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Elisa Adami  
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Art Catalyst with Gary Zhexi Zhang,  
and Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and  
Tomislav Medak (Pirate Care)  
Oreet Ashery  
Nika Autor  
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Isobel Wohl  
Andrea Luka Zimmerman

# PAUSE. FERVOUR.

## REFLECTIONS ON A PANDEMIC

HARUN FAROCKI INSTITUT & JOURNAL OF VISUAL CULTURE

Edited by Manca Bajec, Tom Holert, and Marquard  
Smith

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# Joining Forces

By Tom Holert

When SARS-CoV-2 arrived in Europe in February 2020 to engender a health crisis of harrowing proportions, leading to the 'lockdown' of cities and entire nation-states, the organisation of networks of solidarity and mutual aid was one important way by which cultural workers sought to cope with the emergency.

Among the measures taken was the online sharing of texts and images, of diaristic accounts and relevant readings. To procure platforms of exchange and communality in a moment of enforced 'social distancing' and the imminent collapse of the social as such was aiming at the maintenance of forms of discussion and dialogue that were in peril to be outruled and put aside by state responses to the pandemic.

Shortly after the German government had imposed its first lockdown on 13 March (two days after the WHO had declared the epidemic a pandemic), the Harun Farocki Institut moved its incipient occasional commentary on the situation from Facebook to its website and started issue no. 2 of HaFI's online journal *Rosa Mercedes* on 'mutual aid' as an open invitation for contributions that could help to make sense of the quickly emerging shifts in visual and cultural politics.

Reaching out to a number of colleagues and friends from personal and HaFI's network, on March 21, Tom Holert also wrote the following email to one of the editors of the *Journal of Visual Culture*:

Hi Marq,

Just a quick Saturday morning note.

As the situation is getting increasingly tense, initiatives, many of which are great, mushroom to cope with the crisis. Among the many things to be attended to now are our core fields of expertise, the visual culture/politics of the crisis - 'we' here meaning you and I, but also the contexts in and for which we are working, namely JVC and HaFI (Harun Farocki Institut).

I started to post entries to a special issue of *Rosa Mercedes*, HaFI's online journal

(<https://www.harun-farocki-institut.org/en/category/rosa-mercedes-en/02-en/>), and I would like to invite

interested friends and colleagues to send dispatches, micro-essays, visual works (as long as I manage to integrate them in the limited Wordpress template of our website).

Would you or anyone else you know of be interested in contributing something?

We could also discuss options of teaming JVC and HaFI up in some way or the other.

Much love,

Tom

Marq Smith immediately responded in favor of the proposal. With trademark speed and matter-of-factness he then contacted his fellow editors and brought in Manca Bajec as a facilitator and special editor. On 27 March, a call for contributions was sent out to JVC's board of editors and a wide selection of previous contributors and members of its extended communities:

'There is a lot of spontaneous, ad hoc opinion-making and premature commentary around, as to be expected. However, the ethics and politics of artistic and theoretical practice to be pursued in this situation should oblige us to stay cautious and to intervene with care in the discussion. As one of JVC's editors, Brooke Belisle, explains: 'We are not looking for sensationalism, but rather, moments of reflection that: make connections between what's happening now and the larger intellectual contexts that our readership share; offer small ways to be reflective and to draw on tools we have and things we know instead of just feeling numb and overwhelmed; help serve as intellectual community for one another while we are isolated; support the work of being thoughtful and trying to find/make meaning...which is always a collective endeavour, even if we are forced to be apart'.

As these lines made pretty clear, the task was to avoid abusing the situation for intellectual and academic show-off, as just another modality of denial. Rather, a certain humility and empathy were asked for, in the spirit of sharing, caring, and support.

Taking seriously the perceptual rupture of Covid-19 while gazing closely at how corporate and public media orchestrated the pandemic (as well as at the political language introduced to create legitimacy for unprecedented measures of social control) appeared badly needed. In order to foster a critical discourse that would go past news torrents and social media hypes, the visual production of the crisis was to be read as an essential element of its ontopolitics. Rather than providing standard critical commentary of scientific or journalistic representation of the pandemic, the intention from the start was to attend to everyone's deep entanglement in its making, starting with one's nutritional and streaming habits.

Acknowledging interdependency and demanding solidarity were two key discursive figures from the early days of the crisis on, and they attained increasing traction in the course of the year. Amid the pandemic, anti-Black violence in the United States and elsewhere cumulated, entailing large scale protests driven by Black Lives Matter and other anti-racist and anti-fascist movements and initiatives. This collection is a contribution, a minor act of interdependency and solidarity, resonating with numerous other entries in HaFl's *Rosa Mercedes 02*.

## Section I:

# Covid-19, or The Pandemical Logic of Very Late Capitalism

- 1** **Oreet Ashery**  
**9** We've Been Preparing for this our Whole Lives
  
- 2** **Daniel A. Barber**  
**15** Emergency Exit, Second Thoughts
  
- 3** **Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam**  
**20** Living in the Uncanny
  
- 4** **Kimberly Juanita Brown**  
**32** Unmasked
  
- 5** **Margareta Kern**  
**36** Dream State: Hugs, Dreams and British Psychopolitics
  
- 6** **Jordan Baseman**  
**40** Fabula
  
- 7** **Katarzyna Bojarska**  
**44** Public Protest in the Age of Covid-19
  
- 8** **Laura U. Marks**  
**50** Streaming Video, a Link between Pandemic and Climate Crisis
  
- 9** **Teresa Cisneros**  
**56** In the Way of Being
  
- 10** **Death Class**  
**58** Inquisitive Survival: Burning Questions for the Necro-Scene
  
- 11** **Vanessa Schwartz**  
**60** Is the Jet Age Over?
  
- 12** **Shannon Mattern**  
**63** The Scalar Logis of Covid-19

## Section II:

# Lockdown Life: Distance/Proximity

- 13** **Lina Hakim**  
**66** Things in Lockdown
  
- 14** **Sara Blaylock**  
**70** Hierarchies of Hardship
  
- 15** **Alexandra Délano Alonso**  
**72** Fragments | Brotes
  
- 16** **Dave Beech**  
**78** Lockdown is a Savage Montage
  
- 17** **Vladimir Miladinović and Stephenie Young**  
**86** The Reluctant Screen Shot Collector
  
- 18** **Philip Miller and Marcos Martins**  
**90** 'Caluza', Covid-19 and Creating a Song under Lockdown
  
- 19** **Dean Kenning**  
**99** Social Physical Distance Proximity Diagram
  
- 20** **Edinson Arroyo**  
**106** Quarantine from my Balcony
  
- 21** **Atej Tutta and Valeria Cozzarini**  
**112** Futuro Roseo
  
- 22** **Hana Noorali and Lynton Talbot**  
**9** The Incompetence, the Disdain, the Laughter
  
- 23** **Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead**  
**15** Wildfire
  
- 24** **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**  
**20** A Thousand Kitchen Tables
  
- 25** **Juliet Jacques**  
**32** The Digital Classroom and the Digital Studio

## Section III: Biopolitics and Governmentality

- 26** **Jordan McKenzie**  
**36** Today My Heart Is Empty
- 27** **Elisa Adami**  
**40** The Underlying
- 28** **Amit S. Rai**  
**44** A Biopolitics of the Future; or, The Monster at the Door
- 29** **Tom Corby**  
**50** Covid-19, Climate Change and the Viral Imaginaries of Crisis
- 30** **Eray Çaylı**  
**56** Disaster Nationalism as Geovisual Play
- 31** **Nika Autor**  
**63** Newsreel Shreds: Two Postcards from the Summer of 2020
- 32** **Alessandra Ferrini**  
**66** White Tinted Glasses: on the 'Difficult' Heritage of Italian Colonialism
- 33** **Helene Kazan**  
**70** Against Resilience
- 34** **David Dibosa**  
**72** Exhibiting Embarrassment
- 35** **Jelena Stojković**  
**78** A Name to Sing About
- 36** **The Partisan Social Club**  
**86** We are not Alone: The Partisan Social Club New-Collective Nouns

## Section IV: New Ways of Caring

- 37** **Janine Francois**  
**90** Ecologies of Care
- 38** **Joel McKim**  
**99** Vision and Automation in a post-Covid-19 World
- 39** **Andrea Luka Zimmerman**  
**106** Re-Relations
- 40** **Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos**  
**112** She Would Fall Asleep with a Taste of Home on her Lips
- 41** **Arts Catalyst with Gary Zhexi Zhang, and Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak (Pirate Care)**  
**119** The Server is Down, the Bridge Washes Out, there is a Power Blackout
- 42** **Bahar Noorizadeh**  
**122** The Slow Cancellation of the Past
- 43** **Danah Abdulla**  
**130** Stay Safe, Stay Healthy
- 44** **John Paul Ricco**  
**135** Hope, or Pandora in the Time of the Pandemic
- 45** **Yve Lomax**  
**146** The World that Surrounds me Inheres in me
- 46** **Ruth Ewan**  
**150** The World of Care!!!
- 47** **Isobel Wohl**  
**156** Flocks
- 48** **Plastic Fantastique**  
**160** What is the Future of MYTH post-Covid-19?

Section I:

# **Covid-19, or The Pandemical Logic of Very Late Capitalism**

Oreet Ashery is a visual artist working across established arts institutions and grassroots social contexts. Her distinct multiplatform projects combine video, performance, sound, photography, textiles and writing. The work is often situated, participatory and expands the remit of contemporary practice. Ashery narrates stories of marginal and precarious identities combining autoethnography, collective-knowledge, and biopolitical fiction. In recent years she questioned how the boundaries between illness, life and death, body and self are affected by digital technologies.

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# 1

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## We've Been Preparing for this Our Whole Lives

By Oreet Ashery

- 👉 Existing daily with the conscious presence of death that measures liveness and life under oppression
- 👉 Knowing that belonging is everything, particularly when out of reach and in pieces
- 👉 Playing equal parts in democratic support groups and international networks that serve our recovery daily and exist for decades
- 👉 Living in a constant state of productive grief
- 👉 Practising gratitude within and outside the remit of privilege
- 👉 Dealing always with hypochondria, general anxiety, trauma, neglectful death, chronic illness, underlying fear, and by always I mean for generations, summoning ancestral ghosts



- 👉 Sharing affinities and solidarity with service workers for as long as we can remember, we don't survive without them, and celebrities are nothing but a good distraction from co-dependency
- 👉 Loving friends and chosen families actively, according to myth we chose our biological family too
- 👉 Acknowledging that how we die is how we live only more so, and owing that lineage to Palestinian solidarity movements and Black Lives Matter and queer deaths
- 👉 Sickening by extraction capitalism in the body
- 👉 Sustaining stillness for parts of the action
- 👉 Endorsing solitude

- 👉 Making work about withdrawal out of necessity, soft resistance
- 👉 Recovering tools with Complex PTSD
- 👉 Researching Crip theories, politicised self-care and survivance (survival + resistance), written by younger. Refining our politics to a tooth while remaining open to change our minds
- 👉 Taking things for granted was never an option, that's for normal

## We, survivors, were born for this crisis

Written during lockdown, London, March 2020



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## 2

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# Emergency Exit, Second Thoughts<sup>1</sup>

By Daniel A. Barber

How do we get out of here? That is the substantive question, embedded with fear and panic, when a house is burning, a ship is sinking. When I was 18, I woke up to a house on fire, literally. I had just returned from a long trip abroad; the fire started from a poorly ventilated clothes dryer, which my mom and I had been using all day, emptying my suitcases into the laundry. It was a wood frame house, and the fire spread rapidly. I was wakened by an alarm, in my sleepiness and jet lag I thought it was just my bedside clock, I flailed my arm around trying to turn it off. I pressed the button but it kept going. That was when I noticed the smoke creeping in under the door. Stupidly, I opened the door, and faced a wall of smoke, waiting to come in and take over. The coughing started, the panic, nowhere to go. I went further away, into the bathroom.

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<sup>1</sup> These thoughts develop out of an ongoing project on emergency exits, the first iteration of which was published on e-flux architecture as part of the Overgrowth series, in connection with the Oslo Architecture Triennial, September 26, 2019. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/284030/emergency-exit/>

Stupidly again, I opened the window to get a gulp of fresh air, this created a chimney, drawing the smoke into the room and out the window. Now the panic was urgent. I had to get out, the threat of asphyxiation was real. I crawled out the window, perched on the narrow ledge, and jumped the 20 feet or so to the ground. A few minutes later the fire trucks and ambulance arrived, I was given oxygen and a brace for a minor ankle sprain. I escaped, largely unscathed.

Our lives, our fear of death, are configured by the prospect of urgent egress. We rest knowing we can get out. An emergency is, hopefully, just another event. The ever-present prospect of being elsewhere; and carefully detailed mechanisms for escape. The poet Ocean Vuong points out the obvious: walking through lower Manhattan, or many other dense, townhouse laden urban areas, the façades are strung with 'fire escapes'; as he wrote:

I could spend a whole hour sitting across the street from a six-floor walk-up studying the zig-zags that cling to a building filled with so many hidden lives. All that richness and drama sealed away in walls echoing with elemental or exquisite language – and yet only the fire escape, a clinging extremity, inanimate and often rusting, spoke – in its hardened exiled silence, with the most visible human honesty: We are capable of disaster. And we are scared.<sup>2</sup>

A capacity to leave takes up the city scape, as a kind of background hum to the life of the city. It is there when we need it.

How do we know when it is an emergency? That seems like a nonsense question today – though in the US, one could be forgiven for some confusion, even though almost two hundred thousand people have died many are operating as if the most important thing to do is pretend that all is normal, to keep the economy moving. To build a scaffold around the pandemic, and the panic, to hide it away. And yet. If we have reason to panic, what do we do with it, where do we go? Again, how do we get out of here?

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<sup>2</sup> Ocean Vuong, 'The Weight of our Living: On Hope, Fire Escapes, and Visible Desperation' 2014. <https://therumpus.net/2014/08/the-weight-of-our-living-on-hope-fire-escapes-and-visible-desperation/>

My own experience of being saved, of saving myself, in an emergency is perhaps extreme, a clear distillation of an everyday event, of an ongoing condition: we rely on our capacity to leave in order to stay comfortably. Buildings are constructed around urgent egress, often quite literally: the exit stair is not always clamped on to the facades, it is hidden in the interior, an ugly, exposed concrete passageway winding around or next to the elevator core. Mies van der Rohe wanted to sheathe the exit stair of the Seagrams tower in the same marble he used in the lobby, but was denied. Marcel Breuer managed a more spacious, detailed stair at the Whitney, because it doubles as an alternative to the elevator in order to reach the gallery – his spiral exit stair at the UNESCO building is an exercise in precarity (there is now an internal one as well). Farshid Moussavi's exit stair at the Cleveland MOCA is shining, neon yellow, and doubles as a gallery for sound art. A spectrum of attention and opportunity.

Our crisis today, the pandemic, is characterized by a turn inward, a reliance on our interiors, even more than before, as havens, spaces for solace and refuge. For safety. Unwittingly, we are depending on emergency exits even more – we are inside all the time, or should be, and only can be because we know there is a way out, if needed. At the same time, the outside, exterior life, has itself become dangerous: the virus, the maskless, violating orders or the common sense imperative to shelter in place. Where can we go?

This dynamic between safety in the interior and threat outside is already, for those paying attention, a familiar formula – the relationship between our conditioned, ventilated interiors and the inexorable rise of carbon emissions is, somehow, an even more avoidable connection, a crisis too many continue to largely ignore, even more as we turn to those ventilation systems to keep our schools, offices, and homes free from infection. The sense of panic grows, the recurving of the essential, infrastructural patterns that will keep us on a path towards disruption, destabilization, and the destruction of familiar ways of life. The pandemic is not just a preview to the social discord expected amidst climate disruptions, it is an engine for it, a hardening of reliance on patterns and systems that are unsustainable.

So this is one way the pandemic – and the climate crisis it is

masking, hiding, obscuring – reconfigures our ways of life: there is nowhere to go. For the global industrial culture reliant on the emergency exit, on the externality, there has always been a place to go, a place to move a factory as environmental regulations tightened, to mine ores or dump toxins; to hide profits in offshore accounts. But the virus is everywhere. And we can't escape the climate, we jump out the window and there it is, the closed loop turning back onto us.

Can we imagine – schematically, even, diagrammatically – a building that doesn't require emergency egress? A way of living not predicated on the fragile premise of always having a way out. It would likely be one story, collapsible like a house of cards, or an accumulation of earth, dirt, and rubble. Temporary? Does permanence (steel, glass, concrete, even brick) require the capacity for escape, a sort of exchange, a bargain that says – you can stay here, forever, because there is always the window, just open it and jump, or climb down the ladder. Without an emergency exit would we just live in fear? Maybe so, maybe such an urban and psychic restructuring would allow for a different way of life, more attentive to the dangers of climate instability than hiding from them.



A precarious-looking exit stair (no longer the primary means of emergency egress) at Breuer, Nervi, and Zehruss' UNESCO Headquarters Paris, 1958; photograph by the author, January 2019.

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# 3

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## Living in the Uncanny

By Lana Lin

Sometimes it snows in April, as Prince sings, but you know it's uncanny when it hails in May, like it did a few days ago. I live in the epicenter of the pandemic, in the [zip code with the third highest reported cases of COVID-19](#) in Manhattan as of May 5. I have not taken the subway since March 11 nor scarcely left my apartment. The trains now seem like the stuff of urban legend, practically gothic, housing the homeless who like ghosts haunt the subway cars. Two corpses were found before the governor finally decided it was time to shut them down for the wee hours of the morning, for the first time in over a century.

Freud describes riding a train and being startled by an old man whose appearance he very much disliked. Jumping up he immediately realizes that the intruder is merely his own reflection in the mirror on the washing cabinet door, which had swung back when the train jolted. What happens when misrecognition becomes uncanny recognition? How to return to 'normal' when the unconscious has been made conscious and refuses to be repressed? Freud can only recall his disgruntlement.

It takes but a moment's reflection to notice that viruses are by definition uncanny, situated as they are in the '[gray area between living and nonliving](#)'. A virus takes up its home in your body, unhomeing you. The effect of the foreign invasion is that we become, in Julia Kristeva's words, strangers to ourselves.

The uncanny is here before it makes its appearance known. The conditions for the uncanny are latent, and then something occurs that reveals it in all its horror. Or is it the rupture itself that is uncanny? Is the event or the effect or the conditions for the event or effect uncanny? And what exactly is the uncanny — is it a noun or an adjective, an object or a method? Do we simply bracket those questions and ask what it *does*, and whether what it does might be put to use?

SARS-CoV-2 has spikes that stick to our cells, and in order to infect us, they need to be cleaved, which can be done by Furin, an enzyme ubiquitous in the human body. In the case of an infection, an invisible invader enters and attaches to us. Our own cells split the foreign intruder, allowing it to contaminate our body, turning ourselves into our own evil twins. Do we host our own double within us? But it is not the infection that kills us. Like cancer or other immune disorders, it is our own immune system, attempting to protect us, that wreaks havoc on our body. Isn't the body always already uncanny? Does the virus only make it more so?

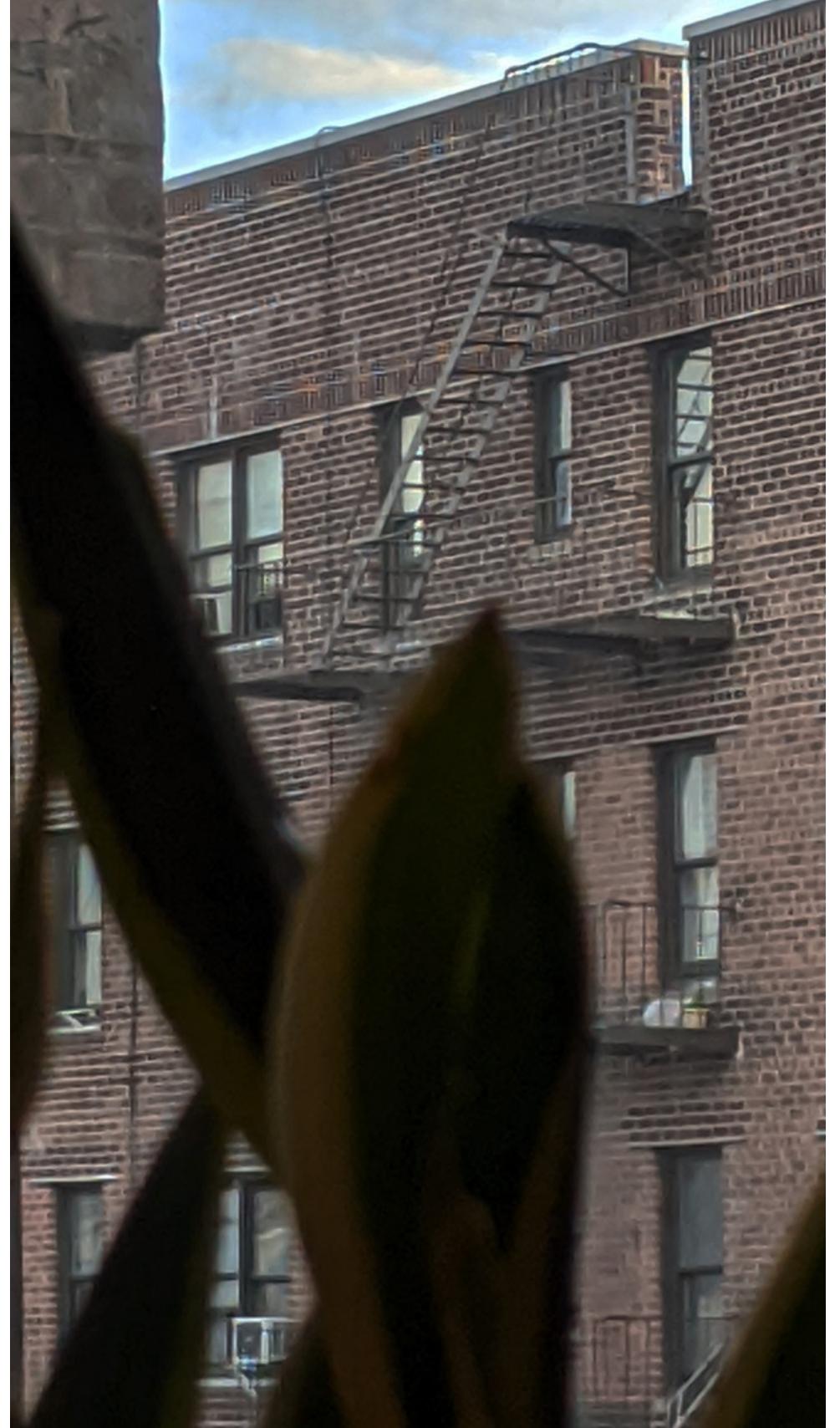
I think of being a 'yellow woman' in the time of coronavirus. I think of coughing while Asian. As someone who grew up being called a 'nigger' by white suburban middle-class boys unable to distinguish the subtleties of racial color lines, I escaped to New York City in order to be spared such racial violences. Now I contemplate whether it is worth stepping outside and potentially being assaulted unintentionally or intentionally, whether as a result of the virus, or being [spat on](#), [stabbed with scissors](#), [attacked with acid](#) while taking out the garbage, or [kicked in the head](#) while waiting at a railway station.

We face our doubles in masked others and our own masked mirror image, and this uncanny encounter must force a reckoning with what has been normalized — a familiarity with inequities that needs to become unfamiliar and intolerable. If the pandemic has made everyday life uncanny, let the [portal](#) that has opened not lead to further devastation but to a defamiliarized world ripe for

re-invention. Perhaps the virus is or does the uncanny by alerting us to the ghosts that inhabit our living. We need to travel through the portal with our ghosts, with our dead ([Munoz](#)) as uncanny allies.

Simon Critchley says that we, meaning '[thinkers in self-isolation](#)', should shut the fuck up and talk to our plants. I mourn my abandoned plants, stuck in my office downtown at The New School where Critchley coincidentally also teaches, although we have both been presumably teaching on Zoom. My office is in a public building a couple floors above Hulu, which might now be considered an essential business. I know I've been streaming constantly since the pandemic began, and as I have learned from [Laura U. Marks](#), I now owe the planet at least a modest forest of trees. The orchids were in bloom when I last watered them on March 10. I am sad to think of them withered. The snake plants and cactus are heartier, but surely won't have survived before I return, or will they? Some forms of life (and nonlife) surpass expectations in their tenacity.

Photo by H. Lan Thao Lam



[Kimberly Juanita Brown](#) is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College. She is the author of *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Duke University Press, 2015). She is currently working on a book about the history of photography and its relationship to antiblackness. Tentatively titled 'Mortevivum: Photography and the Politics of the Visual', the book examines images of the dead in the *New York Times* in 1994 from four geographies: South Africa, Rwanda, Sudan and Haiti.

## 4

# Unmasked

By Kimberly Juanita Brown

The United States is unmasked. Like the videos of white supremacists marching down public streets armed and angry, the incessant images of white women *white-woman-ing*, and the streamlined indifference emanating from the White House, we are seeing, in real time, the façade dissipate. What is left in its place is the 'second sight' W.E.B. Du Bois offers as the violent navigation of blackness-amid-white supremacy.<sup>1</sup> Be it the individual refusal of a layer of protection or a temporary acquiescence to the reality of the viral droplets in the air we all breathe, the mask, as we know it, is off.

'I know your kind', the protagonist in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* says to Sproule, the unfortunate survivor of a battle under a captain named 'White'. 'What's wrong with you is wrong all the way through you.'<sup>2</sup> Unmasked in all of its viral isms (race, gender, class, citizenship, ability, etc.) the visual presence of face masks to thwart the transmission of the coronavirus (and

<sup>1</sup> 'It is a peculiar sensation', Du Bois writes, 'this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West*, Vintage International, 1985, 66.

a particular violent resistance to wearing them) represents a toxicity that must be denied. And so it goes: in grocery stores, town halls, parks, pharmacies, and everywhere in between, bad actors emerge, spewing out all of the sickness within.

Picture one scene: June 9, 2020, a Board of Supervisors meeting in <sup>3</sup>



Orange County, CA to discuss the face mask mandate. The people (almost exclusively white) are not pleased. A woman stands at the microphone, reading from a piece of paper. 'You are kneeling', she says, 'on the necks of the people, and you are continuing to act in a thuggish manner'.<sup>4</sup> She is met with applause from the crowd. It is certainly not the first time, and it will not be the last time a white person has used black death as the symbolic reference point to advance a ridiculous and dangerous demand. The meeting takes place fifteen days after George Floyd's videotaped killing by Derek Chauvin, the man so certain of his power he doesn't even bother to take his hands out of his pockets to steady himself during the act. *I know your kind...*

The mask order was rescinded two days later.

There is something visceral about the refusal to place a protective barrier across the mouth and nose, to disregard specific advice from the scientific community, and to do so in the name of 'freedom' or 'just because'. In the barrage of images on social media and via news feeds all over the U.S. there is the jarring, disruptive visage of the figure averse to acknowledging that a deadly virus is killing hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. For this figure, denial functions as a route through and around what was taken for granted, namely, that death happens

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41KluMgqE9A>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41KluMgqE9A>

elsewhere; it happens to others; and they are in control of life and death. For these figures, they want their normal back the same way that they want their country back – without delay and devoid of accountability.

'I've developed an aversion to that word normal', Dionne Brand writes. 'Was the violence against women normal? Was the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism normal? Was white supremacy normal? Was homelessness growing on the streets normal? Were homophobia and transphobia normal... who would one have to be to sit in that normal restfully, to mourn it, or desire its continuance?'<sup>15</sup> You might be someone another would describe as *wrong... all the way through*.

What is there to see in the violent resistance to wearing a mask in public spaces where other people dwell, work, live, and move about? Everything. It only seems like an odd pandemic anomaly, yet it speaks to a much longer history of ruination – a centering of white supremacy that is, like Sproule's arm, full of puss and excreting an infection he will not acknowledge is killing him.

