of persons'. The concept shifted anthropological approaches and subsequent social science and humanities disciplines away from analytical frameworks that examined society and the social in terms of a system of rules and structures toward the idea that the social is processorial, with humans operating within 'a dynamic, relational, matrix' (Long and Moore, 2012). Since Strathern et al.'s (1990) originating conceptualisation, developments around the idea of the person and affect theory have in turn destabilised the term, with Nicholas Long and Henrietta Moore (2012: 41) asking 'what is the place of non-human, objects and things?'. They argue that the development of a 'definitional haziness' to the term is a positive factor that provides evidence that the concept of socialities has the 'capacity to take many forms' (Long and Moore, 2012: 41). Given this, I would suggest that within our respiratory ontology, sociality can be stretched to include antisociality in a range of forms.

Certainly, there are precedents for the ways in which mobile sociality can be understood to include dimensions that include exploiting and violating the rights of others. Orlando Patterson (1982), whose work explores the violent uprooting, desocialisation and depersonalisation that encompasses economic slavery of human beings in various historical contexts, does not use the term antisociality, but develops the term "social death" as experienced by those enslaved. Neither does he use the term 'mobility' as discussed within this volume: to Patterson, mobility comes in two forms: intra generational and intergenerational and refers to "better material conditions; mobility up the occupational scale". Relatedly, movement refers to the regional and interregional forced movement of people. His work suggests that the basis for an understanding of the most extreme kind of (im)mobile antisociality is that which arises within the conditions of enslavement and the most extreme forms of domination. From this, it can be seen that the ontological variations of (im)mobile (anti)sociality are metabolised through the asymmetry of power.

What can be added to Patterson's work, however, is an understanding of how the media operate in relation to antisociality. It was Paddy Scannell who developed the idea that at the core of our experience of broadcasting within modern life was the importance of sociability (Scannell, 1996: 23), with studies since recasting this as including dimensions that involve antisociality through the deliberate creation of quarrels and conflict (Richardson et al., 1995: 79). What Robin Lakoff (2004) has termed "new incivility" involves new kinds of mediations of what Michael Higgins and Angela Smith term "belligerent broadcasting" (2016) with rancour and rudeness that is often unscripted. To some extent, then, climate change street protests linked to 'I can't breathe' involving the rapid movement and redeployment of protestors to exercise maximum disruption, using mobile and social technologies to facilitate this, might be characterised in this way. But/and these might also be used to explain antisocial movements on the far right (Eyerman, 2016) or the tensions between sociality and antisociality evident in the PEGIDA movement in Germany (Richardson-Little and Merrill, 2020)

I would suggest, though, that we need a deep breath to rethink and recentre the antisocial within immobile antisocialities in more fundamental and radical ways. We see this approach developed within queer studies, in which the antisocial turn has shifted emphasis deliberately

onto examining the productive capacities of the destruction of alliances and an exploration of thinking that includes that which is negative (Edelman, 2004). To Halberstam (2008: 143), such approaches can have the tendency, however, to overvalorise antisociality to the extent that it can lead to a fascist sensibility. Nonetheless, such a refocussing on the antisocial might help us see that it is not protests that are 'antisocial' but rather the efforts to block democratic and transform-ative processes through antisocial alliances between states, corporations and security services.

Despite variations of approach, however, all of these versions of sociality and antisociality are seen as the lifeblood of being human and are 'inextricably and powerfully linked to certain kinds of language and speech as media for the production of meaning, as well as to certain kinds of mind, perception, intersubjectivity, sources of knowledge and reasons for moral conduct' (Solomon, 2012: 114). Solomon challenges what she sees as the three central tenets of sociality: namely first, that sociality is something only done between humans; second, that it is conducted through language; and third, that is conducted by those who have what is termed a "theory of mind" enabling them to relate to others in normative ways. Importantly, her work on autism and sociality suggests that what is frequently missed within neurotypically biased accounts are the embodied, actional and experiential dimensions of sociality (Solomon, 2012: 112).

At their core, both mobilities and socialities are arguably derived from normative physically abled and neurotypical assumptions that rest on the hierarchical devaluation of both human sta-tis and the antisocial. As we have seen, while mobility studies have recognised the importance of that which is immobile or arrested, we still give little ontological recognition to the value of different kinds of sociality that to the neurotypical person appear to be asocial or antisocial. The 21st century's rise of 'social media' – and with it, anxieties about what constitutes networks, friends, sociality and reciprocity – is based on the assumption that social communication and sociality are valued highly, and antisociality is of less value and is deemed to be destructive and negative. For neurodivergent people, and particularly autistic people, they/we are defined through diagnostic medical criteria that includes deficits in communication and particularly 'social communication'.[3] Yet, online and offline memoirs by autistic people disrupt what it means both to 'have a voice' to 'socially communicate', and in turn ~~to~~ offer an important cri-tique to some of the hidden assumptions of mobile sociality. The autistic writer and artist Judy Endow, for example, relates the story of two young autistic men who are long-term friends but their carers only learn of this when the two are separated and the men become upset. She argues that sociality that includes authentic relationships and communication can manifest themselves in non-typical ways: sociality for an autistic person may be sitting in silence, physically distant, but knowingly noticing and sharing a sense of the wider world together (Endow, 2013: 113). Or, sociality may be being in a continual conversation with objects, light and water or the uni-verse through what appear to the neurotypical person to be 'meaningless' repetitive movements, or stimming, as the non-verbal autistic writer Mel Baggs articulates in her film *In My Language* (Baggs, 2007).[4]