But it is, it is, it is.

<sup>15</sup> Dionne Brand, 'On Narrative, Reckoning, and the Calculus of Living and Dying', *The Star* <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html>

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## 5

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# Dream State: Hugs, Dreams and British Psychopolitics

By Margareta Kern

In the first dream I had at the start of the UK COVID-19 lockdown, I hugged a stranger. She was wearing some kind of uniform, maybe she was a nurse, or a care-worker, maybe not. I don't know why I hugged her. I felt an enormous sense of fear, joy and pleasure as we hugged. Did I initiate the hug and she reciprocated? My dream was pervaded by anxiety. Why was I taking such a risk? I was fearful of getting infected, fearful that the police would see us hugging, or someone else would see us hugging and report us to the police. Our hug lasted a few seconds and then it was over.

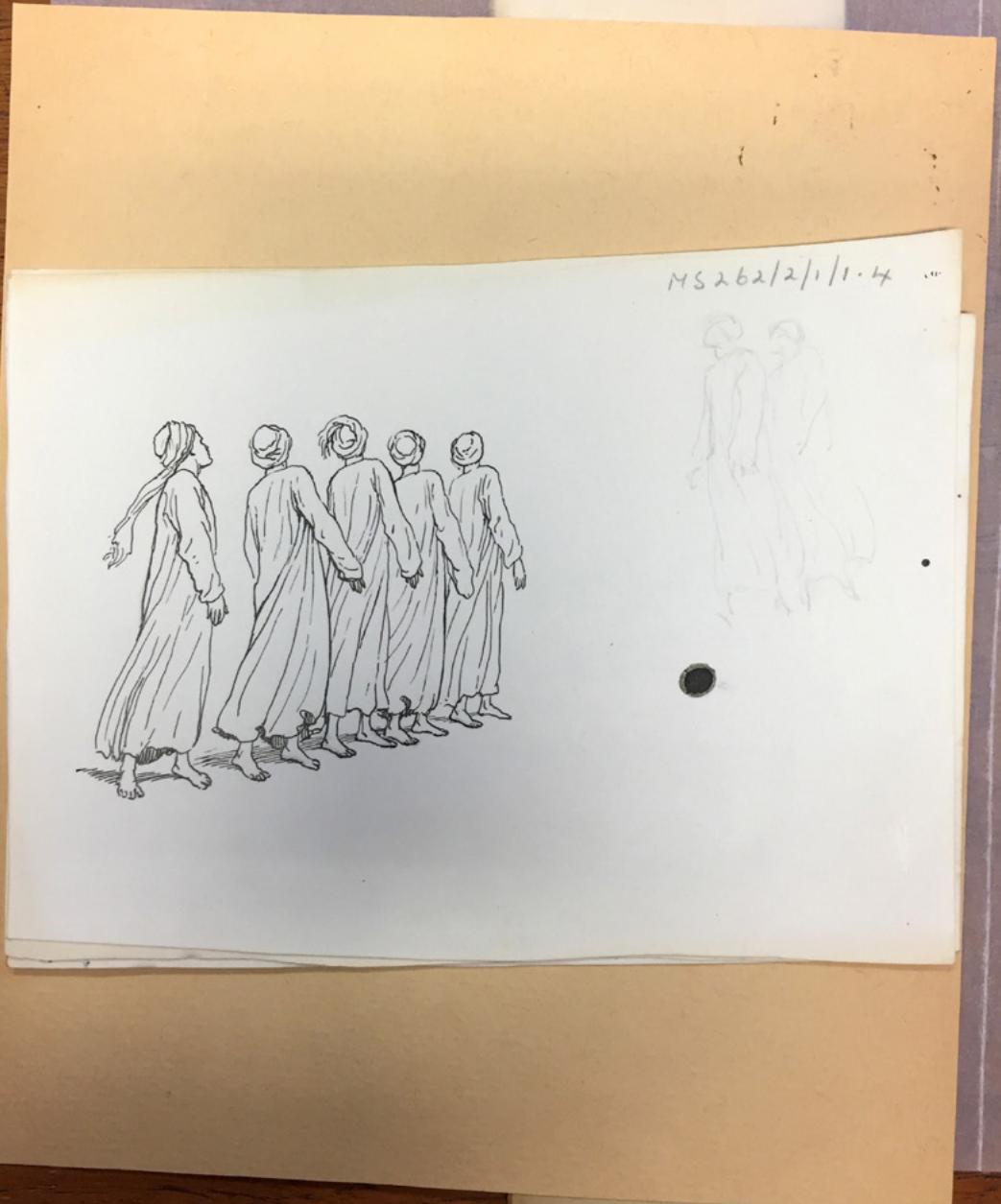
This week I had two distinct dreams on two separate nights. In the first dream, I was in London and everyone was acting strange, keeping their distance, manoeuvring around each other. A close friend of mine appeared in the dream, distant, not just in terms

of her keeping physical distance, but perhaps a more literal expression of 'social distancing'. She did not smile at me, there was no warmth in her look, she was socially distant. We did not hug.

In the second dream, I was back in London and bumped into a large group of friends who much to my surprise all hugged me, gregariously and with a sense of rebellion. They/we were breaking the rules. Not only that, they had flown out for the weekend to see a special performance, somewhere in Europe, I can't now remember where. Flights were fine, even going off for a short weekend of fun and art was fine. I felt outside of their fun (they didn't invite me) and then glad I did not participate in their earth polluting-lockdown-breaking behaviour. I was glad to be hugged though.

During the daily coronavirus briefing on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, Lynne, the first member of the UK public who was selected [to ask a question](#), asked the Health Secretary Matt Hancock: 'I'm missing my grandchildren so much. Please can you let me know if, after the five criteria are met, is being able to hug our closest family one of the first steps out of lockdown?' Mr Hancock replied: 'We understand the impact of not being able to hug your closest family. It affects us all too. We just hope we can get back to that as soon as possible. The best way we can get there, the fastest way, is for people to follow the rules'.

'Every state needs to know about the people it rules' writes Erik Linstrum, author of [Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire](#) (2016), charting an unusual project of the British Empire: to collect dreams from the people of South Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Linstrum explains how particularly after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, British officials across the Empire shared two related preoccupations: the fear of further uprisings, and the conviction that the inner lives of their subjects – their beliefs, their attitudes, their emotions – were exceedingly difficult to determine. Linstrum's fascinating book focuses on the work of an anthropologist at the London School of Economics (LSE) named Charles Gabriel Seligman. Seligman was a longtime adviser to colonial governments, which funded his research and helped to train colonial officials at the LSE. He was also influenced by the work of Freud and Jung. In the 1920s, on Seligman's instruction, hundreds of dreams were collected from across the British Empire – from the Indian subcontinent, Nigeria, Uganda, Australia, the



© Royal Anthropological Institute, 'Seligman, Charles Gabriel Collection MS 262',  
Photography: Margareta Kern and Susan Kelly, 2019

Solomon Islands and elsewhere. However, the results were not what they expected. 'The common thread running through all the accounts', Linstrum writes, 'was a twist on the Oedipal story. The oppressive patriarch, a largely fantasied figure in the European context, was here embodied in the very real force of the 'white man' and the colonial state behind him'. It turns out, concludes Linstrum, that Seligman had chronicled the psychic wounds of colonialism, revealing a political order fundamentally at odds with Britain's self-understanding.

Colonial anthropologists would have been, no doubt, quite keen on [Facebook's current project](#) of building a new kind of 'non-invasive brain-machine interface' that silently turns thoughts to text, or armbands that can hear words within your skin. They would certainly be jealous of Google's mass collection of behavioural data, modelled into techniques of governance described by Shoshana Zuboff as '[surveillance capitalism](#)' (2019). Perhaps, this is why Demis Hassabis, a co-founder of Google's artificial intelligence division, DeepMind, [attended a meeting](#) of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, when the group was considering whether the UK should go into lockdown. DeepMind had previously processed millions of healthcare records from an NHS hospital trust as part of a scheme to design a diagnostic app, in an arrangement subsequently found [to have contravened data protection law](#).

After keeping the names of SAGE advisors secret for more than a month since the lockdown, the UK government finally [published](#) them on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Well, all those who gave their permission. Conspicuously missing from the document were Dominic Cummings, then chief advisor to Boris Johnson, and Ben Warner, the data scientist who ran the most recent Conservative party's general election campaign model and worked with Cummings on Vote Leave campaign. According to [The Guardian](#) both Cummings and Warner attended the SAGE meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.

Less than two years ago, Dominic Cummings was found in contempt of Parliament for refusing to appear in front of the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (DCMS) which was investigating 'Disinformation and "fake news"'. Cummings might hate committees but he loves AI, predictive data-modelling and psychographic scores - which is probably why

he hired a digital advertising and software development company [Aggregate IQ \(AIQ\)](#) for the Vote Leave campaign (on their links to Cambridge Analytica see [this article](#) by Carole Cadwalladr). Unlike Cummings, the owner of AIQ, Jeff Silvester, testified in front of the DCMS Committee. He explained how their first work for SCL Group/Cambridge Analytica was to create a political customer relationship management software tool for the Trinidad and Tobago election campaign ([see page 48](#)). The DCMS Committee's [final report](#), published a year ago, concluded that 'AIQ carried out online advertising work for Brexit-supporting organisations Vote Leave, Veterans for Britain, Be Leave and DUP Vote to Leave. The majority of the adverts were created by AIQ on behalf of Vote Leave'.

Let's just pause over Jeff's words for a moment: **political customer relationship management software tool**.

## What does this even mean?

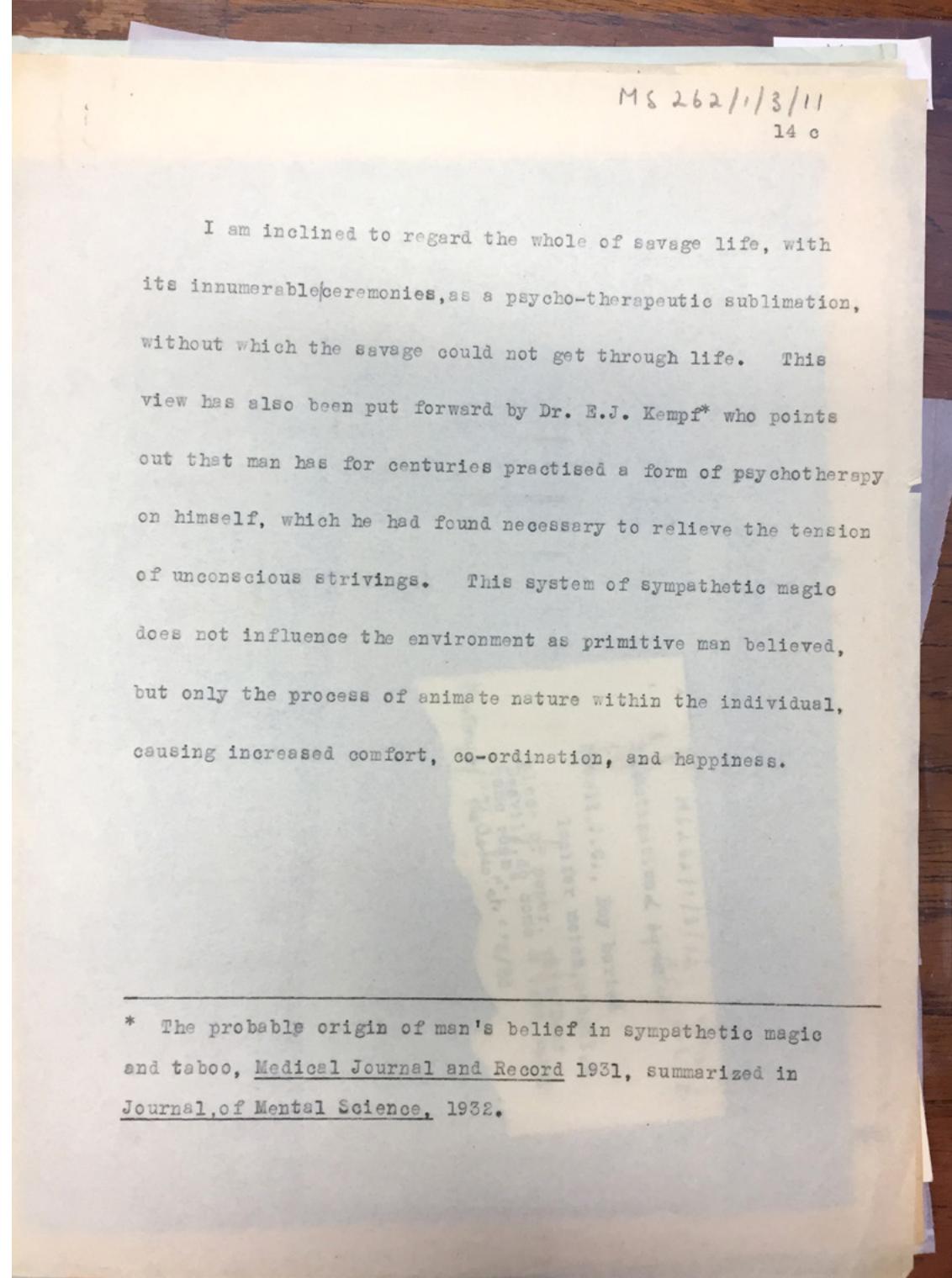
The SCL Group, was a British private contractor working for the UK Ministry of Defence, US Department of Defence and various NATO militaries, for whom they carried out [behavioural change programmes](#) (basically, [psychological warfare](#)). A comparison of the map of [SCL Group's operations](#) with a map of the British Empire reveals astounding similarities. SCL Group spawned several other entities, e.g. SCL Elections, focused on influencing elections, out of which Cambridge Analytica emerged in 2012, with backing from the US hedge fund billionaire and Donald Trump donor, Robert Mercer, who became the majority shareholder. The primary aim of Cambridge Analytica was to adapt and deploy tactics SCL had used on military projects for election politics in the United States and the UK.

The transference of military-grade persuasion tactics onto its own population, echoes deeply with words of the poet Aime' Césaire, who in his well-known essay *Discourse on Colonialism* argued that what in Europe is called 'fascism' is just colonial violence finding its way back home. Kader Attia and Ana Teixeira Pinto explain how Césaire's warnings went unheeded, and how instead, *The Authoritarian Personality* by Theodor Adorno et al., published the same year as *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) was more widely

read. In the opening text to the conference: ['The White West III: Automating Apartheid'](#), that took place in Vienna early last year, Attia and Pinto describe how *The Authoritarian Personality* developed the F scale (F for fascist) in order to:

gauge the psychological predisposition for fascism among the democratic citizenry, leaving the post-war consensus to settle on the notion that fascism was a personality trait, resulting from the devolution of the individuated liberal subject. Still dominant today, this tendency to psychologize fascism fails to incorporate the colonial dimension, obscuring the continuities between fascism and the biopolitics of empire, and ultimately depoliticizes both (Attia and Pinto, 2020).

In 2019, I visited the Charles Gabriel Seligman archive collection together with artist and collaborator Susan Kelly. We were researching the rise of private contractors operating in the nexus of corporate and state military apparatus, as well as academia, who perfect models of psychological profiling and tactics of behavioural control. We traced resonances of this phenomenon to the histories of dual psychological and military practice in counter-insurgency struggles in the former British colonies where 'rehabilitation' techniques were used to 'cleanse' and re-constitute compliant colonial subjects. Following in the trail of Linstrum's book, we found ourselves inside The Royal Anthropological Institute in central London, looking through the dusty boxes. Under the entry number MS262/1/3/11, Seligman writes: 'I am inclined to regard the whole of savage life, with its innumerable ceremonies, as a psycho-therapeutic sublimation, without which the savage could not get through life.'



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Photography: Margareta Kern and Susan Kelly, 2019

'Suggestions as to Method of Recording Dreams of Non-European Races' is another entry written by Seligman, addressed to 'the investigators' in which he gives a number of instructions, ending with:

It may help the investigator to remember that although Freud, to whom we owe the first clear statement of dream mechanisms, believed that dreams refer predominantly to the sexual sphere, further research, particularly experience of the war neuroses shows that any emotion especially if accompanied by psychic conflict, as in the struggle between fear and duty, may be the efficient cause of dreams. Jung, if I understand him aright, regards the dream as an attempt (usually by way of analogy) at adaption to present or future demands or difficulties while it has been suggested that one function of the dream is to make some of life's problems clearer to the dreamer

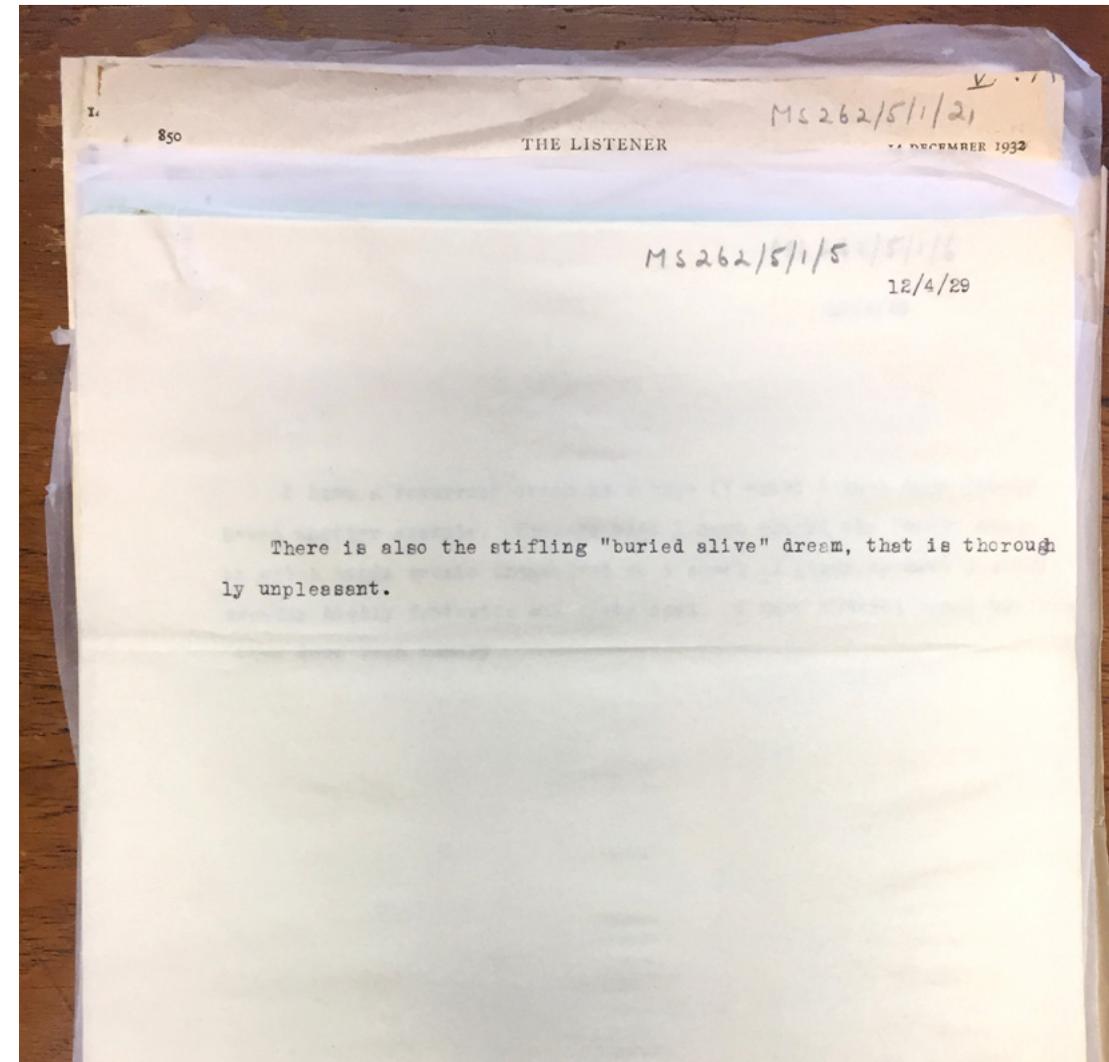
(Charles Seligman, archive entry MS262/5/6/4).

Around the same time of our visit to Seligman's archive, Dominic Cummings published a long blog-post titled: '[On the referendum #33: High performance government', cognitive technologies', Michael Nielsen, Bret Victor, & "Seeing Rooms"](#)'. Predictably (and, one doesn't need a data-modelling tool to know this) it doesn't feature a single reference to an idea by a woman (which is kind of a relief). In the text, Cummings techno-evangelises about cognitive toolkits, AI and then, referring to the Amazon owner's desire [to colonise the space](#), writes: 'Jeff Bezos is explicitly trying to revive the Mueller vision and Britain should be helping him do it much faster'.

Less than a month later, in July 2019, Cummings was appointed as the chief advisor to the British Prime Minister.

Recent disclosure from NHS England to [Byline Times](#), reveals that a number of highly controversial contracts containing confidential data from tens of thousands of COVID-19 hospital patients have been awarded to technology companies: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Palantir and Faculty. The system is now live and being used to inform senior health officials on the latest situation at the daily Downing Street briefings. Similar handover of public 'telehealth' to the big tech companies is happening in the US, where [Naomi Klein writes](#) 'something resembling a coherent Pandemic Shock Doctrine is beginning to emerge. Call it the "Screen New Deal"'.

As well as collecting dreams from the people of South Asia, Africa and the Pacific, Charles Seligman collected dreams from the British public. In the folder marked 'further dreams, articles, psychical research, art, various' we came across two letters from Maude Meagher, dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1929. The first one asked: 'Do you know the "aloneness" dream? It was a recurrent dream of my childhood, and several people have given me various versions of it'. The second one simply said: 'There is also the stifling, "buried alive" dream that is thoroughly unpleasant'.



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Photography: Margareta Kern and Susan Kelly, 2019



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# 6

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## Fabula

By Jordan Baseman

I think that a chronically sleep deprived society has been catching up on sleep. The strongest correlate of dream recall and dream vividness is how many hours you sleep. People are recalling more dreams, they are longer dreams, they're more vivid dreams. Both emotionally and in visual imagery. They're more bizarre. More people are having powerful dreams that get their attention than in typical times.

Any crisis tends to stir up our dream-life for psychological reasons. We definitely get more anxiety dreams. But in most crises, we sleep less. All of our dreams are just thinking in a very different brain-state, very visual and metaphoric and intuitive, rather than logical, and linear, and verbal.

There were an awful lot of dreams, especially early on, about just coming down with the virus or thinking you might be coming down with the virus. But then probably more interesting were all the metaphors for the virus. One common one was bugs. And I wouldn't say one dream stood out so much, it was just cumulatively the number and variety of bug attacks on different dreamers in their dreams. Swarms of flying insects like bees or hornets would be coming at some people. Armies of cockroaches

running towards them. Dreams with different kinds of masses of wriggling worms. Most people were really being attacked by the bugs. Others would just open a door to a room or pull back the covers and there would be huge numbers of bugs that were experienced more as disgusting and dirty and disease ridden than literally attacking, potentially going to kill you because there was contamination.

But lots of the bugs were swarming at and attacking the dreamers. And a few were dramatic, bizarre and sometimes individual bugs, like there was a giant grasshopper with vampire fangs attacking one woman. And there was another woman who said that she had kind of a false awakening in her bedroom and, she saw a large tarantula crawling through the mail slot into the bedroom. She remarked that she had no mail slot anywhere in her house, much less in the bedroom. But in the dream the tarantula was coming in through the mail slot in the bedroom wall.

Many of the other metaphors I saw, like natural disasters, tsunamis, earthquakes and tornados and hurricanes and wildfires breaking out, I saw those after 9/11 and I'm seeing some of them now. But the bug attacks seem rather specific to Covid-19. It's partly the slang term we say of 'getting the bug' when we're getting sick, especially with a virus. Also, just a swarm of lots of tiny things that cumulatively can harm or kill you makes bugs a very good metaphor for the current crisis.

<https://www.facebook.com/BBCArtsOnline/videos/560272081335609/>



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# 7

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## Public Protest in the Age of Covid-19

By Katarzyna Bojarska

### Public protest in the Age of Covid-19

Was April the cruelest of the months of lockdown?

I see my dry hands, clean as hell, as never before. And I see fear in a handful of sanitizer.

First, we got socially immobilized, publicly absent, forcefully attached to our households. In Poland, leaving one's home was only legal if one was heading to work or to satisfy the necessities of everyday life.

A crisis like this one hits the weakest and it seems at its core it means 'a disaster to feminism'. Five weeks into the crisis Polish parliament decided to proceed a citizens' bill to make even more stringent what has already been one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. Ironically, while coronavirus seems to affect women less severely, the alt-right will try to re-claim its share.



above: Warsaw-Praga, line to Pewex, Aleksander Jałosiński/Forum

below: Warsaw, 3.10.2016, Black Monday, Chris Niedenthal (Archiwum Protestów Publicznych)

The first thesis of the recently published manifesto, *Feminism for the 99%*, bespeaks the reinvention of the strike which took place in October 2016 in Poland', when more than 100,000 women staged walkouts and marches to oppose the country's ban on abortion!<sup>1</sup> Yet it was not even 4 years later, when women under lockdown had to reinvent the strike again.

<sup>1</sup> Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, London: Verso, 2019.

How to protest in the times of coronavirus, how not to surrender at the times of utmost confusion and fragility?

Amidst the health care crisis, we had to manifest exceptional self-care and solidarity without being able to take to the streets.

In this state of exception, measures were taken spontaneously and collectively, and beside online campaigning, we did go out, nevertheless. People began to form lines – keeping the prescribed distance – in front of grocery stores, waiting to satisfy their basic needs. This has been powerfully and ironically resonant of queuing in socialist times: hopeless and frequently fruitless everyday practice which was not teaching people – as some wish to believe – solidarity as much as it was exercising their despair and humiliation, especially in the 1980s, the first decade of my life.



above: East News, Karol Malczuzynski  
right: Warsaw, 15.04.2020, Agata Siwiak



The queue I remember best, however, was an exceptional one on a spring day in 1986 when among a mass of people, we waited to get lifesaving *Lugol's iodine*, supposedly a protection against radioactivity flowing from Chernobyl. Another invisible threat, a concealed killer.

Is April the cruelest month mixing memory and militancy?

Warsaw, 15.04.2020, Jasza Strongin



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# 8

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## Streaming Video, a Link between Pandemic and Climate Crisis

By Laura U. Marks

With the CoVid-19 pandemic, people all over the world are taking refuge in streaming media — binge-watching movies, browsing cheering "Tubes, holding a lot of video conferences, consuming more porn than usual.

This pandemic panacea is fueling a more pressing global catastrophe, for streaming media has a significant carbon footprint. Online video represents nearly 60% of world data traffic. By a [conservative calculation](#), streaming video is responsible for over 1% of global greenhouse gases — a figure increasing exponentially. This fact, long known to IT engineers and industry insiders, is gradually entering public discourse.

For this text I calculated the carbon footprint of the wildly popular Netflix miniseries *Tiger King*, which [streamed 34,000,000 times](#) in the United States in the last ten days of March 2020.<sup>1</sup> Many variables enter, so this is an approximation, but it's not off by orders of magnitude.

<sup>1</sup> <https://collider.com/tiger-king-netflix-viewers-34-million-joe-exotic/>

*Tiger King* has 7 episodes at ~45 minutes = 5.25 hours. Let's assume that each unique viewer watched an average of ¼ of the whole show.

Thus:

Time per viewer:  $5.25 \times \frac{1}{4} = 1.3125$  hours

Gigabytes per viewer:

I chose the average resolution, 1080p [4300-5800 kbps = ~1.9-2.55 GB per hour ([webgeek 2018](#))]. This averages to 2.225. 1.3125 hours x 2.225 GB/hour = 2.92 GB per *Tiger King* viewer

Energy per viewer:  $2.92 \times 5 \text{ kWh/GB}$  (Costenaro and Duer 2012) = 14.6 kWh

Total energy:  $14.6 \text{ kWh} \times 34,300,000 \text{ unique viewers} = 496,453,125 \text{ kWh}$  of energy, or half a terawatt hour. That's the same as the [electrical consumption of Rwanda in 2016](#).

Carbon footprint: According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's [Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Converter](#), 496,453,125 kWh of energy would produce 351.012 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. That's equivalent to the emissions of 75,834 passenger cars for one year. (Of course, if the US were not so reliant on fossil fuels for energy, this figure would be lower.)

On the upside, according to the EPA calculator, the carbon emitted by that *Tiger King* pandemic-streaming equals the amount of carbon sequestered by 5,804,061 tree seedlings grown for 10 years. If every 6 *Tiger King* viewers planted a tree... Industry is invested in convincing us to consume more media at higher bandwidth, and governments the world over are buying in. Media corporations will likely leverage the CoVid-19 crisis to insist that ubiquitous high-bandwidth media constitute an essential service. As consumers, citizens, and activists, there are several ways we can resist this siren song. These include:

- demanding government regulation, for example a carbon tax on data centers and networks
- practicing 'digital sobriety', in the term of [The Shift Project](#) (2019): consuming less streaming media at lower resolution
- paying carbon offsets for streaming
- once the pandemic settles, going to the movies!
- purchasing and renting DVDs (during the pandemic, my local store, [Black Dog Video](#), is doing curbside video pickups)
- circulating media by mail
- for teachers, conserving bandwidth, e.g. by uploading slide shows with audio narration rather than videos (Hilderbrand 2020)
- demonstrating that low-bandwidth, small-file media are attractive in a 'cool' (McLuhan), haptic (Marks) way.

This is what we are doing at the [Small File Media Festival](#), now in its second year. Submit your maximum-5G videos! -and fundamentally, demanding that our governments push for renewable energy.

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Thanks to my colleagues Joe Clark and Stephen Makonin for their feedback on drafts.

*Note: Since this article was first published, I've been working with a team of ICT engineers and media scholars to more accurately calculate the carbon footprint of streaming media. We share our results, and other calculators, at <https://sfu.ca/sca/streaming-carbon-footprint.html>.*

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# 9

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## In the Way of Being

By Teresa Cisneros

i am writing because i have no other way  
to digest interactions over the last few weeks.

i have lots of questions  
about what practice looks like  
when my main mode of interaction is in person with people  
physically  
not on a computer or via the post or a video.

i can see the person but i cannot feel them.

i can see their facial expressions but i cannot read them.

i can see their words but i cannot decipher them.

i can hear their voice but i cannot understand the intonations.

how and where am i supposed to read the nuances by which i  
understand the world  
through the political  
through the bodily  
through the feeling  
it's like my intuition is temporarily put on hold or if it's slightly  
being broken.  
when you no longer use something, what becomes of it?

i can no longer tell when i upset someone or say the wrong thing.

this not physical space feels like anther form of colonising my  
body  
my body colonised by the machine  
by the separation  
to dull my senses  
to dull my beingness  
and where does my collective feeling go when i am separated?

i guess i am grasping what this means, at this point in time, when i  
have to continue to labour, communicate, perform.

Death Class is an open collective of artists, scholars, students, friends, and strangers, all from a variety of backgrounds and orientations, each with a singular non-exclusive constellation of attributes. We first met in Jill Casid's seminar 'Necrocene, Necropolitics, Necrolandscaping' in Spring 2018 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We regrouped in Summer 2020 as COVID-19 stopped the world, welcoming new interlocutors to share our burning questions to cope with, in Casid's words, 'living our dying on a dying planet'. Contact point for any questions or comments for any of the authors or the group: Amy Gaeta (she/her) [amylizgaeta@gmail.com](mailto:amylizgaeta@gmail.com)

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# 10

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## Inquisitive Survival: Burning Questions for the Necro-Scene

By Death Class

As COVID-19 spread like wildfire in the US, we assembled in April 2020 to begin sharing out our burning questions about living our dying on a dying planet — a scene Jill Casid has reframed as the Necro-scene (Casid 2018, Casid 2019)<sup>1</sup>. In part, we first came together two years before in Casid's seminar 'Necrocene, Necropolitics, Necrolandscaping'. In September, as we regroup to assemble our questions, wildfire is burning through the West Coast, and it is no metaphor. We are a group of artists, scholars, students, friends, strangers, queers, trans, straight, marginal, privileged, reliable and/or inconsistent humans, each with a singular non-exclusive constellation of attributes, who share having Casid as a teacher, advisor, or friend. We have been confined to our homes largely since the declaration of the pandemic on March 11 — that same day and without much anticipation the University cancelled all in-person instruction. We met online Friday between 4 and 6 pm CT throughout the summer, welcoming friends and colleagues to reimagine a

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<sup>1</sup> Casid, J. H. 2018. 'Necrolandscaping'. *Natura: Environmental Aesthetics after Landscape*. Eds. Jens Andermann and Lisa Blackmore (Zurich: Diaphanes) 237-64.  
Casid, J.H., 2019. 'Doing things with being undone'. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 18(1), pp.30-52.

collective study animated by questions as an affective structure of sustenance and Mutual Aid. We use 'mutual' not as a mere qualifier of 'aid', but as a challenge to its implied hierarchy, blurring the distinction between who gives and who is in need with the oscillating ambiguity of gift and debt. This inquisitive survival pivots on, thus, not why this world is falling apart, but the role of the unresigned question in world-making otherwise. We came together to question the collective delusion in which the Virus materialized as an invisible but concrete presence.

We shared our experiences confronting a new choreographic imperative that, in line with Harun Farocki's method, illuminates what had remained invisible in plain sight like the droplets of a sneeze. The Virus exposed and magnified the deep-rooted pandemic criminalization and marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and Brown people; as 'essential' workers and those warehoused in nursing homes, prisons, meatpacking plants, whose lives were already deemed disposable (Preciado 2020)<sup>2</sup>. Our meetings were punctuated with the urgency of joining the frontlines to protest, to stand against police brutality, and confront the largely underscrutinized consumption of black suffering as spectacle. The Virus, with its spiky sovereign crown, also crushed our fantasy of being harmless and irreproachable, not only as we unknowingly touched on each others' sensibilities regarding suffering and death, but also as we considered the possibility and risk of being contagious, of exposing our loved ones with our affection. We renounced the comfort of looking for answers to open space for radical questions notwithstanding fragile internet connections. What follows is an exquisite corpse of the burning, consuming questions we shared as we explored ways to sustain each other amidst radical ruptures and uncertainties – that for some of us were already a condition of existence. Using a hundred words as a limiting constraint, we offer you our questions as a strategy of cognitive emancipation and resistance to the rampant and contagious disinformation going viral. In an effort to extend this inquisitive survival as mutual aid, we ask you, which are your burning questions, would you share them with us?

— Fernanda Villarroel

<sup>2</sup> Preciado, P. 2020. 'Speed of life: Learning from the virus'. *Artforum International* May/June 58 (9), pp. 74-84.

## Laboratory Report - UW-Madison University

<b>Name:</b>	GAETA, AMY E	<b>Ordered by:</b>
<b>Id:</b>	9073696263	<b>Order #:</b>
<b>Age:</b>	27 yrs at result time	<b>Collected:</b>
<b>DOB:</b>	3/5/1993	<b>Received:</b>
<b>Sex:</b>	F	

## COVID-19 - COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Exact

<b>Reported:</b>	8/7/2020 7:26 PM	<b>Lab Name:</b>
<b>Status:</b>	Final	

Test Name	Result
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Your mask doesn't protect you; it protects others from you. You don't lack symptoms; your symptoms are invisible. You're not self-isolating; You're hosting. Your healthy, the normal, hurts me, us, a world. Crip theory has proposed the 'disability to come' as all our bodies break down naturally, further unevenly broken down by heteropatriarchal racial capitalism (McRuer 2006; Puar 2017)<sup>3</sup>. In the wake of the Virus, we may embrace the infection, the disability that has come. How might this crip orientation, living in our universally infected bodies as a mutually constitutive infrastructure, incite an ethics based on renouncing complete bodily autonomy that may help us collectively sustain amid unsustainable conditions?

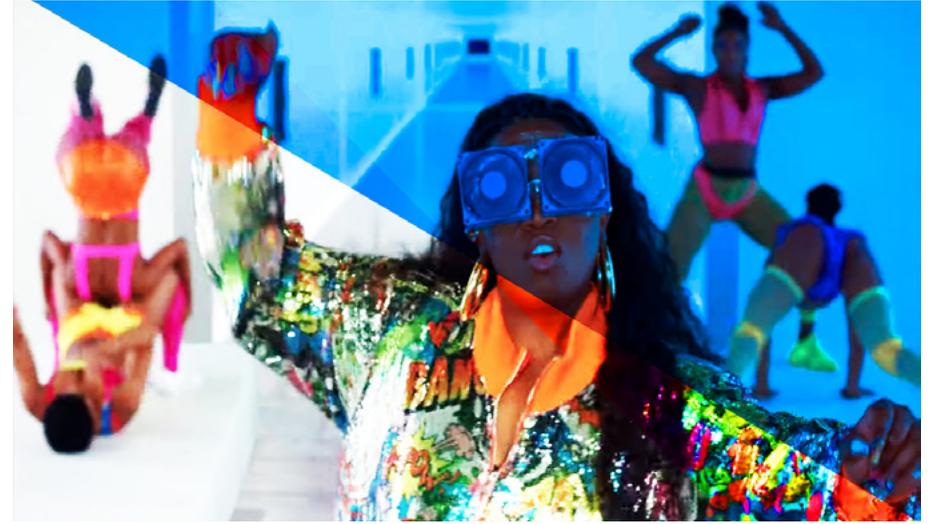
— Amy Gaeta

<sup>3</sup> McRuer, R., 2006. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. NYU press.  
Puar, J.K., 2017. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Duke University Press.



'The hunting *Shabah*' is frequently used to describe the Covid-19 pandemic in Persian and Arabic headlines. The word *Shabah*, colloquially used to mean specter, etymologically connotes the remaining essence or soul after something has been unveiled. Following this analogy of the hunting specter of Covid-19, and thinking about the 'model' it may provide as an essential structure of the contemporary world, I suggest that the idea of the 'neco-cybernetic' has a significant explanatory value for the present crisis: death being in a circular - causal relationship around the world. This further allows us to ask how the necro-cybernetic model alters our perception of the paradigm of local/global as an established historical and political model in international relations.

— Saeedeh Asadipour



The jawdrop recognition. The smackmark of the present. That feeling of future but '*they couldn't have known...*' I am obsessed with art that anticipated the pandemic: art about contact and breath denied, art that made do without air or touch. I've rejected chance and pray instead for destiny — John's kind (Berger, 1984)<sup>4</sup>, the fate that coexists with freedom by slipping the rules of linear time: *I did this now because it would become true*. Artists mediate between worlds and eras, but so do prophets and Cassandras. Enough with orders. Enough awaiting. Past, Present, Future: *who's leaving now? Take me with you*.

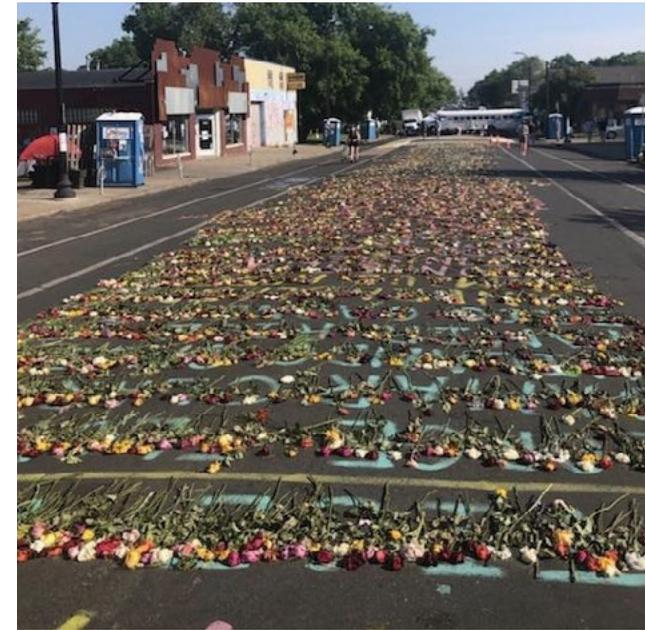
— Anders Zaniczkowsky

<sup>4</sup> Berger, J. 1984, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, Pantheon Books, New York.



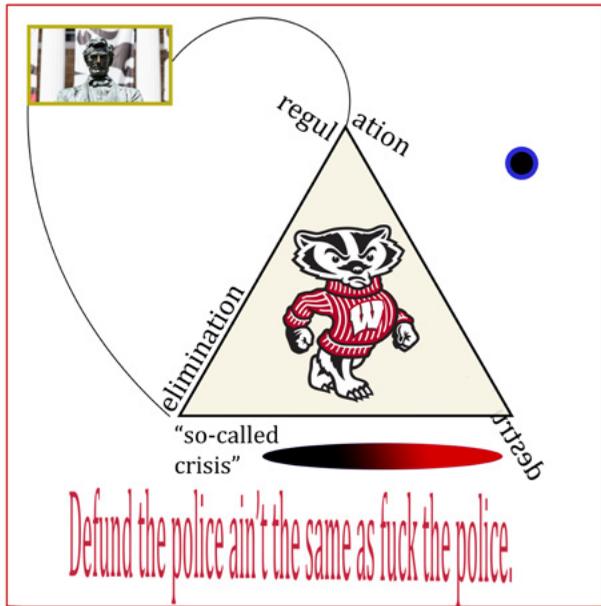
Images of protest amplify how my relationship with my grandmother who fled Germany as a refugee just before Kristallnacht ignites my affinity with those who pursue anti-racist work in other diasporic contexts. How might the performative potential of a punctum in an image of broken glass from a jewelry store following a Black Lives Matter protest (which undoubtedly brings attention to longer histories of extractive capitalism that causes and amplifies anti-blackness) elicit a queer sense of intimacy by also operating as a material metaphor for the haunting presence of other diasporas that are still not done?

— Michael Feinberg



The pandemic, the racist state, the wildfire. To state the obvious, the language we use for these things is neither fixed nor inconsequential. The past few months have, it seems, witnessed an osmosis of rhetoric, a shift in a public discursive equilibrium that augments the coefficient attached to death while diminishing the one attached to life. What is the role and responsibility of language in this process, and how can we use language as a tool of consciousness raising toward the creation of shared spaces of safety and refuge, moments for memory and respite, and chances to breathe?

— Luke Urbain



Diagrammatic interpretation of the university: last words, a text supplement to a conversation of the same name lead by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten and hosted by FUC (striking graduate students in the University of California system) on July 9th, 2020.

Being post-medieval doctors in good standing, we bleed the university in order to keep alive what we would kill.<sup>5</sup>

As Moten and Harney discuss, the 'so-called crisis' unveils what already exists. In the University, that often becomes grounds for the game of apperception engulfing on particularities. I read, emitting Boggle - in so many words - via Wisconsin. That's usually eventually - but rarely - salaries. However, it's okay to have Game Night once in a while, because it allows us to socialize. Using wrinkles to toggle dry light. You pull the 'I' into ROT. Rot the Uni. That's quite alright. Next: how to leave dry abolishment's leech?

— Luke Leavitt

<sup>5</sup> Moten F. and Harney S. 2020. *the university: last words*, FUC, Viewed 9 September 2020. <https://www.fuc-series.org/pp.3>



BirthStrike activists in the UK with strollers carrying oil barrels wearing Extinction Rebellion logos.

I follow BirthStrike activists — withholding their labor, childless. Always-already-mothers were it not for environmental catastrophe. The specter of the childless woman is the specter of death amongst the population. Genocide by fossil fuel. I am trying to make sense of their unfertilized eggs, to decipher an activist 'fungus' of sorts, growing in their wombs to bear a fruit of another purpose. Solastalgia leading them to 'mother the earth'. Woman-as-womb. SavetheChildren. Do-it-Yourself. Build-a-Bear. Make-a-Family of non-biogenic-kin whose precious presence might provide needed love and necessary re-kin-dling. If I commit to an ethical *now*, who will care for me if I grow old?

— Alexandra Lakind



Border Patrol also stabbed all of the gallons in the back of a truck that was at Byrd Camp during the raid. Attacks on our work are attacks on people crossing the border. Irreparable damage was done to those who sought aid in our camp.  
#nomoredeaths  
#humanitarianaidisneveracrime  
#borderpatrolkills  
#usmurderpatrol  
#nomasmuertes.”  
@nomoredeaths\_nomas-muertes on Instagram.  
August 6, 2020.  
Tucson, Arizona.

To be an immigrant in the US-of-COVID-19 hurts. There was no stimulus package for US, there was more deportation for US. More kids in cages of US. Concentration camps of US. ICE threats of deportation of US. Blaming the virus on US. Banning US. Being scared of the white unmasked, the ones with rifles. As always, all cops are bad. But kill the cop inside first. Fuck the Police State. But don't let us die just yet. Let us dance one more time first. What does power look like when we can't see each other's face?

— Malú Machuca Rose



Harmattan sun and morning traffic at the third mainland bridge from the University of Lagos in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. Image by the author.

Anxiety (as a wad of affect caught in one's chest) is not unlike the demonic, concealed and unknowable yet exercises a dark and profoundly foreign power over those possessed and those around them.<sup>7</sup> Anxiety is on the rise, hand in hand with the pandemic and police brutality, they all merge in a single symptom: 'I cannot breathe.' It is not something one gets, earns, or deserves; it just takes over, often violently. In January 2021, a friend calls me from Lagos where the vaccine is unaffordable because of the Global North's prideful stockpiling.<sup>8</sup> Should we ask how is it that we have lived with anxiety, loss, and death?

— Fernanda Villarroel

<sup>7</sup> Brian Robertson. *Lacanian Antiphilosophy and the Problem of Anxiety: An Uncanny Little Object*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

<sup>8</sup> I thank visual artist Temitayo Ogunbiyi for her call and always hopeful yet harrowing observations.

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# 11

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## Is the Jet Age Over?

By Vanessa Schwartz

If anything could stand-in as a primary culprit in the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus that is circling the globe with seemingly unprecedented speed, it might be the jet plane. At the same time, cancelled flights and empty airports also stand as potent symbols of how life during the pandemic has been coming to a standstill almost as rapidly as the jet flies. But carrying symbolic weight is nothing new for jet planes. They have always seemed to function as heralds – proclaiming more than they could actually ever measurably deliver. In 1957, architect William Pereira, who with his partner, Charles Luckman, led the mid-century redesign of Los Angeles International Airport, explained, 'At this very moment, history is classifying the Jet Air Age...we are realizing our future now almost as fast as we can visualize it'. The jet inaugurated not just the availability of a new speedy mode of transport but also gave rise to a new age, 'the Jet Age'. Is the COVID-19 pandemic, complete with the possible moratorium on air travel, the end of the jet age?

The jet defined an age because it changed subjective experience, not because it went fast. As the historian Daniel Boorstin noted in his classic book, *The Image* (1962), *The newest and most popular*

*means of passenger transportation to foreign parts is the most insulating known to man...I had not flown through space but through time.* Boorstin even complained that the non-experience of jet flight did not merely lead to in-flight boredom, which resulted in the airlines' introduction of movies and bars aboard. It also led modern people to lose all sense of history, which he considered a function of people understanding how time was located across space. The jet, he complained, robbed passengers of the experience of the landscape. He concluded: We look into a mirror instead of out a window, and we see only ourselves.

Boorstin predicted that the jet would lead to a hyper-individuated society of narcissists. Writing in the same year, cultural critic Marshall McLuhan noted, that 'travel differs little from going to a movie or turning the pages of a magazine'. These prescient observers understood that the jet was about more than fast travel. They dug deeper than pointing to the jet as a key element of the globalization that seems to make the world smaller and thus, for example, facilitate the spread of epidemics more quickly. (We have heard this invoked endlessly to explain how the COVID-19 pandemic differs from the Spanish flu.) The jet, they could see, participated in a larger cultural shift from the late 1950s to the late 1960s – a jet age aesthetic – which glamourized fluid motion.

During the period, the experience of being in the jet was extended, in a variety of new cultural forms, to life on the ground. Jet age people learned to toggle between the material and immaterial worlds; navigating between such newly built spaces such as jet-age airports, Disneyland (which was one of the era's most enduring creations and is a place built around transportation and people-moving – also closed during this current epidemic), as well as via contemporary media forms such as weekly picture magazines, which saw their heyday during the jet age. The jet age did not just make the world smaller because people (and viruses) could travel faster, it ushered in a culture that would conceive of the 'networked society' in which we could imagine being connected without being physically present.

As people around the world prepare to 'shelter in place', we may not be happy that we are grounded and we are right to be extremely afraid of the costs of the current pandemic. At the same time, we are also ready to live and survive while staying in place. We will teach online for the duration. We visit and

socialize with each other via Zoom and FaceTime. We stream a remarkable selection of fiction films, documentaries and series. We order essential provisions on-line. Daniel Boorstin was both right and wrong. He understood that the fluid motion of the jet would lead to a society that would invent its own fantasy of 'surfing' the internet and literally go no place at all. But he could not have anticipated that we don't just look in the mirror and see ourselves. We will have been able to go through this looking-glass in a time of crisis and create new forms of human community and connection. To be able to shelter in place from a deadly pandemic while eating freshly delivered provisions and seeing one's geographically distant friends and family may not always be better than being physically together – until it saves your life.

[Shannon Mattern](#) is a Professor of Anthropology at The New School for Social Research, New York. Her writing and teaching focus on archives, libraries, and other media spaces; media infrastructures; spatial epistemologies; and mediated sensation and exhibition.

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# 12

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## The Scalar Logics of Covid-19

By Shannon Mattern

A particle merely 125nm in diameter, far below the 'naked' eye's threshold for perception, has managed to render itself – or, rather, its effects – visible on bodies, in cities, across continents. Lungs, skin, streets, and atmospheric particulates manifest its transformative presence, as do electron microscopes, CT scanners, thermal guns, and satellite images. [Medical illustrators](#) wield [3D modeling software](#) to style a COVID-19 'avatar' that will facilitate its public recognition. [Maps](#), [network diagrams](#), and [QR codes](#) ostensibly track its spread, while masks and walls and closed borders seek to impede its transmission. Biocontainment suits, biological hoods, and isolation tents create physical separation, but allow for visual access, between the infected and the hygienic.

Assembly lines and supply chains are repurposed to produce and distribute respirators and personal protective equipment. Quarantined cruise ships and convention centers, testing booths and drive-through swab stations are among COVID's temporary architectures. Here and elsewhere a six-foot grid defines the spatial order. Recreators in public plazas and reporters at press

conferences organize themselves into a diffuse geography, while improvisatory tape strips mark social-distancing intervals in grocery store and bank lines. Refugee and homeless camps remain perilously dense. Passage through thresholds and across borders is regulated, in some places, by body temperature, registered through thermal imaging. Contagion hotpots, meanwhile, populate maps and trackers and dashboards.

Sanitation, medical, and delivery workers take on new visibility – as do their protests of unjust and unsafe labor conditions. Asian-Americans attract unwanted attention and hostility. Social disparities are made starkly apparent. When our work and social lives are mediated through screens, those without digital access are rendered further invisible. Online, we reside in grids, too: chat boxes and Zoom windows. On our rare ventures outdoors, we interact with the bodega clerk through an ad hoc plastic screen. We lean out our windows in nightly noisemaking celebration to perform our publicness. Our streets are barren, but on sunny spring days, our parks are packed with bodies repelled by one another, pushed apart as if by polar magnetic forces. We die with no loved ones at our bedsides. We mourn from a distance.

Satellite images tell us that quarantine may have contributed both to the acceleration of deforestation in the Amazon and a decrease in pollution in around the world. [Gubernatorial PowerPoints](#) bring us some measure of solace. Our smartphone clocks mark the glacial passage of time.

In '[The Transccalar Architecture of COVID-19](#)', Andrés Jacque and Ivan Munuera track the visual and spatial logics of COVID across scales – from the microscopic to the planetary. Theirs is a [Powers of Ten](#) for an age when surveillance capitalism meets quarantine.

# Lockdown Life: Distance/ Proximity

[Lina Hakim](#) is a researcher, lecturer and artist particularly interested in overlaps between the material cultures of science, technology, craft, and play. At Kingston University, London, she teaches Critical and Historical Studies, mainly to Graphic Design students.

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# 13

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## Things in Lockdown

By Lina Hakim

In locked-down life, there is no shortage of things to find oneself caught up in, of objects asserting themselves as things. There's the laundry, dishes, chairs, floors, walls, doors, steps, shelves, cot-bed, beds. There's dust, dirt, food stains, paint stains, crumbs, hair, spilt liquids of all kinds. There's toys, balls, mats, boxes, cars, dinosaurs. There's books, piles of them that fall, board books, soft books, torn books, favourite books, reference books. There's tools and technology that go missing or break down at the moment they seem most urgently needed: the phones, my specs, the TV, the remote, the laptop and mouse, the wifi router, the fridge, the hob, the sink, the washing machine, the bath shower. There's clothes, shoes, scarves, stones, sticks, pinecones in all the wrong places. There's scissors, tape, glue, cardboard, paper, paint. There's cardboard masks, makeshift seesaws and all kinds of dens. There are plants that seem to revel in neglect blooming, there are plants dying, and there are sprouting avocado seeds in a plastic tub. There's nappies, wipes, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, old dirty toothbrushes, a new dinosaur toothbrush.

The '[great withdrawal](#)' has made the circulations that make up subject-object relations almost brutally concrete. Spending a lot more time amongst our things, relentlessly immersed in them, has brought to the foreground – inescapable phenomenological attention – their resilient thingness that can no longer be held at an objective distance by our thinking them. There are only so many things that can be kept up by our thinking at once (let alone in any kind of order). And in this frenzied circulation, all these things (or is it thinging?) – including us – weave our household into a communal and primary form, essentially one big mess, though often (and not often enough admitted as such) a joyful one.

Isn't it telling that Michel Serres explains the quasi-objects (and quasi-subjects) that constitute social forms and processes, by comparison to popular child's play? In the comparison, the quasi-object is the *furet*, a token passed around by players:

He who is not discovered with the *furet* in his hand is anonymous, part of a monotonous chain where he remains indistinguished. He is not an individual; he is not recognized, discovered, cut; he is of the chain and in the chain. He runs, like the *furet*, in the collective. The thread in his hands is our simple relation, the absence of the *furet*; its path makes out indivision. Who are we? Those who pass the *furet*; those who don't have it. The quasi-object, when being passed, makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual. (Serres 1982: 225)

The counterpoint of social withdrawal is an intense intimacy within our home. A state of constant attachement (or is it a re-attachement with the babies?). And this great being together in turn emphasises all the other 'being there' and 'being together' that we are missing.

Our indivision is shaped in the path of things. All kinds of chants, incantations, silly runs, quotations and recitations from favourite stories, singing games, pretend play, elaborate variations on inside jokes and litanies of nonsense rhymes seamlessly and constantly interweave more 'normal' day-to-day activity. *Silly old mummy, doesn't she know, there's no such thing as normal anymore?*

There is the temptation, which we often give into out of sheer exhaustion, to just play, fully, without trying to manage work

around it, or even chores. We embrace play in a moment of surrender and remember how much *fun* it is, how essential it is, how it is, as Huizinga puts it in *Homo Ludens*, 'an absolutely primary category of life, familiar to everybody at a glance right down to the animal level' (1955: 3).