Connected with this, there are radical insights to bring to the concept immobile antisociali-ties from indigenous humanities which suggest deeper cycles of sociality and mobility. Indige-nous cultural analytics disrupt ontological assumptions of what constitutes life and non-life, and the mobile versus the inert. Social life within Western thought is mapped onto that which is liv-ing and animate, with human beings at the top and centre. Yet, indigenous ontologies argue that life and animacy within Western thought is constituted extremely narrowly. It sinecures human activity from the rest of the planet and universe in order to extract and subjugate to capital all that is deemed to be dead and inanimate that might include rocks, minerals, water, mountains, trees, plants and even the sun. Within indigenous knowledge, these animate elements are part of a broad social and cultural ecology of which humans are just a small part.

Just as 'I can't breathe' suggests what Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) in *Geotologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* argues is the mobius nature of life and non-life, Western ontologies, she argues, excise life and non-life from each other in an effort to extract value from the earth, while categorising and dividing off indigenous and other people whose analytics of knowledge see them as intimately interconnected. Povinelli argues from this that the distinction between life and non-life is increasingly being called into question: we might in that case take another deep breath and rethink the ways in which the distinctions between mobility/immobility and sociality/antisociality are also mapped onto deeply held assumptions of a distinction between life and non-life, which – if we take a respiratory approach – break down.

Concluding remarks

This chapter used an exploration of the political ecology of the slogan 'I can't breathe', using the idea of the lung, inhaling and exhaling, as an approach to what I have termed as the metabolics of the mediated movements and associated choke points of the phrase. This enabled us to trace the ways in which the slogan catabolised and anabolised, broke down and synthesised different metabolic pathways into and out of (im)mobile antisocialities. This suggested two deep breaths drawing anew from the concept of mobile socialities developed so far in this *Handbook*: the idea of respiratory ontology and new ways of valorising neurodivergent socialities and indigenous cultural analytics.

How then might we use (im)mobile socialities? Perhaps, this might be in terms of analysing media activities, connectivities and content that is deliberately disruptive and destructive; this might be by populist fascist movements intent on division and destruction, or antiracist groups or climate emergency activists seeking to block, change or transform mobile socialities. Or, it might be useful for analysing state militia intervention into democratic processes, the production of corporately organised and state-sponsored mobile antisocialities such as 'troll farms' that user media influencers and fake profiles to deliberately interfere in democratic processes (Pomarentsev, 2019). (Im)mobile antisocialities, though, might also enable us to break down and synthesise the impact of the hidden infrastructures and global supply chains that enable mobile socialities, allowing us to ask how mobile socialities implicate users and consumers within a commodity chain of economic activities which move the antisocial dimensions of capitalism and planetary destruction to elsewhere. While mobile socialities for some may engender sociality, they might also be understood to simultaneously engender neither human connection nor the possibilities to move or escape from environmental toxicity or catastrophe.

The chapter provides some necessary groundwork prior to the subsequent studies in this collection. It links to Hartmann's study (Chapter 17) of how people who move as a result of their work function without mobile media, what it means to live within a digital media blackout (Hill [Chapter 18]), the work of narratives to positively anchor young people in situations of precarity (Lynn Scofield Clark [Chapter 5]), and how people may create socialities in situations of forced immobility such as refugee camps (Seuferling [Chapter 19]). The chapter addressed the contrary realities of mobile media and socialities challenging more broadly our normative assumptions about communication and media, mobility and immobility. Drawing on Choy's (2011) work, which explores the relationships of breathing to the sociality of political spaces, Povinelli (2016) argues that we are witnessing a shift in socio-political discourse from the demand 'Listen to me' to the statement, 'I can't breathe'. By extension, I would suggest that what (im)mobile antisocialities catalyses is an approach to cultural analytics that asks what happens not just when we are breathing, but when we are choking, before it is too late.

Notes

1 The full statute can be found in the Statutes Project 1837: 1 Victoria c.3 Slavery Compensation Act. Available at: http://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/nineteenth-century/1837-1-victoria-c-3-slavery-compensation-act/.

2 When a statue was made and erected several weeks afterwards on the same plinth of BLM protestor Jen Reid, it was quickly taken down on the grounds that it was by a London-based artist and was erected without permission. (Roach, 2020).

3 See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*).

4 Mel Baggs sadly died of respiratory failure in the course of writing this chapter in April 2020. For an obituary on her life and work see: Neil Genzlinger, "Mel Baggs, Blogger on Autism and Disability, Does at 39", *New York Times*, April 28, 2020. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/health/mel-baggs-dead.html.

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