Shouldn't we rethink the balance of playtime and work-time? Isn't this proper living time? Is this a glimpse into the revolutionary? But this kind of play, 'real living play', is always too enmeshed in things, too all-encompassing. It demands full absorption, so when our attention falters the spell breaks - 'Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real' (Huizinga, 1955: 8) - and 'real' life rushes back in. That monstrous thing out there. Pandemic. The tragedy, the numbers, the grief, the worry. *Is the virus very bigger and bigger mummy?* No, *it's very very small, but it goes everywhere...* Things that are difficult to make sense of, beyond grasp. Incommensurable, unimaginable, and hard to accept. Could this virus really be something we all have to live with indefinitely? What kind of growth, sharing, communal understanding will the children be able to experience under these conditions? Will we ever be able to be together again with family, loved ones and strangers?

When it all gets too much, get back to things. There are things to do, to clean, to tidy up, to play with, to wipe, to move away, to put back in, to dry, to read, to glue, to hang, to paint, to staple, to wipe again, to find, to hide. There's 'work from home' to do mostly at silly hours after the children's bedtime, laptop and mouse precariously balanced on a piece of foam from the play-mat over a high chair, a sad - because practical - version of Fischli and Weiss' beautiful. The 'Second Shift' is now employment. But the partition is leaky, the spheres merging: public *and* private, professional *and* domestic.



On Zoom meetings for work, I can glance us in one of the frames - such a bizarre feature of video-based interfaces that includes our image onscreen amongst the person(s) we try to communicate with. We're a ready recreation of [DaVinci's drawing of the holy family](#) for the [Getty Museum's challenge](#). I've always liked the way in which this image abandons the traditional posed or emblematic ordering of members in representations of family, in favour of an intermingled composition of figures, coalescing bodies and overlapping movements, a merged complex of gestures, expressions and intentions. Of course our version is messier, the baby clambering up into my arms, the toddler hanging by my hair

behind me - *Can I say hello?* - any opportunity to socialise. Matt said we're all now [that correspondent whose children walked in during an interview](#), and I love that thought. I've always felt a need to resist this separation of spheres, even before motherhood. The need to share the mess of things we're each always negotiating. Rather than the neat impersonal frictionless efficiency that has come to define professional practice, messy selves in collaboration, meaning-making friction, authentic moments of sharing. *I didn't say goodbye. It's ok, you can say goodbye next time.*

There are times when it all just gets too much, the weight of it all outside and inside, the global mess and the one at home. Then it's survival mode: let things wash over us without pulling us down too much, keep an eye on the clock, it's ok in [Groundhog Day](#) - wrap today up and start again at all this tomorrow. But then there are also - admittedly more rarely - moments of breathing space and objective order. Moments of extraction from the mess, when we can push away from things for a bit to look *through* objects again and maybe even find an 'I'. This text was pieced in such moments, little treats, opportunities to step back and register things. And register our privilege.

*Tomorrow the houses will get angry and the virus will get sad and then it will go away - go away virus! - and then we can see everyone again.*

In the meantime, we'll be staying with the things. Try to enjoy their play. There's the drums, Matt's guitar, musical toys, the mini-piano, the spoon on the radiator, clapping along with a song, for the NHS and keyworkers, and just because. There's potatoes in the washing machine, a filled potty, a dropped plant pot, an upturned bowl of cereal, sticky sippy cups, squished peas in the carpet (at least I hope that's what it is).

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# 14

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## Hierarchies of Hardship

By Sara Blaylock

I find myself taking walks to add variety to my day. After more than two years of living in my neighborhood, which is close enough to my job that I walk there multiple times a week, I am for the first time attuned to such things as the contents of my neighbors' gardens or the stages of their house projects, the way the weather will change the behavior of our local birds, and the slow progress of spring as it appears on the deciduous trees. Chives come first, then rhubarb. Crows enjoy a grey day; seagulls prefer moisture. Grackles have black iridescent bodies, cluck a bit like chickens, and will eat small birds and minnows if given the chance. When it's sunny, I can discern the scent of a magnolia tree from a safe social distance of six feet.

Of late, I have also found myself a regular visitor to a construction site. It's a daily dose of theater to watch cranes as tall as dinosaurs lower steel beams onto platforms, front loaders unleash rubble into dump trucks, or cement mixers steadily turn.

I have come to think of the construction site as the major cultural touchstone of my day. Its subjects are riveting, the changes constant, and the mechanisms profound. Really: that brachiosaurus-sized crane puts time into perspective, making more tangible the way the world may have looked when it teemed with life at that scale.

My neighborhood is likewise more exciting when I allow observation to be not only a way to pass the time but a method to make sense of its passing. The yards are beginning to be raked and mulched, making way for daffodils and hostas. The fishing boats are filling driveways. The scent of charcoal has begun to waft from back decks and patios. The calls of ships as their captains hail the lift bridge have returned to our daily soundscape.

Within the smallest scale of my world, as the eyes of my twin newborns begin to widen, my toddler – at home with us full time – is gradually transforming into a little kid.

Even with all this change I'm freshly attuned to, I still find this time exceedingly repetitive. The certainty of how each day will pass contradicts the uncertainty of the future but gives little comfort when I am at my most morose. This is not a confession of depression. To the contrary, it is a confession of the embarrassment I feel at not being able to rise to the pandemic occasion with more grace and self-awareness.

I live in a mid-sized city in the northern reaches of the American Midwest. I have an objectively easy life. I am not threatened by the pandemic; I am inconvenienced by it. My boredom is a sign of privilege. This has become a daily mantra, a reminder that pulls me away from a listless moment and back to the lilac buds growing from a plant that only two months ago quaked under the remains of three feet of snow and ice.



Alexandra Délano Alonso is Associate Professor of Global Studies at The New School in New York City. This excerpt is part of her recently published poetry book *Brotes* (Elefanta Editorial and interstitial press, 2021) and the short film *Fragments* (2020), with Daniela Alatorre.

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# 15

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## Fragments | Brotes

By Alexandra Délano Alonso



March 10

Home | Casa

*36 cases.*

Silence.



What  
were we doing before this?

Cancel

Essential | Non-essential

(A is sick)



Mamá, do you believe in god? 329 cases.

An hour. Another.

Out of focus.

Distancias.

Morning light.

Fronteras cerradas |

Loss | Play



The cemetery is closed until further notice.  
(C is sick, Sh is sick).

M's father died.

The heavy sound of every siren.



Un tiempo sin tiempo.

Ashes

Remains of magnolias blown away  
Branches fall. Power out.

33,768



Wind  
Touch

How it all falls apart

Humanity | Humility



Fog  
In betweenness  
Sometimes lifts

Tránsitos

A curve shifting

slow  
down

ready or not



How we become

part of

each other

158,268 cases | 11,648 deaths



a sense of  
direction

or balance

root

disassembled  
in place



What we allow  
The limits of discomfort

What we let go.  
Who dies.

Linked fates.



too loud, too fast, too soon  
too much, too close, too long  
too slow, too quiet, too far

unknown beats  
pendulum swings

questions unasked  
traces elsewhere

huecos | hollows  
anhelos |



Can't take a deep breath.

thick  
tense  
air

plywood over windows  
steel railings  
unfold  
default

199,392 | 20,422



mamá, otro pájaro muerto

early feathers  
yellow deep beak

break up the soil  
hold on  
hands joined

hay que cantar  
asirse | ritual

16

# Lockdown is a Savage Montage

By Dave Beech

Lockdown is a savage montage

ISOLATION IS A CUT

Lockdown takes a pair of scissors to society

CORONA IS THE WORLD AS AN INTERNALLY HETEROGENEOUS IMAGE

Covid-19 is the hardest example of soft montage

WHATEVER COMFORTING IMAGE WE HAVE OF A UNIFIED SOCIETY AS A WHOLE IS FRAGMENTED BY QUARANTINE

Hugs, handshakes and kisses have been spliced with the scalpel of social distancing

A BLADE 2 METRES WIDE SLASHES THROUGH THE WORLD

Edit points separating the dying from their loved ones

KEY WORKERS ARE THE GLUE

Quarantine is a savage montage, surgical in its control but brutal as it scars, tears and rips through bonds of love

THE FRAGMENTS OF SOCIETY HAVE BEEN REARRANGED IN A NEW PATTERN

Families are cut up while households are stuck together

THE VIRUS TRACES THE OUTLINES OF SOCIAL CONTACT

The emergency measures are rules of composition

SOCIAL DISTANCING IS AN ARENA FOR THE JOINING TOGETHER OF HETEROGENEOUS MATERIAL  
Knitted, sewn, patched and repaired, we reunite in new patterns  
LOCKDOWN IS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE PRECARIOUS BALANCE OF FRAGMENT AND WHOLE





Vladimir Miladinović is an artist whose main interests lie with the politics of remembering, media manipulation and the creation and reinterpretation of history. His work engages with war and post-war trauma. His most recent work 'The Notebook' is a work based on Ratko Mladić's war diary – a document that was used as evidence in his trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. He lives and works in Belgrade.

Stephanie Young is a professor at Salem State University in Massachusetts. She holds a PhD in comparative literature and translation studies from the State University of New York, Binghamton and has also studied the practice of photography at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Her forthcoming book, *The Forensics of Memorialization*, traces a trajectory of visual culture in (former) Yugoslavia since the 1960s with a focus on how traumatic material culture is used by artists to shape memory politics in the region.

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# 17

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## The Reluctant Screen Shot Collector

By Vladimir Miladinović and Stephanie Young

**(S)** A couple of years ago I was at the MIT Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts with the artist Vladimir Miladinović where we visited the virtual reality exhibit about war and testimony. We thought we would take a look and try it out. We put on our large VR glasses and started moving through the virtual rooms of the exhibit. I had no idea where Vlada was because I was blind to the real world, only able to see the shoes of the other blinded wanderers. Although it was taxing for me, I moved through the entire exhibit as best I could, roaming through this digital world of war. I obeyed the virtual orders of how to move my body through this world the best I could. At the end, exhausted, I took off my huge glasses and found Vlada standing in the corner of the room. Having failed to follow the digital narrative, walking through the virtual walls and the like, he had taken off his own glasses and had been watching me walk around in circles. We noticed that we were both nauseous. The disparity between the movement and wearing the digital glasses had literally made us sick. We left the museum and its digital world and drove across the Charles River to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to look at 'real' paintings.

**Digital:** From the Latin 'digitus' meaning 'finger' or 'toe'; relating to, using, or storing data or information in the form of digital signals; involving or relating to the use of computer technology; 'the digital revolution'.

**(S)** With Covid comes a world of deep-seated anxiety and this is surely connected to the fact that our world has not only become more virtual than even, but in a Sartrean kind of fashion, there seems to be no exit, no alternative. At this moment when we spend so much time in front of our computers, we have to reconsider how to deal with many of our usual habits and this includes the news. We have this insane news coming at us everyday day. We see it. It comes to us. And we can't depend on our eyes anymore.

**(S)** Vladimir Miladinović usually works with paper archives but now, as with everyone else, he has turned to the digital instead of the physical world for his source material. And what he has found is the opposite of the thoughtful research that he usually draws from. Of course, he wasn't exactly searching for these memes – they were just popping up everywhere – his computer, his phone, and he found that they represent the things that are happening now. Thus, he started painting his 'screen shots series'. A small series of watercolors about the relationship between social networking and the foreign media. He has become an unwilling recipient and therefore reluctant collector of these little fake news articles. A mere screen shot collector.

**Meme:** 1970s. From Greek mimēma 'that which is imitated', on the pattern of gene. An idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture. To imitate; an intended echo. An image or snippet of video or text considered witty or incisive that is spread widely and rapidly by internet users.

**(S)** What he has painted are anecdotal texts. Mere screen shots. Memes. They are the opposite of archives, or perhaps they are a new kind of archive. As one French philosopher wrote: 'The archive. If we want to know what that will have meant we will only know in times to come. Not tomorrow, but in times to come. Later on, or perhaps never'. The new archive consists of a series of bytes of information. Just an image and a headline. What you see on the screen gives you three to five seconds to make an opinion, to do a 'reading'. To make an opinion. There is a crisis of knowledge, of information, of reflection and analysis. News is supporting this crisis. Without this news it would have been different.

**Influenza:** 1504. Medieval Latin 'influential' in the astrological sense; visitation or influence of the stars; astral, occult or atmospheric influence. 1743: Italian meaning disease; a plague has broken out which destroys a large number of people; they call it Influenza.



Watercolor on paper, 30x40cm, 2020

(V) One typical afternoon during a terrible lockdown in a small city in central Serbia:

'Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant as Potential Coronavirus Treatment' Seriously? This pandemic is less problematic than the world leaders we have today. Did he really say that? And what is this 'Intelligencer' in the first place? I should look up more sources online; I doubt any normal person would say something like this. Wait?! Look at this one: 'Drink Vodka to Beat Coronavirus' Man! This is insane, no way this is real, must be another clickbait, this portal must make a lot of money! It would feel good to take a shot of Vodka though, I feel anxious! Or something stronger . . . 'France Had to Tell Citizens That Cocaine Won't Cure Coronavirus' I totally get this, I will keep this one for sure, it even looks nice. I should do something with these screenshots. I already have hundreds! Oh, 'Medical Experts Denounce Trump's Latest "Dangerous" treatment suggestion', so he did say that, it's in *The Guardian*, so it must be true?! But why is it dangerous *and* why is dangerous in quotation marks? I don't get it, this is so confusing. 'A Man Drank a Bottle of Rubbing Alcohol for Covid-19', poor guy,

but what are these websites? 'MedPage Today', who knows if this really happened. Do people really take instructions from these obscure online sources? Probably yes!



Watercolor on paper, 30x40cm, 2020



(V) I just remembered a story about some terrible revenge that took place somewhere in the Bosnian warzone in '92. Soldiers tortured a doctor who was imprisoned in a camp because they read in local papers that he was baking kids in the oven. The power of media indeed! I can only imagine the chaotic aftermath produced by this content. So, a crisis produces content that produces more crises; it's a capitalist Perpetuum Mobile. And I am a perfect consumer! 'This Pandemic is Nothing Compared to What Climate Change Has in Store', finally someone wrote about it! I don't know why, but this has calmed me down a bit. I think I'm hungry! 'Belgians Urged to Eat Fries Twice a Week as Coronavirus Creates Massive Potato Surplus', A potato surplus? What the hell? I should stop looking at this! I'll keep this one too!



Watercolor on paper, 30x40cm, 2020



**Infect:** Late 14th century; Latin 'infectus' to fill with disease, render pestilential; pollute, contaminate, to corrupt morally. Disinfect: 16th century. French. Cleanse from infection, destroy germs or disease.



Watercolor on paper, 30x40cm, 2020



(S&V) And the news keeps getting crazier, which creates the perfect situation for an even greater support of capitalist ideology. It tells you: don't even try to think outside of capitalism. Don't even try to think of alternative political realities. The production of knowledge is now based on these obscure websites that are creating knowledge — opinions — and ultimately misinterpretations — fake news. That is, the production of knowledge, fake news, has no source, no center. There is no author. Like capitalist ideology, the dissemination of this material is everywhere, and this very fast news is easy to perceive and easy to form a quick opinion about.

(S&V) The meme has no source, like capitalism. It has no roots. It has no trace. Yet, it is our present and our future. The question then becomes: Does a third way exist? Or is this Capitalist logic one that tells us that there is no alternative, and we continue to believe this. It says: be creative to make things nicer but do not be too creative — do not think outside of capitalism or else the fragile world that we have all worked so hard to create, a mere façade it seems, will fall apart and only immense anxiety will remain. Our world is connected. We only have a digital world. We are limited to contact with a small amount of people. We cannot meet anyone now. It is nearly impossible to make new contacts and the world is now made up of bubbles, clusters.

**Bubble:** 2020: unofficial term used to describe the cluster of people outside your household with whom you feel comfortable spending time during the pandemic.

The world is closed, insulated. There is no exit. It's a Sartrean crisis.

Grappling with terrible governments and civil unrest amidst a pandemic, we are reluctant to see anything positive in the future. Yet, even though we have no clear exit in sight from this current disaster, we continue to search for one, as we always do.

Philip Miller is a South African and international composer and sound artist based in Cape Town. His work is multi-faceted, often developing out of collaborative projects in theatre, film, video and sound installations. Miller is currently an honorary fellow at ARC (The Research Initiative in Archive and Public Culture) at the University of Cape Town.

Marcos Martins is a graphic and interaction designer and an associate professor at Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial, Rio de Janeiro, a city where he works and lives. As a researcher, he explores possible connections between design and art, philosophy, and media studies. His post-doctoral research at Princeton University (2018) addressed the cultural changes in written communication practices brought about by social media.

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# 18

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## 'Caluza', Covid-19 and Creating a Song and Video under Lockdown

By Philip Miller and Marcos Martins

March 2020. It is lockdown in Cape Town, South Africa. I am privileged to live in a small seaside village right by the sea called Kalk Bay. But not more than five kilometres from my home, is a township called Masiphumilele. There people live mostly in shacks sometimes crowded with large families- as many as ten people in a small two roomed house.

How do they live inside in their 'safe homes', which our president Cyril Ramaphosa urges us to do. As the days turn into weeks, many singers whom I have known — some for decades — they are my friends — not just colleagues — reach out to me and ask for financial help. Some of them live in these small houses in townships where they have limited resources, let alone easy access to green parks and white sandy beaches.

I am wondering how I can find an effective and collaborative initiative to involve many of the singers in my immediate musical world to earn some money, as concerts and gigs are deleted from their once busy calendars (many of them were meant to be

singing in the walking-opera production 'Head and the Load', my collaboration with William Kentridge, the dates for which have been cancelled indefinitely).

After reading an article written by my friend, the writer, Mark Gevisser (The Business Day <https://www.markgevisser.com/blog/was-apartheid-the-ultimate-lockdown>) I learn about a South African composer, Reuben T Caluza, who had composed a song 'Influenza 1918' at a time when the Spanish Flu decimated so many people in South Africa and other parts of the world. I am curious to hear this song so I embark on some internet research and contact musicologists and academics who may know more about the composer and the origins of the song. I eventually track down a recording of the song from an album of Caluza's music which was recorded in 1920 in London by the Zonophone Gramophone company (much later to be merge with the South African record label 'EMI').

Eventually, after much more hunting on-line, I was sent a digital Mp3 recording of the song, by Professor Veit Ehrلمان who has written extensively on Reuben T Caluza and his repertoire in his book 'African Stars'.

The decision is made! I will transcribe this recording and make a new vocal arrangement of the song 'Influenza 1918' for my singing colleagues. They do not all live in the same cities nor towns. Some live in Soweto, some in the township close to where I live. Our only means of communication will be via cell-phone. I arrange each part for their different voice registers from soprano to deep bass. They each receive a recorded audio guide track which fixes both the speed and musical key to which they must sing. We swap musical takes over Whatsapp. Data is precious and because South Africa's cell-phone companies are unregulated, most South Africans cannot afford to have data. This is another glaring chasm that faces the poor of the country. So, I purchase bundles of data and the learning of this song takes shape remotely. A Whatsapp group is formed and soon — we have an online space to chat — ask each other questions around the interpretation of the song and then of course, just keep each other company and encourage each other when lockdown conditions seem overwhelming. We talk about the meaning of the lyrics — written in Zulu with two different possible translations to choose from. We think about why the composer, RT Caluza wrote

the music in the style of 'Four – Part Harmony' singing, a direct import from the Christian Missionary hymn books of the English and German. We ask ourselves why Caluza's message in the song is one of admonishment. He writes that if the people lead a life of 'lust' and sin, they will be punished with getting sick and dying by the 'Spanish Flu'.

Iningi labanye lafa lapela kona l'ehlane, Siya niyala nsizwa Siya niyala ntombi musa n'ukuvumel'inhliziyu ngoba ayigcweli.	Many others died in the wilderness We warn you men We warn you young women Do not follow your heart Because of non-satisfaction ( <i>lust</i> )
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Lyrics and translation with courtesy of Professor Howard Philip's book 'Plague, Pox and Pandemics'.

These lyrics are hardly the message which we want to support now in 2020 in Covid 19 – Lockdown, given South Africa's initial negative reaction of intolerance to the spread of the HIV Aids Virus in the 1980s and 1990s

The song is finally finished – the singers have recorded their voices with their own cell-phones. The quality hardly reaches the professional sound which would have been achieved if we were recording in a music studio. But somehow, the tinny quality feels both like a 78-inch disc playing on an old gramophone player but at the same time, it has digital glitches and distortions which start to give the recording a unique and uncanny sonic character.

I come to the final stage: to ask each singer to send a video selfie of their lives under lockdown to the video-artist, and my partner, Marcos Martins (who lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) Under his editing and splicing, a magical and evocative video emerges.

### Thoughts from the Video Designer, Marcos Martins

*The video depicts the singers whose voices we hear in the song. Captured by cell phones, these images have an evidently amateur look – and – feel. Their low resolution does not at first sight seem to allow much enlargement nor enough room for changes in their original framing. These technical limitations resonate with many*



*restrictions imposed by the lockdown as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which has drastically reduced our possibilities of choice. However, images that are not quite sharp end up being consistent with a disease that is itself obscure and, in so many ways, unintelligible. Accepting this precarious state of being, the video does not comply with 'professional' resolution standards. We see successive interventions have been made which further degrades the original images: its speed is drastically slowed down, the colours are over-saturated, and certain visual details have been exaggerated through magnification and zooming techniques. These frayed images accompany the sad melody like flimsy records of everyday moments in which the singers are immersed in melancholy, even in the most joyful situations. Many times, they look out a window which marks yet another limit, both real and symbolic, between the inside and outside. At the beginning of the video, a man looking at the sky, is seen through the reflection of a window. At the end, a child gazes down at the mobile phone screen, which offers her a connection to*

some kind of 'outside'. In either case, everyone awaits.

The music video 'Influenza 1918' is uploaded on to various social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, Spotify, and Youtube. The video and posts encourage listeners and viewers to donate money to a fund # MusoReliefSA. Donations pour in! And with excitement and much hope, financial relief is now possible. For a short while the singers have food on their table for their spouses, partners, children and grandparents.

More songs by the composer Reuben T Caluza are made over the next 8 months using the same methods but donor fatigue has taken its toll on our little campaign and for now the funds have dried up.

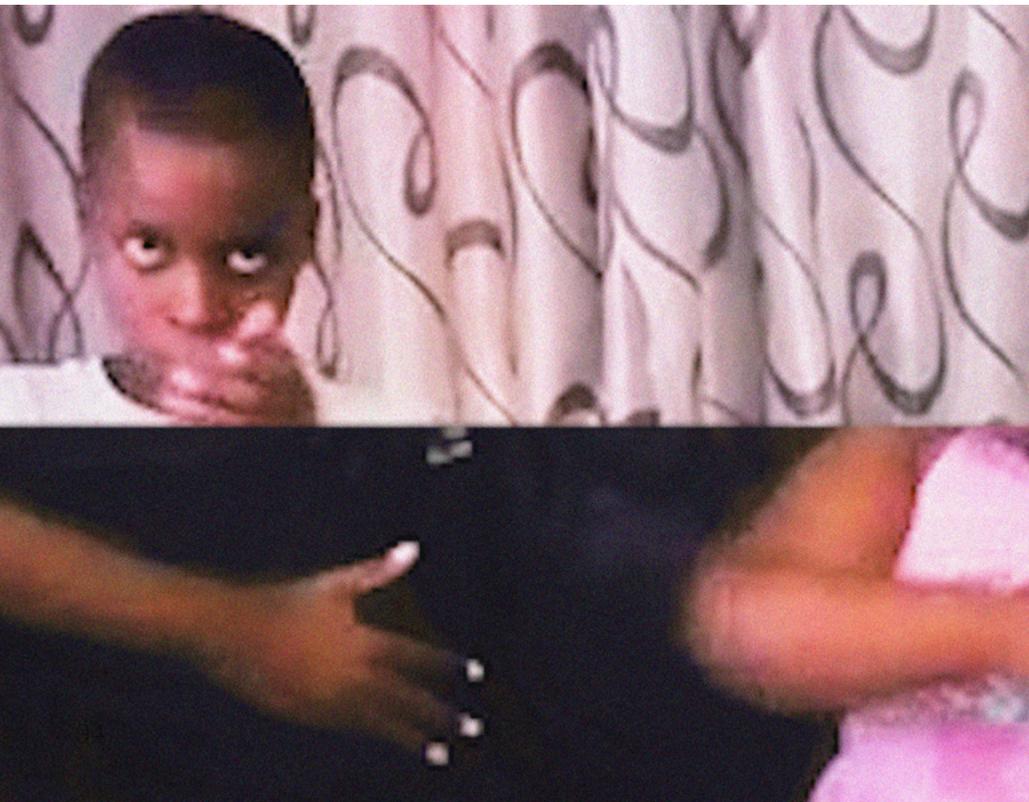
But the group Whatsapp is still busy with text messaging. The general wish is that if we can raise more funds, we would like to create an album of Reuben T Caluza's songs in 2021.

For information: go to:

<https://www.philipmiller.co.za/projects/influenza-1918>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CWdHB3aTBw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jURxsyU5z4>



Dean Kenning is an artist, writer and educator. His artworks range from kinetic sculptures to videos and diagrams, and employ DIY, allegorical and autodidactic methods and modes of representation to generate visceral, uncanny and humorous encounters and to explore political and philosophical material. Solo exhibitions include 'Where IT Was' (Piper Keys, 2018), 'The Origin of Life' (Beaconsfield, 2019) and 'Psychobotanical' (Matt's Gallery, 2019). He is the winner of the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award 2020-21.



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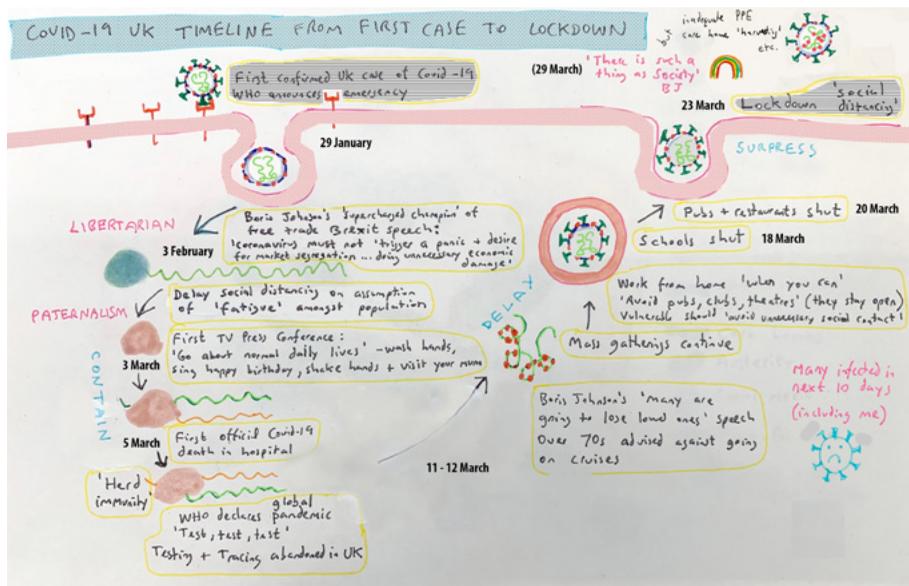
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## Social Physical Distance Proximity Diagram

By Dean Kenning

The virus enters the host cells of human bodies due to the physical proximity of individuals in a population. 'Physical distancing' needs to be operative at a social level for prevention and containment to be successful – it is the duty of the state to ensure such distancing occurs. However, the official term 'social distancing' might suggest a distance *from* the social, rather than a necessarily socially enacted physical distancing. Social distance in that sense is not at all the experience of many who, in various ways, feel a strong social connectedness and closeness during lockdown. In the UK, the term 'social distance' has echoes of Margaret Thatcher's stated belief that 'society' does not exist (there are only individuals and families). On 29 March, six days after lockdown, Boris Johnson, physically isolating with Covid-19, declared that 'there is [after all!] such a thing as society' – a fact epitomised, of course, by the NHS, essential workers, and social cooperation. Johnson's epiphany might be viewed as a purely cynical, not to say hypocritical political exercise, or else as a rhetorical concession as to the bankruptcy – now plain for all to see – of the anti-social(ist), privatising individualism which Johnson's party has upheld as unquestionable doctrine.



Edinson Arroyo is a photographer and audio-visual artist based in Colombia. In his career as a photographer, the main focus has been documentary, exploring issues of conflict, culture, community and social problems. This emphasis has led to his participation in various local and international projects. Arroyo has published in national and foreign media and exhibited internationally. Venues include Manifesta 13, National Geographic, and Docs Barcelona.

20

# Quarantine from my balcony

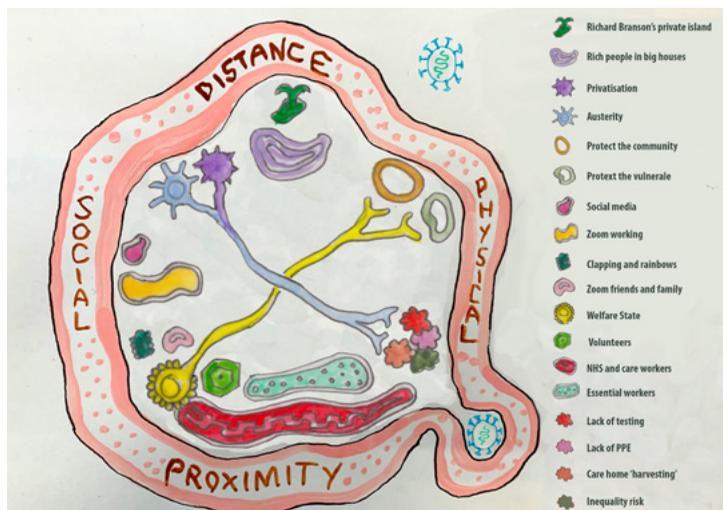
By Edinson Arroyo

Given all this there are interesting positions to be mapped with respect to relations of the social and the physical in connection with both distance and proximity during a pandemic. Social distancing as self-interested ideological denial of the social may force physical proximity amongst sections of the population (as a consequence of free market housing policies, underfunding of care sectors and local authorities, structural racism, deregulated workplaces, etc.) by those who remain at a safe physical distance (due to the hoarding of wealth and power). Alternatively, social proximity as an awareness and embrace of bonds beyond the family unit can protect people through acts of physical distancing, which benefit and remain reliant upon those who must maintain physical proximity in medical and care situations.

My name is [Edinson Arroyo](#). I am a [documentary](#) photographer dedicated to the exploration of rural territories in search of people, places and stories. However, after the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia, I had to seclude myself in my house in Medellin. There began an entirely new routine: washing my hands constantly; listening to the news hoping to find orientation but also encouraging messages; disinfecting the domestic space tirelessly; sitting down to contemplate the same landscape everyday. Home is perceived, in this context, not as the safe place, but as a paradoxical prison that keeps us safe, while a great uncertainty about the future looms over our heads.

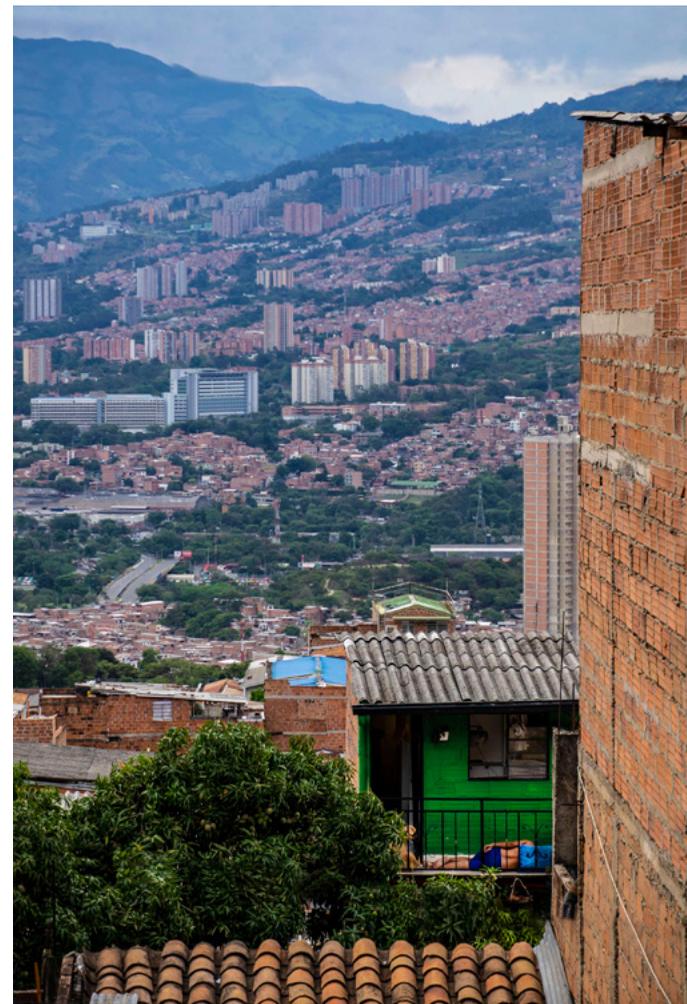
In spite of this situation, and with the desire of keeping with the work I usually carry out, I decided to delve in a deep observation of my everyday surroundings. It is remarkable how much we can discover in our immediate spaces when our attention has not been captured by the constant haste of our responsibilities.

I never thought of working on a photo series from my balcony and to dedicate myself to the detailed observations of that place

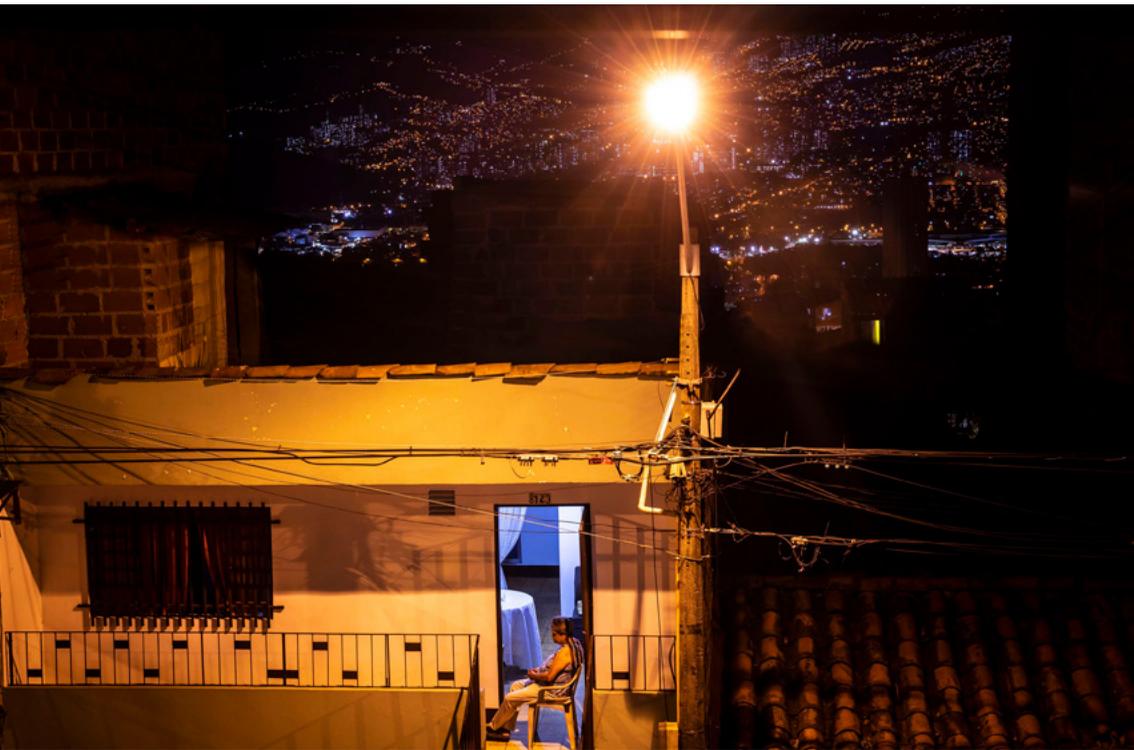


I called my home all along. In a way, it is a reflection on speed, about the need to stop to find new details in the places we thought we knew well. From my house I can see my neighbours and realize they are struggling during the quarantine; I know they can't carry out their daily lives, their friendly gatherings, their game nights. Also from my balcony, I need to shout to my other neighbour to say 'hi' and tell her everything will be alright. My photography wants to show my neighbours and their mood as I perceive them.

This photo series aims to put forward those feelings of reflection, loneliness, unrest and, at the same time, hope, which today brings us together under the same purpose: to survive.







[Atej Tutta](#) is an artist and filmmaker based in Venice. From 2009 to 2014 he worked as an associate professor at the Academy of Fine Art in Venice. He also works as exhibition designer and has co-curated several transdisciplinary projects. In the field of performing arts, he co-authored a project rewarded the Stückemarkt prize at the 53rd Theatertreffen in Berlin. As a set designer and video artist he collaborates regularly with choreographers and theatre directors.

[Valeria Cozzarini](#), based in Venice, works as a mixed media artist and filmmaker. She holds a BA in Painting from the Academy of Fine Art of Venice (2006). She has won several awards including at the Cortinametraggio Film Festival and Expression Art Movie Film Festival. Most recently she collaborated as animator for a play directed by Vinko Möderndorfer.

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# 21

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## Futuro Roseo

By Atej Tutta and Valeria Cozzarini

We bought some flowers, selecting each based on its color. We dismembered the bouquet in our studio, placing the flowers across the room to create a garden. Repositioning the lighting several times, trying out various compositions, the results appeared as the process developed. We archived the images on our hard drive.

It was February 20th, 2020. The news coming in from Wuhan was frightening but the general belief was that we, in Italy, were far enough away not to be touched by what was happening there. This idea, that the virus would only effect the other, someone somewhere far, collapsed in the following days. Swaying between scepticism and insecurity, underestimation and panic. Normality as we once knew it slowly disappeared once the general lockdown was announced.

Some weeks later, looking at the pictures we shot, we reconsidered that moment as perhaps an anticipation of what was to come.



The time of lockdown, could be understood as a slip of the tongue, a temporary delusion, a fissure in the wall. Like every wound, this one too leaves its traces. Like a camera obscura, it leaves an upside down image of the world outside, inside our precarious existence. We will not see this image until it is fully developed and fixed, its development as always, is in relation to time.

We have allowed this to become a state of normality, but in order to find our way out of this burning forest, we must stay awake and lucid, up until the very end.

[Hana Noorali](#) and [Lynton Talbot](#) work collaboratively with artists to produce exhibitions, text and live events. Together they have started non-profit galleries in both London and Berlin and have curated exhibitions in public institutions, project spaces and commercial galleries across London and internationally. (DRAF, Lisson Gallery, Auto Italia, The Whitechapel). Alongside [Parrhesiades](#) initiated by Lynton Talbot and [TRANSMISSIONS](#), co-founded by Hana Noorali forthcoming work together includes a project with WHW Akademija, Zagreb where they have been visiting lecturers in 2020. In April 2021 they are publishing a book, [Intertitles](#) with Prototype Press that considers practice at the intersection of language and art. Forthcoming projects include an exhibition at Galerija Prozori, Zagreb (2021) and online with Amant Foundation, New York. (2022).

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# 22

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## The Incompetence, the Disdain, the Laughter

By Hana Noorali and Lynton Talbot

**A SELECTION OF WHATSAPP, INSTAGRAM AND EMAIL MESSAGES TO FRIENDS, FAMILY AND STUDENTS BETWEEN THE PERIOD OF 16.03.20 TO 30.05.20. A WINDOW THAT BOOKENDS THE STRICT PERIOD OF the first LOCKDOWN IN THE UK.**

[16/03, 15.03] Hi everyone. What are our thoughts on Mother's Day? I know there were plans to see mum and although this might feel uncomfortable/unkind, I'm wondering if the right thing to do is not go. All fatal cases in UK have been over 70 year olds and while Hana and I are doing our best to social distance, our borough has the highest infection rate. We could all be unknowing carriers and I don't feel comfortable putting mum at risk. It seems strange and a bit unreal but it really is real. Probably the most caring and kind thing to do ironically is to keep away from mum at the mo. Plans will shortly be rolled out to enforce isolation on the over 70s anyway it seems. I feel we have a duty to take it seriously now. Thoughts? Xx

[16/03, 18:42] Here's something nice: Anne Boyer, my all-time fav... from This Virus; 'We also must engage in large scale social distancing. The way social distancing works requires faith: we must begin to see the negative space as clearly as the positive, to know what we don't do is also brilliant and full of love. We face such a strange task, here, to come together in spirit and keep a distance in body at the same time. We can do it'.

[16/03, 11.03] In terms of being on campus, I took the personal decision to try to take my teaching and working online where possible. While I'm not only (or necessarily) concerned for my own health, it became increasingly clear last week that the responsible thing to do as an individual, was to keep distance from one another in quite a radical way so as to collectively protect the more vulnerable in wider society and help this virus slow down as significantly and as quickly as possible. I am confident we can still have productive tutorials and assessments and I'm looking forward to seeing some of you on Skype soon. I wanted to reiterate something D said to you all here: We know enough to understand that your talented brains are contained in physical bodies that need to be nurtured and protected. In the current crisis, our psychic well-being needs to be cherished as much as our physical health. Do ensure that you find room in your life for the hope that can match the anxiety that is being generated in the world. You are wonderful people, you have much to hope for. The future is yours. Once this crisis is over, you will realize once more that the world is there for you'.

No one in the sector will be handling objects or gathering in public for some time in any gallery or museum and I think the effects will be long lasting and far reaching; a veritable paradigm shift in how art meets publics. Together, we can be prepared for this new world. Despite the inevitable disruption of this situation, as curators it is a very important time to rethink **what** we are doing, **how** we need to do it and **who** we're doing it for. This must now be at the forefront of our minds. I'm looking forward to asking these questions with you.

[20/03, 18:35] Lol J, I agree. Do you realise what's happening though???

This is beginning to look like a socialist state lol. This is exciting. This my comrades is what communism might feel like. Social

provision WITHOUT CONDITIONS!!, everyone in solidarity, the mental easing that comes from a caring state, freedom from financial uncertainty not as a favour but as a right. In crisis, it is the only thing that can help. Where is free market capitalism's help now?

[20/03, 18:40] Actually feels like there might be a radical change implemented here. It's so bizarre, all the policies that the Conservatives have implemented this week are Labour ones. In a time of crisis, socialism is being turned to of course. Just goes to show we need it now and that capitalism simply doesn't work for everyone. But, we need all these changes in policy to stay put. Lynton is convinced that communism is around the corner lol. Who knows maybe Brexit might even be reversed?!

[20/03, 18:42] But listen, J. Let's not lose sight of the need to insist Boris resigns and that we NEVER have a right wing government again. This is all Labour and the Trade Unions working their nuts off to bully the Tories into offering all of this as Hana says. Firstly, it's not enough and it's not being sent in exactly the right directions tbh. But, it is a surprisingly good start. Make no mistake, though, it will all be redacted and rolled back after Corona has gone and the conversation will focus on debt and who will pay it. Under the Tories we will, austerity will... but if we can collectively grasp this narrative, kick them out as soon as possible we can have it all!!!!

We just wrote something as a provisional outline for a project we are developing. Can I share it with you all? It's short.

[20/03, 18:45] Okay, it's a project we've been thinking about for a while called Escape Horizon.

The 'escape horizon' is evocative to us of a near possibility, a vision of something better that's just about in reach but perhaps not quite yet. Our project is to galvanise a collective effort to identify the escape horizon as such and set sail towards it. Fiction, poetry, critical writing, political conjecture, philosophy, fantasy and speculation as the wind in our sails.

Right now, we are seeing the categoric failure of free market capitalism to respond to the real needs of people. As a result, we are witnessing a veritable paradigm shift. The murderous



injustices and social inequality that the right have championed for decades, yet always managed to hide in plain sight, have been fully and brilliantly exposed by this crisis.

There will of course be pain and there will be death, but at the end, when all is said and done, and we are left to survey the damage and pass judgement on our governments, all will see that free market capitalism, that has been worshiped for so long, did absolutely nothing to help us. Nothing. The naysayers that have said time and again over the decades: 'socialism just doesn't work..' will face the unavoidable reality that it is, on the contrary, the only game in town. It has the answers and in systemic and decisive ways, it will save us.

This could be a tolling bell for the Tories and right wing ideology. As crisis provision is rolled out, people will see that financialised capitalism is itself a crisis and a plague and nothing but a death sentence to the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, the old, the homeless, the marginalised.

This crisis has come like a gale. It has brought destruction, yes, but it has also blown clear the obfuscatory clouds that we have been living under. We can finally see our escape horizon. We want to gather wind in our sails by gathering a collective vision for what's on the other side.

[20/03, 18:52] This is harder for some than others, provision will help some not others, the Tories' lack of compassion will feel sharper for some than others and this may all end in disaster and capital may just flood the void in more ruthless ways than ever... But. I want to be as hopeful as I am anxious about this. Maybe it really will change things? If it doesn't, then we will always talk about this time as you say, S. We might remember a moment when we at least tried, as a nation, to collectively model a different way to be. We considered society based on some radical shared values; Each other's health, each other's well-being, a deeper appreciation of each other's work, a need to keep everyone sustained financially and a shared desire to keep each other alive. What a shift! We must remember at least that.

[20/03, 18:57] Exactly. I am also impressed but we have to remember it is Labour and the Trade Unions steering their response. They will take it all away again as soon as they can. Let's

not let them know we're impressed, after all it is only the right thing they are doing, nothing more. If we want to keep the planet alive, our minds healthy, and our hearts good we need them out as soon as possible.

[26/03, 20:10] Boris on the steps of Downing Street clapping the NHS! Don't make me laugh. It wasn't that long ago there was rapturous applause in the House of Commons from Tory MP's when they successfully blocked a pay rise for Nurses. GET BACK INSIDE YOU HYPOCRYTE!!

[07/04, 20.34] See that Conservative MP talking tonight on the news? Volumes of Hitler biographies over his right shoulder on view... Jeez, this is gonna be so fun watching Tories talk from their homes in the coming months.

[15/04, 11.00] For a very long time now it has been easy to believe (or at least accept) that our freedom of speech and freedom of expression are best exercised on technological platforms owned by corporations dedicated to making as much money as possible. With Instagram, Twitter, Facebook etc., there is a heady feeling of instant gratification that comes with instant activism and instant response. While it may feel we are speaking up and speaking out into the world beyond our screens, what we are in fact doing is addressing a carefully and deliberately diminished sphere of influence. Rather than voicing our dissent in meaningful ways, we are instead creating content we don't own for corporations in which we have no stake. Our anger, pleasure and creativity, our last fancy dinner or most recent meme (life in other words), fuels the algorithm that offers space to bespoke advertising and we are the unpaid labourers making it happen. In short, our 'activism' diverts capital to a handful of the world's richest people directly - *white male billionaires, weapons profiteers, tax dodgers and sociopaths who want to build new nation states on floating island platforms* (Kobek, 2016).

Now, quite rightly, we cannot leave our rooms. Our whole world is delivered to us via said technological platforms offered by Google, Microsoft and others in more acute ways than ever. We have very little choice. This includes our entertainment, our politics, our communication, our family time, our exercise routines, our shopping, our teaching and learning, all our social interaction. From our private spaces, this is also the only way we might protest.

The only way we might make our art meet a public. Or is it? These platforms are territories and this conundrum is not entirely new. These technologies are not in any way neutral and certainly not impervious to our scrutiny. If we think about the paradoxical status that many of our museums, institutions and other territories for art have already always held; as simultaneously open spaces to play out political dissent whilst also sustaining and upholding many of the problematics that art intends to critique - unpaid labour, precarious contracts, corporate sponsorship and worse we will see this offers a similar problem to contend with. I will argue it is in the language we choose that more discrepant forms of resistance can emerge. And that this, right now, is as urgent as ever. As artists and curators we must show the way in not lazily falling into techno-capitalist traps of exploitation. We will suggest that this can begin at home, now.

[23/04, 20:10] Yes, I support the NHS but this weekly clapping is very clever. It's the language of heroism given to us so that we might, of our own volition, help mask the brutal disdain our government has shown the NHS for decades. Here's an idea: How about at 8PM, every single night of the week until the end of time, all Tories stand on their doorsteps and scream 'I'M SORRY' into the night in unison?

[04/05, 17:03] Well I knew it would happen but this is just unreal lol.. MICHAEL GOVE!! The Bell Curve? The discredited thesis that argues IQ and intelligence is determined by race and things like whether or not you were born out of wedlock lol... David Irving books?? Holocaust denial?? Biogs of Hitler that characterise him as misunderstood. Fucking hell, I knew this would be good peering into Tories homes but this is White Supremacy levels of madness. You don't amass that kind of reading material out of curiosity or by accident. WOW.

[10/05, 20:00] 'stay alert, control the virus and save lives'??? Are you joking? So now we're given a series of abstract, untenable platitudes so that responsibility and accountability is neatly shifted from government onto us; we must control this virus by staying alert??? I'm no epidemiologist but I don't think that's how viruses are controlled. May as well read: RUN THE GAUNTLET > TAKE ONE FOR THE TEAM > SAVE THE RICH or THAT'S ENOUGH > FUCK OFF > GO AND DIE or what about HEY PEASANTS > DO

## YOUR JOBS > DIE FOR THE BILLIONAIRES

[19/05, 23.00] Well that's a massive understatement. The UK has a relatively small population; 0.8% of the global population. UK deaths from Covid-19 amount to nearly 15% of deaths globally from the disease. That's how catastrophically badly the Tories have fucked this up. And now, they've just coerced the poorest and the most vulnerable back out to run the gauntlet in order to save on their social provision spend and lo and behold, we've seen cases rise from 140 deaths yesterday to nearly 500 today. That's another 300 families' lives in turmoil, ruined because the gov. want to test out their cheap plans at our expense. They're like little boys playing the parts of ministers in a school play. Where's the accountability?

[25/05, 18.00] Cummings was like a 10 year old in the Headmaster's office. 'I had a tummy ache. My Dad owns a forest. My son did a wee wee. My dog ate my homework'... Zzzzzz... Disgraceful.

[25/05, 18.00] BUT YOU'RE AN ADULT!! And you're talking to a furious nation. Tens upon tens of thousands are dead and we are all trying as hard as we can. Apologise. Resign.

[25/05, 18.00] A 'Poor me. Fuck you' combo is what it's called... A sympathy card to mask the utter disdain he shows for others.

[26/05, 18.00] Well that's it then. What a weaselly little prefect, circling around the head boy to protect him. The incompetence, the disdain, the laughter. Absolutely nothing matters to these boys. Children died alone, scared without their families beside them because their parents followed the rules. Now we're told the parents were stupid for not spotting the loophole, not using their parental good sense, their child needn't have died alone and terrified... Now here he is trying to say it's quite normal to drive across the country to test your eyes before he runs out of steam and faces the reality of what he's saying and just starts to laugh at us...

[26/05, 18.00] They're laughing at us.

[26/05, 18:48] It does. But who knows? This could all backfire in many different ways... We have been staying pretty much on self-

implemented lockdown, leaving the flat only to take short walks regardless of new advice. It's so surreal in the streets right now, it feels half normal - half sci-fi. We watched a film called *The Quiet Earth* a couple of nights ago. It was made in 1985 and tells the story of a man who wakes up one day and finds that he is the only human alive in the world. It solidified my feelings that community is more important than ever right now. We need to be close and take care of one another, even if that means still staying apart for the time being as a gesture towards one another. Over 800 dead in the last 48 hours yet the schools are returning? It's madness.

**[26/05, 18:58]** It will be interesting to see the final analysis of the effects of this and how different govts. choose to move forwards and out of crisis. What ideologies will be driving those moves. Early on I was hopeful that this would be a tolling bell for free market capitalism as it's proved absolutely without question to have nothing to offer here. In fact, less than offering anything, it's asked for help!! Corporations, that ardently espouse the virtues of the free-market and rile against public provision have sacked their staff and sought the public purse to maintain their business. But we are also seeing socialist policies, rolled out at a huge scale, just to keep societies alive, well, cared for and up and running... this state support gives a glimpse of what being truly cared for financially and otherwise could look like regardless of crisis. Different Govts will pay for it in different ways. The right will recoup the cost through austerity and by taxing regular people, the left might consider things differently. This has been a war economy. After WW2 we didn't enter austerity indefinitely or rush to pay back the debt, we built the NHS, we invented the welfare state; further, unprecedented investment and spend. We spent this money now, in 2020, because we had to, because we all needed it. Because it was right to. We have surely learned a lot from it and might emerge changed by it? No apocalyptic myths of survival of the fittest, riots and chaos and bar a few toilet paper squabbles we've caught a good glimpse of our innate humanity and kindness. This must be viewed as money well spent - a mortgage on a better future that will only increase in value. Can't we view it like we've collectively bought a nice new home rather than been begrudgingly given a gift we have to be eternally grateful for and indebted to? This debt should be a badge of pride that we live with while we arrange the furniture and ensure everyone has a comfortable place to live. Let's unpack, settle in and then start working out how to distribute our wealth more fairly...

**[27/05, 20:26]** The moral bankruptcy of Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson and his cabinet, and the utter betrayal of the people of the United Kingdom by their disingenuous interpretation of the rules needn't be rehearsed further. But look, if Boris Johnson cannot do his job without Dominic Cummings' assistance, the answer must not be to keep Dominic Cummings in his position, but that Boris Johnson must also go. Justice has to be done in the name of so many people who are working sometimes impossibly hard to do the right things based on guidance Dominic Cummings himself gave. For him to arrogantly flout those rules and garner the support of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet for doing so, makes a mockery of the pain, suffering and death we have all endured. Total contempt for us. Dominic Cummings has to go.

**[30/05, 12:20]** MICHAEL GOVE IS LOOKING AT PORN ON TWITTER! America is literally on fire, the UK on its knees. The government email servers are crashing trying to deal with the influx of messages from citizens calling on Dominic Cummings to resign, 324 more deaths yesterday (compared to Spain's 2, Ireland's 6, Hungary's 8, Portugal's 14, Romania's 13 and countless other's zero deaths), my sister in the London Ambulance Service, is now having to leave people with Corona Virus symptoms to die in their homes as A&E instruct them not to deliver Corona patients to an over stretched emergency room, we continue to see private ambulances enter our estate to remove bodies. Millions without jobs and their financial support coming to an end. Dominic Cummings comfortably keeps his job and MICHAEL GOVE IS WATCHING PORN!!!!

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# 23

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## Wildfire

By Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead



Wildfire. Jon Thomson & Alison Craighead, April 2020

During a lull in the meeting I drop myself into Minecraft. I find myself sitting in a Lego garden on a farm with a colourful windmill some way up the hill behind my right shoulder. This sparks a brief diversion as the three of us sort through the baffling library of pictures you can deploy if you would rather nobody sees what is really behind you.

We sit in front of our computer screens jumping from place to place. There is Ben's head and shoulders floating in Outer Space, and now Julie is sat in every bland hotel room I have ever forgotten.

As we each sit in our own physical confinement, in our own homes, in different parts of the world, we teleport our way through the corporate imagination of whoever it was, who compiled these images for the conferencing software that we have been told to use by our employers for the duration of pandemic lockdown.

A scribbled note is pushed into my view and I snap back into my house on a hill in the highlands of Scotland in late spring, where my partner Ali is silently mouthing their scribbled message at me. I lift one side of the headphones away from my left ear dispelling the patch of workplace that has been mapped onto the kitchen table for the last hour or so.

*There's a wildfire out on the heather. Keep looking for  
smoke through the trees at the back in case we have to leave*

A fire engine passes by. Julie jumps to an Italian palazzo. Ben is on a sweeping coral sand beach. I reposition my headphones and continue

the meeting without knowing why, and Ali runs outside to better understand what is going on.

\*

Two days later I see the helicopter rising into the air having scooped water from the loch below ready to be dumped onto the wildfires. The flames have been sprawling unpredictably across the land, branching and multiplying as they are blown to the west across dead bracken and heather.

That first night we lay in bed with the blinds open, watching a thin line of flame describe the hill line through the trees. All the signs are good. We have an overnight bag ready, but we know we will probably be OK. The wind is blowing away from us, but the anxiety remains in parallel to the pandemic. As the virus blazes across the planet, we are all staying home, if we can, in our attempt to slow its crossing.

My laptop starts chirping, an insult to the birds outside. The ringtone is calling me to my next meeting where we can be alone together.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv are artists, writers and curators. Their work addresses the relationship between art and politics. They've had solo shows at Project Hospitale, Tottori, Centre Clark, Montreal, Naughton Gallery, Belfast, Pump House Gallery, London, Te Tuhi Center for the Arts, Auckland and The Showroom Gallery, London. They have also presented live work at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the 5th Montreal Biennial and Kunsthall Oslo. They are the directors of artist run project space xero, kline & coma and work as lecturers in Fine Art at the University of Reading, Royal College of Art and CASS School of Art.

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# 24

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## A Thousand Kitchen Tables

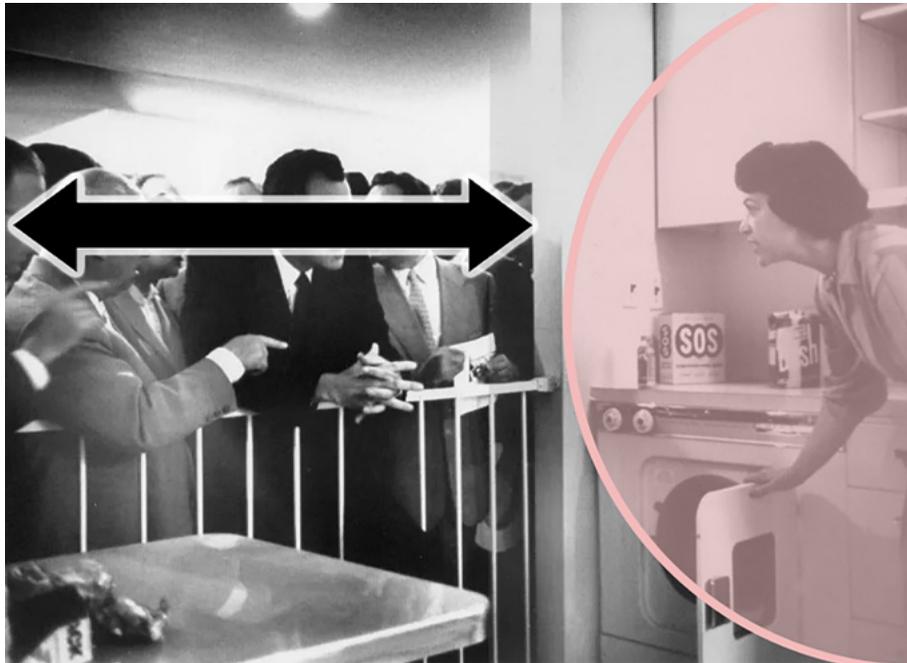
By Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Over the last few decades, a series of dichotomies have been eroding quietly under the pressure of life in late capitalism. Private/public, work/leisure, consumption/production have become irrelevant in a system where value emerges directly from the marketisation of human capital. In 1971, Daniel Buren described the artist's studio as 'a private place, an ivory tower' where portable objects are made to be consumed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> For most artists until very recently, the studio has been 'anywhere with a WiFi' – a kitchen table, a café, a train journey. The artist has become an entity that collects, connects and displays internet searches, mobile moving images, social media conversations and eBay listings. Art production has moved away from Buren's model a long time ago and is now rooted in dialogue and process, ephemeral and responsive, produced directly at the point of engagement with other humans and objects.

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<sup>1</sup> Buren, Daniel, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol. 10 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 51-58.

In a pandemic, with the removal of (semi-)public spaces for the consumption and production of art objects or spectacles, these conditions have become even more pronounced. In this respect, through COVID-19, conditions that were already prevalent but somehow still shapeless under the patchy surface of austerity, have crystallised into clear form. In redefining practices that were previously supported by more public spaces of production and display (or at least fed into them), artists now have to accept these post-Fordist structures. Where in the past the artworld



may have been divided on how to respond to the rise of post-studio practice, with some doggedly insisting on materiality and regularity as marks of resistance and others adapting more keenly to project-based, post-internet art, the choice has now been removed from us, at least temporarily, leaving us to re-evaluate the hierarchies embedded in these positions. Art will now emerge from bedrooms, quarantined hotel rooms and parks as a default rather than as the consequence of failure to attain the historical conditions of studio practice or by vanguard choice. One of the interesting questions for artists is how to find critical distance within this: how can we create work from within these imposed conditions and reflect on them at the same time?

On the one hand, this question, of how to be critical without occupying an outside position, has plagued artists for a long time. However, in the time that has passed since Joanna Drucker celebrated complicity as the end of critical negativity in art, the world has changed. We are well past the 'end of history' moment that saw neoliberalism unfettered in the wake of the end of the Soviet Union. In the face of the current resurgence of fascism, complicity hardly seems like a problem and being in opposition feels easier than ever. Where fifteen years ago, dissident artists would be offered the crumbs from the table of the major art fairs via performance and talk programs, in the age of austerity there is far less risk taking on the part of those institutions and the precarity of millennial life means fewer opportunities than ever present themselves to make the tough choices of resisting the seductions of the art market. At the same time, while the aims of dissent feel clearer than ever, our means of expressing it in the form of some kind of collective action have been curtailed by circumstances.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt notes the division in classical Greek culture between the private realm, where economic activity resides, and the public realm where political life happens through debate and collective action. For Arendt, part of the problem of modernity lies in the collapse of this binary and the creation of an economics driven politics. COVID-19 has brought back an interesting version of this dichotomy. A lot of economic production now happens in the privacy of one's home, while politics is exclusively about the policing of the coming together of bodies in public, at least while economic activity is suspended. This new realignment of the public and the private does not skip art institutions. Public museums, as Benedict Anderson and Carol Duncan remind us, are an arm of the state whose function it is to reproduce citizenship, a sense of belonging to an imaginary, shared, history and geography. As such, it will hardly be surprising to find that these institutions will likely participate in the biopolitical policing of access privileges where entry into their 'civilising' spaces is granted to citizens but forbidden to those designated as non-productive (the 'shielded', disabled, ill, old and those who care for them).

However, since exclusion from these sites is nothing new for many, there are plenty of examples to draw on in thinking about how art might proceed outside them. We can think of feminist

art that dealt with the institutional marginalisation of women by resorting to mail art networks and exchanging art objects by post. The work that came out of these exchanges was clearly a critique of domesticity and the gendered labour associated with private spaces, but through circumventing traditional galleries and modes of display they never allowed for an external 'public' critique of the private. The site of production, materials (often 'domestic' stuff from newspapers to yarn) and modes of display created a critique of the domestic without stepping outside of it. Consider for example Su Richardson's *Burnt Breakfast* (1976), a crocheted 'full English', a critique of domestic labour paradoxically delivered through a labour intensive and underappreciated medium, or Carlyle Reedy's *Yoga with Interference* (1981), using the bed as a set and referencing 'lists of groceries, schools schedules, Christmas lists, book lists, lists of all the things that women have to do in slavery of domestic life'.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, we have long been fascinated with the Moscow Apt Art movement, where domestic spaces became sites for production and display of art, as a model for making art in the absence of a legitimate public sphere for critical artists to operate in. With the evisceration of our own public space nearly complete, we might do well to draw on such historical precedents for strategies, where a fridge becomes the first page of a novel and the kitchen sink a monument for Malevich, or Yuri Albert's performance piece of (literally) helping people with household chores. The concept of Skretiki, recently foregrounded by the Moscow Garage Museum's survey, reminds us of the possibility of art as a secret practice shared between initiates but coded for future use, in anticipation of a public to come.

As the current uprising against white supremacy and police oppression demonstrates, it is too soon to condemn the political constitution of publics to the history books. And yet there are many for whom this type of public collective action will be impossible. With further repression inevitable and a shrinking cultural space for critical production, away from the Zoom curatorial initiatives and online galleries, it may be that the artistic public sphere of our plague times yet to emerge is being constituted across a thousand kitchen tables, awaiting its time.

<sup>2</sup> Reedy in Di Franco, Karen(ed.), *Carlyle Reedy*, exhibition catalogue, London: Flat Time House, 2014, p.25.

[Juliet Jacques](#) (b. Redhill, Surrey, 1981) is a writer and filmmaker based in London. She has published two books, most recently *Trans: A Memoir* (Verso, 2015). Her short fiction and essays have been included in several anthologies; her journalism and criticism has been published in *Granta*, *Sight & Sound*, *Frieze*, *The Guardian*, *The London Review of Books* and many other places. She has made four short films, one with artist Ker Wallwork, which have screened in galleries and festivals across the world.

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## 25

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# The Digital Classroom and the Digital Studio

By Juliet Jacques

Recently, my colleagues and comrades [Pil & Galia Kollektiv](#) contributed a [piece](#) to this series about how the Covid-19 crisis means 'Art will now emerge from bedrooms, quarantined hotel rooms and parks as a default rather than as the consequence of failure to attain the historical conditions of studio practice or by vanguard choice'. Pil teaches with me at the Royal College of Art, and was on the picket line with me in March 2020, just before the UK began its fatally belated lockdown, striking against the [consequences of neoliberalism in the art school](#): casualisation of labour, unsafe workloads, falling pay, and pay gaps relating to ethnicity and gender. One of the things we discussed, stood outside in the freezing cold, was the possibility of the institution forcing staff and students to move to online learning and how much that might diminish not just our employment rights but our pedagogical horizons. Before the strike even ended, the pandemic forced the issue: we might not yet have been asked to record lectures that can be paid for once but recycled endlessly, but we have been forced to teach students whose bedrooms

are now their studios, running tutorials and seminar groups via Skype or Zoom. What have been the pitfalls, and have there been potentialities?

After a brief moment of optimism that the crisis might bring about the end of the UK's heavily mediatised Culture War politics, if not the collapse of capitalism, it now seems that the post-Covid-19 world will probably be as [Michel Houellebecq](#) asserted: 'the same but worse'. In the shadow of that [crushing election defeat in December 2019](#), ending our hopes of a Labour government that would address the catastrophic state of British arts education, the main issues behind the strike – the precarity for teachers and exploitation of students – have already been exacerbated. [Art schools are laying off tutors on fixed-term contracts](#), with the fate of visiting lecturers (who are effectively on zero-hour contracts) still unclear; the RCA have [unconditionally suspended fifty of 190 students who withheld their tuition fees](#) 'in response to the RCA's handling of the outbreak of Coronavirus, their inaction on the UCU strikes at the beginning of the year, and their decision to move all learning online without consulting the student body'. (The RCA have even threatened to report non-paying international students to the Home Office.) Several of my Skype tutorials have been spent encouraging students not to quit – not always unsuccessfully – as they struggle to adapt to losing their studios and being expected to adjust their practice for a [digital degree show](#), without any reduction in their exorbitant fees.

For the students, the prospect of losing their Crit sessions, where a group take it in turns to assess each other's work, moving between studios as they go, was tough. We were able to recreate these online, to an extent, but the spontaneity that came with being able to discuss any piece of work they had to hand was lost. The conditions best suit those making work that can most easily be shared online – moving image, or text – and the most rewarding points of these traduced conditions have been the seminars I've done with Critical Writing MA students. Using Zoom, I ran three classes on identity, the first covering transgender writing, the second looking at patriotism, and the third exploring the links between colonialism, anti-immigrant rhetoric and government policy. The patriotism class was the most interesting, partly because the students hadn't often been encouraged to think of patriotism (and especially Englishness) as a form of identity politics, but also because the conversation took place in a space



that was global: here and in my tutorials, students called in from Europe, Asia and Australia, but given the lockdown, all were kind of nowhere places, the distinctions between them blurring into the little boxes that lit up whenever someone interjected. In a sense, this is exciting, introducing a new kind of equality between the participants, with interesting implications for the national identity politics being discussed. But what is lost is the creative and personal development that comes with moving to a different country: being immersed in a foreign culture brings about a perspective shift both for the individual who moves, but also for those they meet, and these exchanges cannot be replicated online.

In an [interview](#) I did for my podcast [Suite \(212\)](#) – another thing moved from a studio to Skype in lockdown – [Oreet Ashery](#) talked about the [impact of Covid-19 on Anglia Ruskin University students](#), and how the digital shift has benefitted (or at least not actively de-privileged for a change) people with disabilities, or those who aren't privileged enough to be able to relocate like the RCA's many international students, and how a blend of physical and digital learning is likely in future. On the face of it, this seems positive – despite the extra work this will engender for tutors, unlikely to be paid more for it. In a country in which everything that can be has been privatised, and in which every last penny has been squeezed out of students (especially international ones, who are the least likely to return for the first post-pandemic academic year), the further corporate/tech takeover of higher education is a huge concern. For such a development to be good, it really needed to happen after a revolution in the ideological climate – the one we were trying to bring about in December 2019. For the art school to survive, let alone thrive, in the future that Houellebecq predicts, we will have to adjust not only our tactics for working and teaching, but also for industrial action.

# Biopolitics and Governmentality

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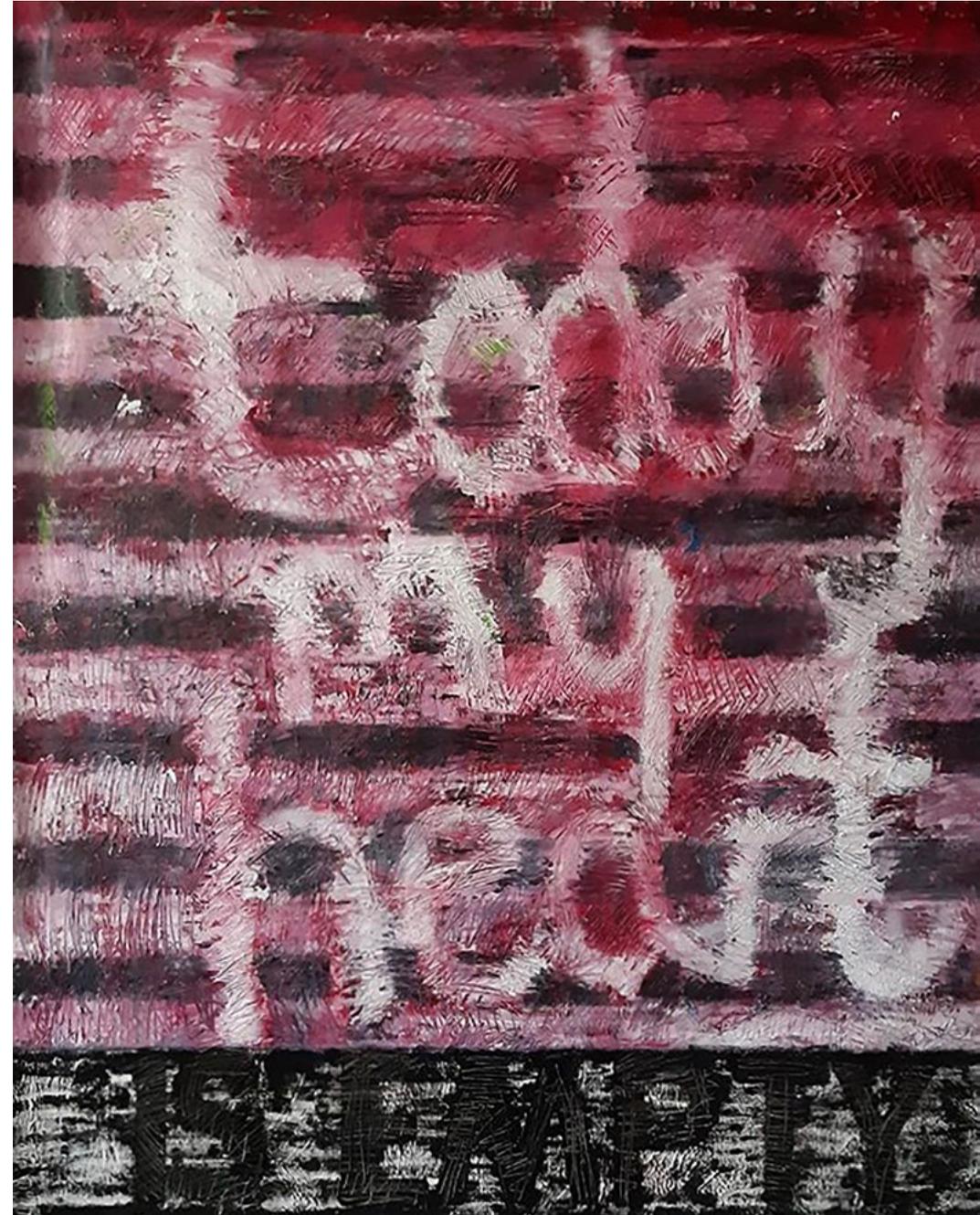
26

## Today My Heart Is Empty

By Jordan McKenzie

Two days ago I lost a friend Shahin to Covid 19. He was an asylum seeker who had gained UK residence from Iran. He'd been imprisoned by the regime for his political views and also was unable to express his sexuality too. In Iran he was a lecturer on an MA photography course... in the UK the only job he could get was at a supermarket. After the deductions taken out of his benefits, he was left with about five pounds a day to live on. He was let down by both governments...

#emptyheart #heart #sadness #covid #sayinggoodbye #loss  
#painting #contemporarypainting #textwork #textartist #queer  
#gay #instagay #iran #ukgovernment #letdown



This text was written at the end of May 2020 in London, UK. Footnotes were added at the beginning of December as a way to account for the ongoing-ness of the Covid-19 pandemic – its extension in time, shifting dynamics, belated systems of reporting and accountability, the multiple crises embedded in it and varied tactics of resistance it has engendered.

27

## The Underlying

By Elisa Adami

A slew of new words and expressions has entered our vocabulary in the past few months. Some come with clear-cut angles and marked spatial-temporal boundaries: *lockdown*, *red-zone*, *quarantine*, *self-isolation*, *iso-pod*. Others stretch into a hazy limbo – *furlough* – or combine into oxymoronic pairs – *social distancing*. Vital supplies nestle in unimposing acronyms like PPE, yet the word's handy brevity does not make their shortages any less conspicuous. Meanwhile those who were previously deemed *low-skilled* are overnight upgraded to the status of *key workers* – but do not expect any improvement in pay or working conditions in return!

Unassuming and modest, the adjective *underlying* has started appearing in insistent combination with words such as *health conditions* or *medical issues* (see [Merriam-Webster's](#) automatically selected sentences reflecting current usage). In its new blanket use, *underlying* points to medical conditions, chronic illnesses and disabilities that, in combination with age, we are told, are the real factors determining the death of thousands of people from

the virus. This virus hits disproportionately the elderly and the vulnerable, we are assured. The garb of statistical fact is used here to cloak a eugenic claim, a social Darwinist worldview. The *underlying* singles out a group of people whose death it is meant to make somehow justifiable, socially acceptable and, to some, reassuring.<sup>1</sup> It serves to separate and sort out people along the lines of an ideal, normative scale of health and able-bodiedness, no matter how unreal and murderous that ideal actually is.

In this, the *underlying* is close to the Gallicism *triage*, another word which has seen a recent surge in popularity. In its original meaning, *triage* denotes the act of sorting items, such as coffee beans, according to their quality. In the dictionary of military hospitals, where it has been in use since World War I, it indicates the sorting of wounded soldiers into groups according to the severity of their injuries. In the management of the current pandemic, *triage* or *triage-like* practices were applied in hospitals, care homes and the community at large, to redirect precious but insufficient resources – depleted by more than a decade of austerity – to patients with a greater chance of survival: predominantly young and with no serious underlying conditions.

The idea of a class of people with underlying conditions is close to the notion of *risk group* that [Susan Sontag](#) discusses in *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. The 'neutral-sounding, bureaucratic category', as Sontag writes, inadvertently 'revives the archaic idea of a tainted community that illness has judged'. (46) *Underlying conditions* is a vague expression, indefinite enough to ward off scrutiny, capacious enough to contain whichever 'fault' does not conform with the abstract notion of a perfectly healthy and functioning body. Indicating what lies 'beneath or below' or what is 'basic and fundamental', underlying conditions are invisible, tucked away in deep structures, manifested only in the sudden flare of symptoms – a rash on the skin, a spike in deaths. Like the virus, they are undetectable to the naked eye. Although, in its current use, *underlying conditions* remains specific to medical practice, for it to be truthful, its scope should rather be stretched to include

<sup>1</sup> Observed from the vantage point of December 2020, the consequences of such eugenic policies are chilling. According to an ONS (Office of National Statistics) report that was published on the 18th of September, two thirds of the people who died of Coronavirus in England and Wales from March to mid-July were disabled people. While disabled people make up 16% of the UK population according to the ONS's criteria for self-reporting disability, up to mid-July, they made up 59.5% of deaths. See <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/september/disabled-people-make-two-thirds-coronavirus-deaths-ons>

all those interlocking structures of discriminations that shape life in contemporary capitalist societies – race, class, work, gender, sexuality, money, education, able-bodiedness, citizenship, geography.<sup>2</sup>

The language we use, the language we are given, is a mirror of what [Johanna Hedva](#) calls the 'world's ableism'. A pandemic disables 'normal' life; it suddenly makes what was easy, accessible and ordinary, hard, out of reach and odd. Except that such 'normal' life has never been easy or accessible, ordinary or indeed normal for the chronically ill and/or disabled'. The world's ableism', Hedva writes, 'has always been a thing, it's just now getting closer to those who normally don't feel it'. What will we do with this newfound knowledge?

Hedva urges us to confront the ableist biases not just in our everyday language, but in the language we use to protest against it too. Slogans like 'take to the streets' or 'occupy the square' will always exclude those bodies who are too sick to get out of bed. Now that we are all home bound or have been (at least those of us lucky enough to have a roof and able to work from home), it's time to rethink what a revolution could be like. This revolution to come, which is already here, calls for a general strike: stay at home, refuse to work, refuse to go to school, refuse to shop, refuse to pay rent', refuse as much as possible to get sick or make others so'.<sup>3</sup> As [Anne Boyer](#) writes: 'demonstrate in [y]our every action that the lives of the vulnerable matter, that the deaths of the sick and the elderly and the poor and imprisoned from this virus are unacceptable'. This revolution is and will be an act of communal care, and care is always inherently revolutionary as it 'demands that we live as though we are all interconnected' – which, of course, we are – thus invalidating 'the myth of the individual's autonomy' (Hedva).

2 In *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017), Jasbir K. Puar usefully introduces the term 'debility' to complicate the neoliberal discourse of disability rights. Debilitation refers to the biopolitical 'practice of rendering populations available for statistically likely injury', deployed both in the global south and in disenfranchised communities in the global north (xviii). In a context where four-fifths of the world's disabled persons live in the global south, it's crucial to consider the ongoing production of debility through colonial violence, war, occupation, settler colonialism, developmentalism, mass incarceration, environmental racism, and uneven distribution of resources, medical supplies, and basic care. These global inequalities are clearly on display in the nationalist rhetoric imbuing the current race to stockpile Covid-19 vaccine supplies in the global north, as well as in the evident imbalance of access to such resources in other parts of the world.

3 With hindsight, it's clear that this general strike is not something everyone can afford. With a paltry statutory sick pay of £95.85 per week in the UK and lacking other systems of support, even Covid-19 positive workers were de-facto obliged to go to their workplace. The right to refuse is also based on privilege.

There's another word now in vogue, that while pointing to our essential interconnectedness, has been perverted in its preposterous use. *Herd immunity* is a form of indirect protection from an infectious disease that occurs when vaccination rates in a population are high enough that a pathogen stops spreading, so that even individuals who would otherwise be vulnerable, such as babies or cancer patients, are protected. The vaccinated, immune bodies shield and protect the unvaccinated or immunocompromised person. There is a direct, etymological connection between herd immunity and vaccination. The word vaccine comes from the Latin *vaccinus*, meaning 'from cows', as the first vaccine preventing smallpox was obtained by injecting people with the similar but much milder cowpox virus. Herd immunity without a vaccine is slaughter.

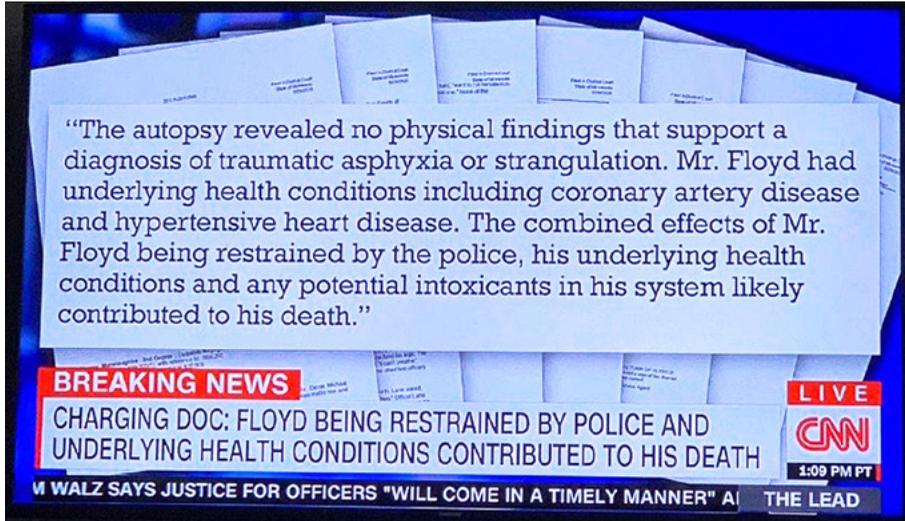
The expression herd immunity, as [Eula Biss](#) observes, is an unfortunate term, in that it's difficult to sever from the image of cattle waiting to be sent to slaughter or from the associate idea of herd mentality. Biss proposes trading the metaphor of the herd for that of the hive, which evokes a networked and interdependent collectivity: 'Honeybees are matriarchal, environmental do-gooders who also happen to be entirely interdependent'. And we are, of course, entirely interdependent too.

This interdependence, that some want concealed, is now in full sight: from disrupted supply chains, to the vital role of postal workers, transport workers and delivery services, from the tangible obligations of care we owe to each other to the spontaneous emergence of mutual aid groups. In the midst of capitalism's hierarchical systems of structural discriminations that show no sign of subsiding, and as governments hastily withdraw already paltry measures to shield vulnerable people, let us, the underlying, continue to build more permanent infrastructures of support and radical care.<sup>4</sup>

4 This is a call to all of us who, to different degrees, are victims of the structural carelessness of neoliberal states across the globe, many of which are already gearing up to undergo another decade of austerity. As Khairani Barokka and Annabel Crowley powerfully argue in their conversation 'Art School in a Pandemic', organized by UAL's Decolonising Arts Institute, this effort should be disability-led; that is, it should not side-line, but centre the work of disabled and chronically ill people and other oppressed and marginalized groups, who for decades have been pioneers in the building of such infrastructures. It should also acknowledge and learn from the rich historical lineage of radical mutual aid groups: from the Black Panther Party's survival program to the caring networks set up during the AIDS crisis. See: 'Artist Researchers In Conversation: Art School in A Pandemic' 10.09.2020, UAL's Decolonising Arts Institute: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhbFMszAsM0&t=3022s&ab\\_channel=UniversityoftheArtsLondon](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhbFMszAsM0&t=3022s&ab_channel=UniversityoftheArtsLondon)

## Coda

At the time of writing, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis. Floyd's underlying health conditions were used in the coroner's autopsy as a cover and excuse for what was clearly a case of racialized police brutality.<sup>5</sup>



Breaking News, Charging doc: Floyd restrained by police and underlying health conditions contributed to his death, CNN. Author's Twitter screenshot, 30th May 2020.

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Available at: <https://anneboyer.substack.com/p/this-virus>

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<sup>5</sup> The killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor triggered worldwide a wave of anti-racist protests against police brutality and institutional racism, which was further compounded by evidence of the unequal impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on black and minority ethnic communities both in the US and the UK. 'The right to kill' Black people wielded by US law enforcement with relative impunity lies in a continuum with the 'let die' policy of structural racism that, as detailed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, exposes Black people to much greater rates of premature death, including Covid-related ones.

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## 28

# A Biopolitics of the Future; or, The Monster at the Door

By Amit S. Rai

The virus has been brought under control in some parts of the world. In the process, its become a familiar monster. It has also been represented, captured in discourse and through media practices of framing, as a monster, something completely other. The monster metaphor is the habituated matrix of intelligibility for the Absolute Other in societies of socialised Disney; the merciless swarm, the terrorist attacker, an unseen enemy, a 'mugger' (Boris Johnson's racist word of choice), or an aleatory and hence risky trans-species leap — all these metaphors are on their way to becoming different flavoured superhero franchises for Marvel or DC, but they also have one other thing in common: the Monstrosity of the Future.



The Delhi police invited Yamraj (the Hindu god of death) to take a walk through urban neighbourhoods to scare people into staying home.



The Delhi police also put on marches with Covid-19 costumes on to warn residents to stay home.



What would Adorno say?

What we see all too clearly, and indeed in the British and Indian experiences with the virus especially, is that Covid-19, in its very monstrosity and its 'biopolitical containment' has heightened certain inequalities, regimes of violence and injustice, specifically around race, caste, gender, and class vectors, and has more thoroughly entrenched risk as the hegemonic mode of governance and the hyper-surveilled, semi-private, semi-specular 'home' as the unit of social administration in racial-caste capital.

Around April 10, 2020, it became all too clear that the UK Government had been advancing a faulty set of numbers concerning the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the population. Over the following week, it would backtrack, confess shortcomings, and curiously 'discover' that very old administrative and statistical procedures had not been factored into the mortality numbers. The biopolitical crux of the problem was the question of acceptable risk and the (mis)administration of populations understood as consumer segments, as 'herds' to be engineered. While the Tories's almost grudging language of solidarity with frontline workers is a far cry from the 'There is no society' days of Margaret Thatcher, the conservative government's slow response to the virus, based on an ideological understanding of the epidemiology of 'herd immunity', directly contributed to the needless death of thousands in elderly care homes and in communities of colour throughout the UK. Even as deaths in hospital due to C-19 were being daily reported by the massively under-funded and austerity starved NHS, deaths out 'in the public' were being reported once a week and not being factored into the daily totals. Which meant that anywhere from 10-40% of C-19 deaths around the UK were not being reported or integrated into overall figures.

The revelation of this bureaucratic glitch came as a bit of a shock to most people, as the mortality numbers for the UK were already grim, and well on track to match the numbers in Italy and Spain, European countries particularly hard hit by the virus. Many people in the UK just slightly older than the PM were not as lucky as him in his full recovery, and many could have been saved if he and his government had acted swiftly and with care and solidarity with the most vulnerable. But today around 80% of the UK's nursing homes and elderly care facilities have reported infections, and the death toll for these elders is rising sharply. On April 14th, the

*Financial Times* (Gill Plimmer, Laura Hughes, and Sarah Neville reporting from London), published a piece that outlined the coming horror: 'Britain's care homes are struggling to cope with a wave of [C-19] cases, with thousands of residents at risk of dying as the disease spreads. Operators say official figures misrepresent the extent of the crisis and complain that they are short of protective equipment'.

The article noted that around 400,000 older people currently live in UK care homes, and up to two-thirds of the facilities are reporting that elderly and frail residents have contracted the infection. Statistical modelling – dodgy at the best of times, seriously flawed in the case of the UK's mortality numbers – optimistically suggest that around a quarter of this elderly population, that is around 100,000 people, could die if C-19 'becomes endemic in care facilities'. But it is clear these are not real numbers, and the statistics we have for actual deaths are not real numbers precisely because of how the statistics are compiled. Coupled with the lack of resources and protective equipment for front-line workers, the situation in the UK continues to be very serious. Of course, it is easy to say that this world health crisis could have been handled better by this or that state, and that should be said and also strongly debated in parliament and in the public sphere. But what is harder to grasp, very difficult to model, and easy to manipulate in populist talking points, is the long-term effects of austerity on a society, on a population structured in different kinds of racial, class, social, embodied, and regional domination. The numbers of front-line NHS staff dying of C-19 are disproportionately people of colour...

What is biopolitics? This question has taken on renewed urgency post-Covid-19. In his College De France lectures from 1977-79 Michel Foucault proposes various definitions of this by now major concept in contemporary critical theory. Foucault wants to understand the limits that the capitalist state imposes on its own mode of governance. How does the capitalist state 'limit' itself and its own 'outside', civil society? Through the ideology and discursive practice of laissez faire. Foucault will analyse: 1. Objects (e.g. populations, agendas, strategies/tactics, discourses, regimes of Truth, etc.); 2. Rules (system of limits and political legitimacy of operation of State power); 3. Objectives (political economic goals of the capitalist state). Foucault's focus then is

not on abstract categories but concrete practices of the capitalist state. What this enables in his method is to immediately insist that there is no Unified Total State (even when states may tend toward totalitarianism, as in Nazi Germany or settler colonialism as in Israeli Zionism). 'The state only exists as states, in the plural' (5): thus specificity and plurality are the guiding threads of his analysis. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the world witnessed the emergence and maturation of the capitalist mode of production, the deepening of African slavery and the expansion of European settler colonialism throughout the so-called 'New World'. Race and class are clearly articulated in this history, which Foucault can't seem to acknowledge fully. And here's the key point, the methodological 'advance' Foucault claims he is making:

The question here is the same as the question I addressed with regard to madness, disease, delinquency, and sexuality. In all of these cases, it was not a question of showing how these objects were for a long time hidden before finally being discovered, nor of showing how all these objects are only wicked illusions or ideological products to be dispelled in the [light] of reason finally having reached its zenith. It was a matter of showing by what conjunctions a whole set of practices — from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth — was able to make what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist. ....[W]hat I would like to show is not how an error...could be born, but how a particular regime of truth, and therefore not an error, makes something that does not exist able to become something. It is not an illusion since it is precisely a set of practices, real practices, which established it and thus imperiously marks it out in reality... The point of all these investigations concerning madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, and what I am talking about now, is to show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (dispositif) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false. (19)

Here we come to the crux of the matter, methodologically speaking. Foucault aims to analyse different series of conjunctions

connecting sets of practices as they become coordinated with a regime of truth (double articulation of practice with practice and practice with Truth). What happens when practices are coordinated with a regime of truth? This process of knowledge-power, this apparatus (dispositif) makes 'what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist'. What does Foucault mean by this? If we think of the Covid-19 'disease' as something that does not exist in the specific way that Foucault means 'not to exist' here, as a mobile trans-species virus that has 'become something' different through its own vectors of transmission, in its administration in lockdowns across the world, in mortality rates and demographic statistics, in material shocks to feminist and queer ecologies of care — this monster is mappable through the double articulation of practices with practices. For instance, the practices of social hygiene or physical distancing are correlated with 'less risky' behaviour (impossible to ignore the racist genealogies here); and social practices of quarantine are articulated with different Regimes of Truth, some 'scientific' (Covid-19 can quickly kill a human being in definite and already well-documented ways), some racist (the association of one race, nation, or culture as sole vectors for the virus).

The question of race is posed repeatedly by Foucault, but usually in oblique ways (this is analysed quite brilliantly by Anne Stoler [1995] in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*). In *Discipline and Punish* (1976) and in the lectures collected as *Abnormal* (1974-75; Foucault 2004) and *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-78, especially lectures 4, 5, 10-13; Foucault, 2007), Foucault suggested (usually vaguely) how race and class were articulated in complex ways in the (neo-)liberal invention of 'population' and the 'society of security'; the 'biological destiny of the species' (2007: 10) becomes the target of risk assessments and insurance coverage. Race for Foucault is an instrument and target of relations of power, emergent in the contexts of the arts of government, or what he will call specifically governmentality; the responsabilization, or becoming-calculable of conduct (from the State to the individual), the long catalogue of risky behaviours that came to form an archive of the governance of populations, deployed in the material and discursive control of ethical

'subjectivation' (the production of subjects-of-governmentality). Race becomes a variable in the calculation of human capital; race and its material vectors are transversal to genetics, affect, family, nation, 'intelligence', nature, history, civilisation, customs, species-being, sexuality, ecology, conduct, culture, humanity, rationality. What forms of subaltern composition (of organisations and of subjectivity) can critically affirm an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, feminist, queer, non-assimilationist, radically intersectional politics of the body and organisation, a politics that will have been for the benefit of a more-than-human time to come?

All of this has direct relevance for how we understand and develop solidarities across different forms of struggles for justice and equality, especially in the wake of Covid-19. In *Discipline and Punish* and in the 1977-78 lectures on security societies (see lecture one, pages 10-21), Foucault had analysed the state administration of quarantine and the emergence of the defence of population (understood as a multiplicity of individuals within a manipulable milieu, a town or other environment) through technocratic assessments of risks to security, from 'miasmas' to potential epidemics to 'social unrest' (2007: 11). Not surprisingly, Foucault's analysis of the emergence of biopolitical population from the historical administration of quarantine has taken on renewed interest post-Covid-19. In a recent critique of Panagiotis Sotiris' popular article '[Is Democratic Biopolitics Possible?](#)', Bryan Doniger notes how a dangerous confusion of biopolitics and anatomo-politics is often at work in biopolitical theory.

'Anatomo-politics is a 'politics of the human body' (243). This means that anatomo-politics doesn't refer to all political techniques that alter the population's health, but rather just to techniques that directly act on the body. More specifically, anatomo-politics attempts to discipline the human body. As Foucault puts it, discipline is always 'addressed to the body' (242). When we are disciplined, this means that our body is directly induced to behave more productively or usefully. Anatomo-politics 'could be used to take control over bodies ... to increase their productive force through exercise, drill, and so on' (ibid.). A good example of anatomo-politics would be therapy in a psychiatric institution... Another good example would be putting a respirator on a patient suffering from COVID in an attempt to directly control and maximize their body's health'.

By contrast, Doniger argues, biopolitics describes not the politics of the body, but of what Foucault terms 'the human race' (243). 'This form of politics, like anatomo-politics, is not a blanket term for all politics related to the health of humans. The difference between anatomo-politics and biopolitics is that biopolitics doesn't describe techniques that discipline an individual, but techniques that secure the health of the "race" or species... Thus, instead of monitoring and controlling individuals, biopolitics relies on 'processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on' (243). These processes measure and regulate the health of the whole population via statistics'.

It is in this regime of biopolitics that took hold in several Western and settler colonial societies from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on that criminality becomes less about 'bad behaviour' and more and more focused on a demographically distributed 'risk'. Thus, 'fighting crime is no longer about disciplining individual bodies, but about assessing risk. Biopolitical measures of the population – crime rate, rate of drug use, rate of gun-related deaths, and so on – are used to justify heavy police presence in some communities (for instance, in American communities of color [overwhelmingly Black and Latinx]). They will also be used to justify an almost nonexistent police presence in others. The racist, violent goal of these biopolitical practices is no longer to control every individual's behavior, but to target those populations who, "statistically speaking", pose a special risk to themselves, to others, and to the free market' (Bryan Doniger ('Two Problems with Democratic Biopolitics (Critique in times of Coronavirus)', <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/04/28/two-problems-with-democratic-biopolitics-critique-in-times-of-coronavirus/> )

Doniger helps us to pose the question of biopolitics better, clarifying the relation of risk to security and population in biopolitical regimes of governmentality. How the 'abnormal races' were understood to be and constituted as existential threats to Western societies (security and disorder problems, lynch law), or how processes of decolonisation from the liberation of Haiti in 1804 to the independence of Jamaica in 1962, contributed to political and economic crises in the unfolding construction of the apparatuses (dispositif) of biopolitics – these are marginal to the story that Foucault believes he is telling. We know these

histories today to be at the (disavowed) centre of biopolitical governmentality and racial capital. In the first lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault notes that the apparatuses of security (which would evolve into full-blown biopolitical regimes over the course of two centuries) operate on a milieu understood as in some senses an action on the future, as the spatial target (extension, rhythms, and distributions of population and quality and quantity of administrative space) is always in flux, probabilistic, partially speculative, and in a certain sense potential. This is one part of the story of how temporality and biopolitics are linked in a constant, future-oriented and entreprising potentialisation of human capital.

To leave it there would be remiss today. The non-human futures of the Covid-19 virus will not be written to be stored in the digital archive, even though we may have its complete genetic makeup already mapped. Its trans-species assemblage will have had vectors that are imperceptible to us today. Foucault calls our attention insistently to the micro and molar complicities with power-as-Potestas, the consent we give to our governmental multiplicity, the violences and injustices we repeat habitually and proliferate and that structure psycho-social relations in societies of the norm and security. The question is not whether biopolitical life after this virus can be a radically democratic affirmation of a becoming that exits from the 'necropolitical' tendencies, market monopolies, and embodied infrastructures of human capital and the society of control and prosumption (Mbembe 2003). Only a revolution can do that. The question today is to draw material and diagrammatic resources from past struggles for decolonial futures, to make felt the ongoing happenings of those radical and revolutionary becomings, to amplify their resonances as untimely and counter-actualising 'memories of the future'.

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## 29

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# COVID-19, Climate Change and the Viral Imaginaries of Crisis

By Tom Corby



Laboratory, British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge (photograph the author, 2019)

The hot summer of 2015 induced record sea ice and permafrost melt. Scientists gathering ice cores from Siberian permafrost discovered a live 30,000-year old virus *Mollivirus sibericum* of significant size. At 0.6 microns *Mollivirus sibericum* is considerably larger than coronavirus at 0.12 microns (being a *Megaviridae* in science parlance). Under laboratory conditions scientists demonstrated that the virus could still infect its target, a single-celled amoeba.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of interesting things arising from this story. One is obvious: a fear that ice melt caused by climate change could release pathogens that are dangerous for humans and wider animal world. This is not the news we need at this moment and the risk of this actually happening has not been discounted.<sup>2</sup> Another is how this story enables us to map some of the connections and coordinates of the current coronavirus outbreak to conceptualisations of the wider environmental crisis we are already catastrophically bound to.

These late Pleistocene mega viruses (when I first wrote this, Microsoft Word autocorrected 'mega' to 'MAGA') enable us to understand both climate history (how these viruses interact with their habitat are informing environmental predictions) and an understanding of evolution.<sup>3</sup> As recently noted by N. Kathrine Hayles, scientific discoveries arising from work on giant viruses show their genomes to be similar in size to bacteria leading to new understanding of the key role viruses have played in the evolutionary development of life on Earth.<sup>4</sup> This new understanding of biosymbiosis arising from the Earth's ancient viral archives demonstrates, yet again, how we are caught up in wide, deep and complex interdependencies with other forms of life, environments and Earth systems which reciprocate in force on our bodies when we fail to care for them.

1 Legendre M, Bartoli J, Shmakova L, et al. 'Thirty-thousand-year-old distant relative of giant icosahedral DNA viruses with a pandoravirus morphology', *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2014;111(11).

2 Yong E (2013) Giant viruses open Pandora's box, *Nature News*: <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2013.13410>

3 Scheid P, Hauröder B, Michel R. 'Investigations of an extraordinary endocytobiont in *Acanthamoeba* sp.: development and replication.' *Parasitol Res*. 2010 May;106(6):1371-7

4 Hayles, N K, Novel Corona: Posthuman Virus, 'Critical Inquiry', 17 April 2020 <https://critiq.wordpress.com/2020/04/17/novel-corona-posthuman-virus/>

## Flattening the curve

Charts and models dominate our news cycles and hint at emerging visual languages of crisis (*flattening the curve* is an aesthetic figure). It's worth mentioning here that we've been trying to flatten other curves in the last 20 years or so: CO2 emissions, temperature and sea level rises amongst other things.

Alongside these 'neco-visualisations' of human tragedy, the concept of the model cuts across the public imagination as a harbinger of what might be and what was. A new empiricism abounds, but like the old empiricism we have come to appreciate that what it produces is always situated (Haraway's 'God Trick'). Or to put this another way 'all models are wrong, but some are useful'.<sup>5</sup> Science is fragile, partial, contingent, but much of the time it is *enough*. Models of all types, it seems, will be around for some time.

5 The phrase 'all models are wrong, but some are useful', is generally attributed to the statistician George Box.

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30

## Disaster Nationalism as Geovisual Play

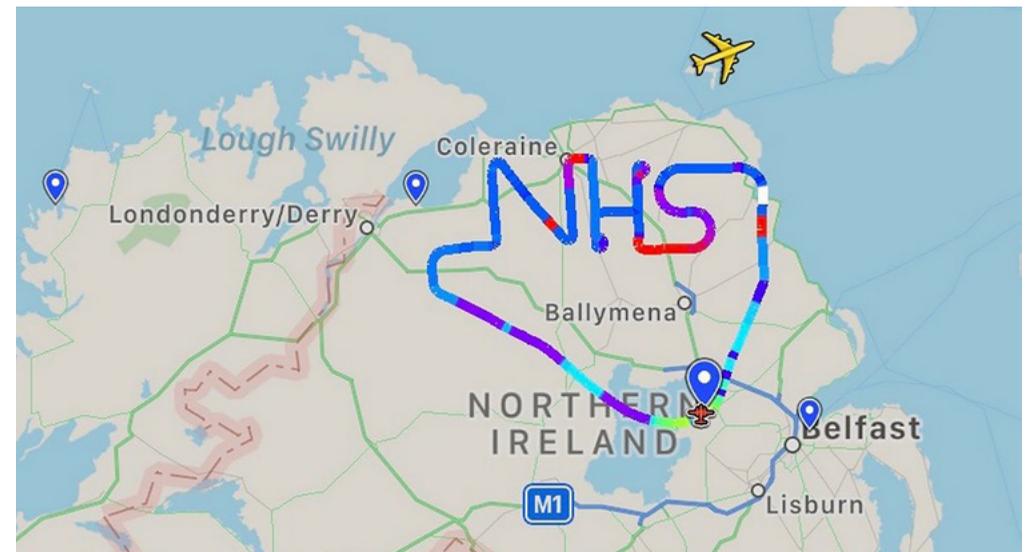
By Eray Çaylı

On 23 April 2020, when both Turkey and the UK had just completed their first month of coronavirus-related measures, a special flight took off in each of these countries. A Turkish Airlines flight numbered TK1920 flew over central Turkey, leaving radar-trackable traces that amounted to ['the world's largest Turkish flag'](#) on occasion of National Sovereignty and Children's Day. Turkey's current parliament was founded on this day in 1920 (hence the special flight number). The founders, the story goes, wanted to gift parliamentary democracy primarily to children. As a result, many a child's playtime every 23 April is infused today with nationalist iconography. In the UK, the Northern Ireland Air Ambulance, outsourced to the private company Woodgate Aviation, conducted a flight on 23 April 2020, which traced out the initials N(ational) H(ealth) S(ervice) capping a heart-shaped trajectory. The idea, said the company, was to offer ['a unique way of saying 'thank you' for the heroic work being done by frontline NHS staff to combat the Covid-19 pandemic'](#). There was, of course, nothing particularly unique about Woodgate's enterprise, except perhaps its sheer geographical scale. The motifs it featured have,

over the past weeks, become a ubiquitous sight in much of the UK where they have been drawn on home windows and pavements especially as children's play.



Flight-tracking image for TK1920 on 23 April 2020



Flight-tracking image for Northern Ireland Air Ambulance on 23 April 2020

Play and aerial imaging correspond to prominent themes in Harun Farocki's oeuvre, the latter more directly than the former. His manifold investigations into the visuality of violence and the violence of visuality exposed aerial photography and satellite imagery for serving, right from the outset of their military origins, [highly selective and often-violent political agendas](#) rather than the objective technicality associated with them. These technologies, showed Farocki, have led military violence to harden into dominant visual regimes that, at every purported turn from war to peace, prove far longer lasting than warfare proper – so much so that, gradually since the end of World War Two, many of these regimes have increasingly become oriented not towards depicting the world but rather towards its destruction. Farocki also charted a convergence between visual technologies of warfare and those of play, [particularly in the realm of computer games](#). Dovetailing with larger processes through which [machines of militarized imaging have conditioned the ordinary eye](#), this convergence has rendered relatable and even playful the act of seeing another as an object to be targeted, monitored and/or surveilled.

The two flight-radar-trackable images drawn this past 23 April in both Turkey and the UK indicate a particularly sinister phase in the visually charged entanglement between play and war that Farocki dissected so masterfully. No longer is a militarized visual technology rooted in violent nationalism simply being made playful or the visuality of play merely being restructured around that of warfare. At stake here, rather, is the pragmatic and programmatic simplicity that characterizes play in its purest form – play that lacks geovisual targets, monitors and surveillance proper, or play, in other words, as nothing else but play even when it may involve the drawing of a national symbol. It is by appropriating play as such that these two images prop up a certain disaster nationalism – a 'we're all in the same boat' ideology – and, in so doing, obfuscate ongoing socioeconomic disparities that mark the way coronavirus is experienced in neoliberal settings such as [Turkey](#) and [the UK](#), and the political responsibilities involved therein.



Children's chalk drawing on a London pavement near where the author lives.

Just in time for the appearance of these images of disaster nationalism as geovisual play, children on my street had made the drawing seen above.

Appropriating the geovisual simplicity of play, it seems, might come with consequences.

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# 31

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## Newsreel Shreds: Two Postcards from the Summer of 2020

By Nika Autor

### Postcard no. 1: Game

At the air distance of 140 km from Italy, 130 km from Austria and 40 km from Slovenia, there is a small place that is the site of unimaginable human suffering, which no longer interests anyone. A place separated from the EU by a dense forest and hills. They call it the forest of darkness. The forest in which 'to be seen' can be fatal and 'remaining invisible' can mean a chance.

The refugees call this part of their journey 'game'. The images of the game on their phones are always deleted by the police.

In the middle of a field, in a makeshift shelter made out of plastic bags and fallen branches, a group of young people, no older than 20, are zealously gathering their things and filling their backpacks. For the third time, they count the number of T-shirts, socks, bottles of water and cans of food that they will take on their

journey. Someone has cooked a few kilograms of rice, which they carefully put into bags. They talk about what the best time to set off is.

So far, they have walked almost 7000 km, some from Jammu, some from the Kashmir Valley, and some from Afghanistan.



Only a few kilometres separate them from the EU border. Compared to the distance from their home, Germany seems to be around the corner. Moseeben says: 'I have my parents, my sisters and brothers. I'll work in Germany for a few years and send them money, then I might return home, but I'd prefer to see us all together in Europe. I don't tell them how it is here. If the forests could speak, they'd dry out from sadness'.

The journey through the forest takes between ten and fifteen days and costs at least 100 euros every time. They are embarking on the game for the ninth time, some even the twentieth. Abid quietly bows his head and murmurs: 'For every game, you need new shoes, a backpack, a telephone, an additional battery, food and a sleeping bag'.

The game is an exercise in hiding from the gaze of others. Zeeshan smiles: 'The game on TV is Tom and Jerry, the game in the EU is refugees and the police'.



In reality, the game means fifteen days of walking, running, climbing and swimming across difficult terrain, the lack of water and food, exhaustion and hunger, innumerable falls, sprains and also breaks, the danger of forest animals and, without exception, infected wounds on the soles and feet.

It also means avoiding the police, hunters, local militias and the locals.

Avoiding getting caught and beaten, avoiding the police stealing your money, shoes, clothes, food and phone, and avoiding being shot at. A journey on which you have to remain invisible. Those that get through to the other side delete the photos of the forest.

## Postcard no. 2: Kaffee und Kuchen and Tea.

16 June 2020, Affolterbach, Germany

I have been asking her for a few days: 'Tell me how it was when you came to Germany. Did you miss home? Did you understand any words? Did anyone curse at you? What did you do? Was it hard to find a job? How much did you make? Did you have any friends? Did you travel a long time? What was the journey like?'

Metka opens a closet and says: 'Look, here are some photos and films. Nobody has looked at them for several decades. You'll find the answers here. Today, we'll have an evening of memories'. 1348 slides marked with the year, meticulously archived with technical writing; 1967, 1968, 1969 etc. The years that unintentionally call to mind the turbulent political and civil society movements. Perhaps not as visibly, loudly or bombastically, those years determined, changed and forever marked the numerous lives of unknown individuals, workers from the southern part of Europe and North Africa.

When, under the 1950s *Gastarbeiterprogramm*, Germany welcomed the arrival of the temporary workforce from Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and, last but not least, in 1968, also Yugoslavia, Metka found herself in the sorting department of a garment factory in Viernheim.

We turn on the projector.

Dusty memories from the past, older than 50 years, take shape on the living room wall. We watch a series of images portraying everyday life, carefully framed, mostly showing leisure activities and pleasant socialising. Nowhere an image recording the fragmented experience of the thousands of people who, having been promised temporary and better work, left their loved ones and their home forever. Photos torn out of the pleasant and nice experiences fifty years later and fragments impressed on celluloid tape resist and persistently keep silent.

Finally, an image of a packed car appears on the wall. In her most beautiful dress, Metka stands in front of it. With an almost photographic memory, she recites: 'This was on the day we left. Before we set off, we took this photo. My mother prepared food for us – fried chicken, which we ate at the border crossing. I took with me everything we could put in the car boot. It wasn't much. Bed linen, Ivačić's cookbook, Prešeren, a few music records, some clothes, cutlery, dishes and that was that. Look, here we also took a photo while on the road. This was a view of the Alps in Austria, and the Autobahn in Germany...'

But the photos of the packed car and the photos from the journey also do not say much.

Around an hour later, it is time for Kaffee und Kuchen. Metka neatly sets the table, makes coffee and carefully puts a freshly baked apple pie, made according to Ivačić's recipe, on the table. Soon after, we are joined by Mortaza, Sogra and Koza. They bring tea. German filtered coffee, Yugoslav apple pie and Afghan tea. Encouraged by the old photos, Metka puts an old map on the table and the comparison of the two journeys begins. Mortaza, Sogra and Metka compare the length of the journey, the hours of driving, the countries they crossed, the things they took with them.

She from Yugoslavia, they from Afghanistan.  
A shot of living memory.  
A monument to travellers.



A sequence of memory joining the past that fills the present and shows the potential possibility of the future. The future that means being together. Not tomorrow, but today and here. Metka, Mortaza and Soghra, all under the same roof, travellers at a different time and from different places, arouse the feeling of all that cannot be found in the archival footage. The experience of the past that opens the possibility for a tomorrow.

Translation: Maja Lovrenov

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## 32

# White Tinted Glasses: on the 'Difficult' Heritage of Italian Colonialism

By Alessandra Ferrini

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Museum of Civilizations in Rome announced the foundation of the *Museo Italo-Africano 'Ilaria Alpi'* (Italo-African Museum), re-housing the collection of the former Colonial Museum. Established in Rome in 1923, it was used as a propaganda tool, even after the end of Fascism and the fall of the short-lived Empire (1936–41) occupying Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Libya and the Dodecanese Islands. After its closure in 1971, its collection has laid in storage for decades.

Due to Covid-19 emergency measures, the Italo-African Museum was announced in a (poorly advertised) virtual press conference that did not allow for audience interaction or a Q&A session. Beside a statement by the Italo-Somali writer Igiaba Scego, the absence of specialists in the fields of colonial history, postcolonial and decolonial studies, as well as experts from former colonies, was made all the more worrying by the proposed inclusion of – and punctual reference to – Ancient Roman history, a foundational element of colonial and Fascist propaganda. This

concern increases when considering the museum's placement within the EUR district, built to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the dictatorship.

Until now, information on the re-exhibition of the collection have only been available at informal, confidential levels, which has made it difficult to craft an appropriate response to the project. Even the conference provides little data: it outlines a series of wishes and ideas without putting forward clear plans or disclosing how activities will be funded and managed, despite the museum being set to open next year. Nor were the formation of a committee or ethical board including members of the communities still affected by the colonial trauma inherent in the collection formally announced. In addition, no explanation on

the name Italo-African Museum was provided, even though its Eurocentric posture, alluding to 'neutral', reciprocal relations, warrants one. At this moment, it remains difficult to ascertain the reasons behind such a rushed press conference, or to evaluate its vague propositions, nevertheless, the whole operation appears intrinsically flawed, reflecting a collective colour-blind attitude that has become particularly visible in light of recent events.

Taking place on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, the conference coincided with the brutal assassination of George Floyd, which propelled protests, actions and debates demanding justice for black lives and the end of systemic racism. In Italy, support to the Black Lives Matter movement was firstly directed to the US context, ignoring the struggles of Afroitalians, migrants and enslaved agricultural workers (mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa), until more recently, when the #saytheirnames campaign has begun shifting attention to the previously disregarded victims of racially motivated violence in the country. Simultaneously, in the wake of similar actions happening in the US and Europe, demands for the removal of a statue commemorating the journalist Indro Montanelli (who, throughout his life, publicly defended having taken a 12-year-old Eritrean concubine during the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-36), are growing. Yet, so far, discussions on so-called 'difficult heritage' have mostly regarded Fascist monuments dissociating them from the regime's ruthless racist politics.

Italian society has indeed long refused to acknowledge the implications of, and responsibilities towards, the colonial past and its legacies. In order to maintain the 'colour of the nation' unchallenged, blackness has been systematically erased from collective history, marginalised and demonised – portrayed as destitute and foreign. Such context has given rise to white solidarity practices decoupled from scrutiny of white privilege and accountability, which, similarly to discourses and operations related to colonial and Fascist heritage, have failed to recognize their rootedness in structural racist violence – ultimately reproducing the oppressive dynamics they pretend to oppose, disempowering the communities they proclaim to care for.



Alessandra Ferrini, *Unsettling Genealogies*, in progress. Video still.

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# 33

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## Against Resilience

By Helene Kazan

The British government's herd immunity policy, implemented in the early response to the outbreak of COVID-19, has revealed a condition of institutional racism and structural violence, in which ethnic minority communities have been affected by a death rate at least twice as high as that in white communities.<sup>1</sup> However, the government shows no sign of taking responsibility, or accepting accountability for employing this terrible and unfounded resilience policy. Further, there can be no doubt that in the quick easing of the lockdown measures in Britain this week, there is an understood acknowledgement and calculation by the Conservative government that without specific protective measures being put in place, the same communities will again be disproportionately affected if and when the infection rate begins to increase.

The wartime rhetoric adopted during the COVID-19 crisis portrays the loss of life in this situation as an uncontrollable and unavoidable catastrophe, rather than an outcome of a series of known and unknown governmental decisions. To be clear,

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<sup>1</sup> In recognition of the problematic use of the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) it has been omitted in this updated version of the article.

the extent of loss of life in both the context of warfare and a pandemic, comes in part from decisions made at state level. The danger of giving in to the logic of resilience measures is that in increasing the resilience of a population, a state might increase its capacity to tolerate imposed risk. Populations and communities can be subjected to a higher degree of suffering whilst allowing them to barely live with that potential threat. In short, resilient populations and communities are produced through state-perpetrated violence as they are forced to live under a calculated condition of increased risk.

The Black Lives Matter protests that took place in London this weekend against the murder of George Floyd reflects a deep-seated need to stand in solidarity against the far reaches of institutional racism and structural violence. On 10 May, a letter was sent from the UBELE community group in Peckham to Boris Johnson asking for support in the call for an independent public inquiry into the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the UK's black and ethnic minority communities. An important demand, as the community group argues that an investigation led by the government simply won't have the capacity to produce a full account of this catastrophe.<sup>2</sup> There was speculation yesterday that the government's review of the situation, led by Public Health England, was going to be postponed in response to growing protest in the UK and US.<sup>3</sup> However, following pressure the report was published yesterday forcing the British government to recognise the similarities between the situations and the inequalities it brings to light.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The important reasons for launching an independent inquiry is explained in further detail in the enclosed article by Rianna Raymond-Williams, 'Why we're fighting for an independent public enquiry', 2020. Since this article was written the British governments published in March 2021 its report on the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities in UK. This has received wide critique for not acknowledging the inherent structural racism in its institutions. A conclusion made possible because of the outlined issues in the way the enquiry has taken place. <https://gal-dem.com/why-were-fighting-for-an-independent-public-inquiry-into-the-covid-19-deaths-of-people-of-colour/>. (last accessed June 2, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Reports of the delay of the PHE report: <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-bame-review-delayed-again-due-to-proximity-to-us-race-riots-over-george-floyds-death-11998897?fbclid=IwAR2QJLE1R8cKggLbgnjrCq9BIKWH3DD5FWXsaVEq1JF1r9wa7ARpK7RMJIQ>. (last accessed June 2, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The now published Public Health England report for the government the disproportionate affect of COVID-19 on BAME communities: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/889195/disparities\\_review.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1uTq-JRQpu4iAUT\\_iFP73KsIXTuF1XdFa9MstxJM5fToVe115ayhECKs](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889195/disparities_review.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1uTq-JRQpu4iAUT_iFP73KsIXTuF1XdFa9MstxJM5fToVe115ayhECKs). (last accessed June 2, 2020).

Seeing the Black Lives Matter protest spring into action on Saturday a short distance from my flat in Peckham, I couldn't help but question whether bringing our bodies together in this way plays into the logic of resilience measures the British government has come to calculate as necessary collateral damage for the UK economy to start again.<sup>5</sup> Does protesting with my body mean giving in to the (un)caring biopower of the state?<sup>6</sup> If so, how do I protest, if not with my body? This question, at this time, obviously has a different weight depending on context. It's not a question of my body alone, but of a body politic that stands together to demand that the British government accepts responsibility and accountability for the terrible outcome of employing herd immunity as resilience measure. Further standing in solidarity in the fight against racist and patriarchal governmental formations that sit on a settler colonial logic that allows such calculations to be made in regards to the disproportionate risks that affect our lives.

#blacklivesmatter #nopeacetilljustice



London BLM Protest, 2020, Photograph taken by Helene Kazan

<sup>5</sup> Information on the Peckham protest: <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/black-lives-matter-protests-peckham-18337388>, (last accessed June 2, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Ideas of a 'caring biopower' are outlined by Couze Venn, 'Neoliberal Political Economy, Biopolitics and Colonialism', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 206–233.

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## 34

# Exhibiting Embarrassment

By David Dibosa

## Towards a position paper

After the toppling of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol<sup>1</sup> on Sunday 07 June 2020, a series of debates was re-ignited in Britain, as well as across the world, in respect of historical memory around nation and slavery. Historian David Olusoga<sup>2</sup> argued that it was right to remove statues commemorating slavers from public pedestals and put them in museums. There, he stated, they could be subjected to the correct level of debate. Statues on plinths were otherwise 'mute'. Removing troubled historical memories from open space deals with one aspect of the problem. What are museums meant to do, though, once the statues are there?

<sup>1</sup> Bhabra, G.K., 'A Statue Was Toppled. Can We Finally Talk About the British Empire?' *New York Times*, 12 June 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/edward-colston-statue-racism.html>

<sup>2</sup> David Olusoga interviewed by Paddy O'Connell, Broadcasting House, BBC Radio 4. 14 June 2020. 09:00-10:00 BST. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000k1bm> [accessed 14-06-20.]

## Pride and Shame

I start these reflections by recalling a memory stretching back more than five years: the evening of 15 June 2015 provided an unforgettable moment of intellectual pride for me. I took part in a discussion between two prominent artists, African American painter Jack Whitten and the British artist Frank Bowling.<sup>3</sup> The debate was in one of the most salubrious settings that London's museums has to offer: the Grand Saloon at Tate Britain. It was fitting to see two artists of such distinction, talking about issues that had faced their long careers: working with abstraction; being Black in America; the relationship between music and art. Watching the debate take place, from a high vantage point above the Thames, I had one of those rare moments during which I could glimpse how far I had come. I had reached the dizzying heights of the London artworld. Although I left the honour of chairing the debate to a colleague, I sat safely in the knowledge that I had been instrumental in making it happen.

My pride did not last long.

Sometime later, I looked back on the event, recalling its high points and, inevitably, reflecting on its lows. The evening of the debate stopped being a bright light out-shining everything else that had happened at the time. Step-by-step, I began to see more clearly all the comings-and-goings that surrounded it. I remembered how opportunistic I had been in those days – always looking out for ways of gaining advantage. I used to revel in the fact that I had a nose for rumours, catching the hint, long before anyone else, that the famed painter Jack Whitten was thinking of flying over to London. Those kinds of things made me feel part of a metropolitan buzz – being among the people who knew that 'Jack would be in town'. It had been with the confidence of a nimble operator, that I had thought I could make a few skilful manoeuvres to pull off a glittering event. Somehow, I wanted my colleagues at University, the artists who taught there, 'my people', to be involved and, if I'm being honest, to see how I could get them some of the glory. As ever with nimble operations, I saw it as just a matter of tying up loose ends. The skill was in spotting them – and knowing which ones to tie. As luck would have it, at the same time as talk about Jack's visit was rising, I heard another rumour that

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/talk/painting-thoroughly-modern-frank-bowling-and-jack-whitten-conversation>

Frank Bowling was keen to hold an event in London, an artworld equivalent of an ambassador's reception on a public stage. Who better than me, with all my connections, to pull the whole thing off?

With all the diplomatic sense of how to smooth a path, I approached my academic seniors to help get backing for my moves. In collaboration with Tate, the University would host an evening with Frank and Jack. As part of the usual niceties, there would be drinks and nibbles and, of course, a swanky banquet for a select few. As it turned out, the envisaged elegant dinner ended up being lunch, which Frank, due to his health, was unable to attend. Jack, though, would be there with his family. Generously, my Dean offered to host at the famed Rex Whistler restaurant. The meal went well, managing an unexpected level of homeliness which was aimed at snubbing the restaurant's evident splendour. There was laughter, though, and, all-in-all, I achieved what I wanted, which was to give the day the sense of an occasion.

It was only years later, after hearing the sad news of Jack's death from Leukaemia in 2018 that I thought back to that day at lunch. Much of my happiness was intact. I had managed to help stage one of the artist's few public appearances in London in the latter phase of his life. There was no doubt that I had supported the cementing of Whitten's relationship with Tate. Indeed, his work appeared together with Frank Bowling's painting in the landmark exhibition *Soul of a Nation* at Tate Modern,<sup>4</sup> which opened in what turned out to be the last months of Jack's life. My contentment should have been complete. Something was missing, though: in the time following the memorable lunch in the restaurant, I was reminded of uncomfortable truths that, perhaps, should have been at the forefront of my mind: there was an open secret around the Rex Whistler restaurant. The dining room's famed tableau featured a disturbing scene, in which a young black boy is pulled on a lead as a slave. I had overlooked the image at the time of the family meal with Jack Whitten. A strange mix of excitement and embarrassment meant that I somehow managed to screen the tableau off in my mind. I didn't hide it but nor did I draw Jack's attention to it for fear of ruining the event. Somewhere in the hinterlands of my knowledge, hiding between tacit oblivion and turning a blind eye, lies the key to understanding how I behaved on that day. Looking back, my unfolding awareness cast a long

<sup>4</sup> *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (12 July – 17 October 2017. Tate Modern, London, Curators: Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley).

shadow over my memory. Mixing melancholy with contentment, I was left with a sense of regret, even shame.



[Rex Whistler's 1927 mural *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats* in the restaurant of Tate Britain, London, has recently been called out for being 'racist' by campaigners such as White Pube due to its depiction of enslaved Black children and caricatures of Chinese characters...]  
- editor's note

'Rex Whistler Restaurant' at Tate Britain

## Exhibitions and inhibitions

I've often said that 'every exhibition holds a set of inhibitions..! With such formulations in mind, I've been speaking to an increasing number of people about the role that art and artefacts play in negotiating the shameful aspects of our deeply entwined histories. In such discussions, I've drawn attention to the ideas and assumptions that have allowed controversial objects to remain on public display. The inhibitions in question arise from the way in which the biographies of such objects interlace with some of the more troubled aspects of our history – a history that cultural

institutions have, in the past, all too often sought to forget, hide or ignore: slavery, exploitation, enrichment and ritualistic violence. We are currently in the midst of discovering what will happen once we have the courage to expose practices that have attempted to obscure disturbing episodes from the past. It is difficult to know what happens next. Politicians have already made interventions,<sup>5</sup> declaiming 'woke militancy', insisting statues need to be defended. Needless to say, such positions have been vigorously rejected.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the claims and counter-claims, there may be those who take dramatic action to barricade their views of history. Such retrenchment might not be enough to stop widespread 'take-downs' and a 'cancelling' of all those who sought to protect offensive artefacts. The question remains, will there be room left for the more nuanced arguments to hold sway?

A technical approach might sit among the array of nuanced arguments that would lead one to look at the motivations behind the preservation of controversial cultural artefacts: conservative perspectives on cultural heritage; liberal ideas insisting that a range of historical voices need to be heard; social democratic fears of gestures akin to totalitarian re-settings of history and 'burning of books'. One could spend time debating such positions while weighing up the effectiveness of technical solutions: Could counter-monuments be erected near troublesome statues? Could one draw on the deep histories of Holocaust memorialisation to find effective interventions?<sup>7</sup> Could

5 On 16 January 2021, UK Government Minister Robert Jenrick published an article in *The Telegraph*: 'We will save Britain's statues from the woke militants who want to censor our past'. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/01/16/will-save-britains-statues-woke-militants-want-censor-past/>  
Accessed: 28-01-21.

6 On 21 January 2021, Historian David Olusoga critiqued Jenrick's position in an article published in *The Guardian*: 'Cultural Warriors attacking "woke" history care little for truth. It's all political theatre'. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/24/cultural-warriors-attacking-woke-history-care-little-for-truth-its-all-political-theatre>  
Accessed 28-01-21.

7 See, for instance, Young, James E., (1993), *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*.

one revisit what is written on plaques? Regardless of the debates surrounding such questions, recent activist intervention may have already been enough to convince broader publics that technical solutions are redundant. No amount of re-writing of inscriptions could ever be enough. The issues at stake are, perhaps, too large to be resolved by an innovative approach to putting sculptures on display. Regardless of solutions found or the action taken, this historical period invites us to consider a much more complex way of reflecting on the relation between history and visibility – posing questions to help us understand not just what we seek to reveal but how it is intimately connected to what we need to obscure.

The violence that often surrounds the accumulation of historic power cannot be disputed – this is particularly true in historic imperial projects, such as those enacted by Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and other Western European powers. Artworks related to such power take on a more complex role. Such artefacts include statues dedicated to figures associated with military glory alongside artworks looted during intensive campaigns. The custodianship of such pieces often has to draw on the occlusion of violence and its ongoing effects. The question becomes what happens once one restores violence to its rightful place not at the margins of the object's biography but at its centre? Such restoration is far from being a straightforward process. Accepting the violence of one's history is troubling. Even the start of the process can be difficult because one has to first encounter the processes that have disguised the violence up to now. What has motivated such denial? What has kept it in place? The structures of denial that enable decisive occlusions to be made need to be understood in all their variety. The levels of their intensity, the extent and pace of their mutation from one context to another needs to be addressed. Such an approach suggests a moment of caution before statues and other monuments are removed. Might the disappearance of such objects also further distance us from the violence that such cultural objects were built to conceal?

The drive to bring more complex accounts of cultural production into public view has been witnessed recently in respect of black historical figures rather than those who perpetrated violence on them. Initiatives, such as Denise Murrell's magisterial project, *Posing Modernity* (2019), have pointed to the work of institutional

New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

practice: '...institutional silence or blindness can be seen to render depictions of blacks... as unimportant, unworthy of attention'.<sup>8</sup> The beauty of Murrell's work is that it points to a hypo-visibility, challenging the practices that construct and enforce the recesses within which the presence of blackness has been sequestered. In doing so, she opens up the complexity of what it might mean to award such works a different kind of visibility, one that allows a hitherto repressed cultural hybridity to come to the fore. A creolised history of metropolitan culture is brought within reach by such scholarship. It, thereby, reveals a more complex and more complete account of the way in which pivotal objects within western art histories came to fruition. In many ways, such a goal is underpinned by a need to restore to its proper place what has hitherto been hidden.

The 'restorative' impulse, moving towards a more complex and thereby complete account of object biographies, is shared here. What is highlighted in the present discussion, though, are the possibilities offered by bringing to light not just what has been secluded but also the opportunities that emerge from revealing their structures of seclusion. In this regard, it might well be worthwhile promoting a discourse such as that which has emerged around embarrassment. One does so not as a means of overcoming the turbulence resulting from the revelation of questionable deeds. Rather, the whole point is to see what happens if practices are situated squarely within the arena of embarrassment and shame. What difference would it make to the current trajectory of policy and practice if a discourse of embarrassment were to be 'outed' as such? What would a 'shame' statement look like?

The terms, 'embarrassment' and 'shame' form part of a suite of discussions over the past two decades that have sought to grapple with the consequences of historical trauma. Even though the personal aspects of such phenomena remain a significant starting-point, writers have sought to move the debate away from any excessive preoccupation with subjective perspectives. Instead, they tend towards more inter-personal aspects, opening up the public and political dimensions of key concerns instead. Such emphasis can be seen in works like: Eve K. Sedgwick's *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Elspeth Probyn's

<sup>8</sup> Murrell, D., (2019) (Ed.), *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. p. 2

*Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005), and Martha Nussbaum's *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (2006). Drawing on such work, I reached a reformulation of terms within my own research in *Reclaiming Remembrance* (2006, unpublished thesis, Goldsmiths, London). I suggested that it would be helpful to distinguish between 'embarrassment' and 'shame' by looking at the factors of intensity and duration. 'Embarrassment' could be understood as a temporary loss of standing – one from which a person or institution could recover. 'Shame', on the other hand, was seen as a crisis of legitimacy. Shame cannot be overcome, it can only be displaced through other events.

What are the conditions that befall an institution when it is in a state of shame or embarrassment concerning past or present action? The visceral responses to public statues and other cultural artefacts point towards a complexity beyond the binarism of 'take-down and cancel' or 'leave everything in place'. Both attitudes, of course, get publicly highlighted. Widely exposed views within the media, though, show that there is a whole spectrum of opinion that is more nuanced. It could prove more useful to consider different registers of articulation: that which is neither affirmed nor rejected; the half-spoken; the multiple voice. A focus on public activism and the ways in which institutions ought to respond to it can lead to innovative policy solutions, woven between the two extremes of 'preservation' and 'removal'. Beyond the policy work, though, there is more critical work to be done. The work of affect within organisational structure moves to the fore, allowing one to think of 'shame' and 'embarrassment' in institutional terms. In doing so, one poses questions, such as: how does one identify different institutional registers at play? In responding to such queries, the hope would be that a range of protocols might be enacted to help institutions and those that work within them engage more fully. Such engagement must, of course, go beyond empty managerialism – the closing down manoeuvres, which so rightly get associated with discredited perspectives from the past. There is much more at stake than the immediate problems of limiting reputational damage and brand management. Rather, we need to start by understanding the effects that states of embarrassment and shame have on organisations as a whole.

## Whose Memory? Whose Legacy?

I've often been fond of citing Salman Rushdie's famous words: 'the British don't know their history because so much of it took place overseas'. It's difficult, though, to continue applying this to successive generations of Britons, as so many of us have a past from overseas and we know it all too painfully well. We carry a cultural heritage from the wide range of territories in which the British practised colonial violence. Those histories, of subjugation and subordination, of refusal and resistance, of negotiation and complicity, are now being played out. No longer is it possible to rehearse a history of Britain replete with the high levels of cultural amnesia seen hitherto. Sir Walter Raleigh's association with the 'potato' cannot be considered without also recognizing the genocide wrought on the peoples who cultivated that crop. Heroes responsible for defeating armadas are also known to have enslaved and exploited. Even Shakespeare's legacy seems tainted by the colonial fantasies evident in works like *The Tempest* (1611). Maritime power with its imaginary of sailing the high seas also implies an involvement in the terrors inflicted to establish military might. Distancing manoeuvres, enabling some to claim innocence of what happened 'overseas', are no longer tenable. This point in the early twenty-first century presents a turning-point for so many reasons: not least because it is a moment of return – what goes out must come home. Such journeying also points towards transformations – what returns cannot remain unchanged by its voyage. Seeing societal changes without understanding the fullness of what has driven them is difficult for a nation like Britain whose empire had such an extensive reach. The readiness to come to terms with what happened means that the work of acknowledging the unheard stories has to begin in earnest.

The work of recounting such histories began some time ago. The record of scholarship and cultural practice among black and other people of colour goes back a long way. The question now is who is listening to such stories and how are they being received. If there is too much of a rush to correct the record, to take things down and set things right, an important opportunity might be missed. This could be the time to experience shame and be humiliated by it. I use humiliation in the true sense of the word – finding a path of humility. Ending the aggrandisements of Empire and beginning to give form and purpose to a new role. There could

be a chance now to take a long lingering look at the atrocities perpetrated, to move towards an understanding of the costs of such violence to those on whom it was wrought and to those who inflicted it, willingly or under duress. The long shadows of subjugation might finally be seen in sharper perspective than ever before. Through such recognition, the tensions involved in holding such phenomena at bay might finally be released. Until such time the effects of colonial trauma will continue to hold sway. Conflict, fear and resentment will remain below the surface of our social interactions before they erupt into violence – unexpected demonstrations, toppling of statues, civil unrest. The telling and hearing of the stories has to offer us another way.

Rehearsing traumatic encounters will require a new mode of audience. A performance of listening or a rush to bring conversations to a close will not serve. Instead, bringing into view a way of speaking and listening – a way of inhabiting – embarrassment and even shame becomes a useful way forward. Trauma undergone by individuals has now been recognized as having resonances at societal levels – war, holocaust, slavery and colonial violence shape personal, inter-personal and social psychologies. Embarrassment and shame can work in the same way. By recognizing the emotional labour involved in bringing embarrassment and shame into a social setting, we will begin to see the extent of its potential to produce transformations with increasing scope and intensity. By re-shaping public discourse so that there is a space to talk about an institution holding its embarrassment or recognizing its shame, we will see a generation of cultural practice no longer shaken by the toppling of statues or the exposure of artefacts but one setting the tone on how such turbulence can be worked through, at last, to peace.

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## 35

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# A Name to Sing About

By Jelena Stojković

On May 04, 2020 the media reported that NHS Nightingale hospitals around the UK are going to be shut, weeks after they were opened and only having admitted an insignificantly small number of patients. The explanation offered – that there are enough beds in regular hospitals – has been confusing, to say the least. If the national health service is doing fine, why are we discouraged from going to our local surgeries or emergencies? If so, why were the hospitals built in the first place, especially on such a scale? Nightingale London alone had the capacity of up to 4000 beds and there were seven hospitals opening across the country over the last month. Why were the specific locales chosen and how? And I could go on.

Listening to the MayDay Radio Notes on May 10, titled *Nightingale Chronicles 2 – Failure* and dedicated to London Nightingale, it struck me that there is something intrinsically flawed with the very name of the hospitals. Supposedly celebrating care giving, by evoking Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), the note tells us how nurses were expected to train for the challenges expecting them on the floor within a day, which failed to acknowledge even the

basic premise of the profession, let alone appropriately respond to the complexities of the ongoing health crisis. The inability to adequately staff them is speculated as one of the main reasons why the hospitals were eventually closed.

Learning this made me realise how there are two different contradictions entangled with the failure to activate the effort invested in the Nightingale hospitals. The first one arises by applying simple logic, as the closures are implying that although the NHS is under the biggest pressure in decades because of Covid-19 it nevertheless does not need any help. But derailing the idea of care while proclaiming to monumentalise it, as their name does, is a performative one and not as easily spotted. As Martin Jay explains it:

A performative contradiction does not arise when two antithetical propositions (A and not A) are simultaneously asserted as true, but rather when whatever is being claimed is at odds with the presuppositions or implications of the act of claiming it (29).

In retrospect, calling the hospitals by the person epitomising modern nursing was not a simple misnomer but a poor attempt at dressing up a wolf bred by austerity in the clothes of a sheep versed in historical knowledge. There is nothing new about this gesture. Quite the opposite, we heard this song many times before.

For instance, in *Catch Phrases – Catch Images* (1986), Harun Farocki interviews Vilém Flusser for television following the publication of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983). Sitting in a café, the two men discuss the working of news reporting, by looking at a cover page of *Bild* from November 1985. Their analysis focuses on the relation between texts and images, and how they intertwine in the service of demagoguery, but their conclusion still resonates with us today. It is under the assumption of shared values (in this instance motherly love), they agree, that the newspaper camouflages its double moral standards, or its endorsement for and spectacularising of violence, kitschifying, debasing and reducing human dignity along the way.



Florence Nightingale with Sir Harry Verney and Miss Crossland, in the centre of a group of nurses at Claydon House, 1886

## References:

Harun Farocki, *Catch Phrases – Catch Images* (1986), with Spanish subtitles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djIAj4US7rY>

Martin Jay, 'The Debate over Performative Contradiction: Habermas versus the Poststructuralists' in Martin Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 25-37.

Nightingale Chronicles 2 – Failure, *MayDay Radio Notes*, May 10, 2020: <https://soundcloud.com/maydayradionotes/nightingale-chronicals-part-2-the-closure>

## Suggested listening:

Betrice Harrison playing chello in her garden accompanied by nightingales on May 19, 1924

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU1Z7QtyJV8>

The Partisan Social Club (PSC), was formed in 2018 by artists Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan. The PSC is an evolving provisional collective with multiple identities which assembles members through specific projects. James Smith is a Graphic Designer based in Northampton. [www.partisansocialclub.com](http://www.partisansocialclub.com)

36

# We are not Alone: The Partisan Social Club New-Collective Nouns

By The Partisan Social Club

Window Poster # 1 + Colouring-in Version, May 2020.  
Poster designed by [James Smith](#).



# New Ways of Caring

Janine Francois is a Black-Feminist Cultural Producer and Lecturer at University of the Arts London. Her practices centre women/femmes of colour by establishing 'safe(r)' spaces sites of resistance, disruption and co-production. Janine is a Collaborative Partnership Doctoral student researching, 'if Tate can be a "safe(r) space" to discuss race and cultural difference within a teaching and learning context' at Tate and University of Bedfordshire. She is interested in (re)production of dominance, ethics of care, and the cultural politics of emotions, as Sara Ahmed calls it in her book of the same name (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). In 2020, Francois was named one of the UK's top 100 BAME Climate Change activists by Climate Reframe. You can follow her thoughts via twitter: [@itsjaninebtw](https://twitter.com/itsjaninebtw) or her blog: [itsjaninebtw.com](https://itsjaninebtw.com)

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# 37

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## Ecologies of Care<sup>1</sup>

By Janine Francois

Hello, my name is Janine Francois. I would like to say thank you to the organisers of #stophatrednow2020 for putting together the event and for inviting me to contribute. I know we will be discussing pressing and emergent topics presented by an amazing and eclectic mix of womxn, femmes and people of various gender identities and non-genders. These contributors will be sharing with us their knowledge(s), expertise, practices and thoughts that question the intersections between creativity, climate justice, and ecology.

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I have aptly named my talk 'ecologies of care', a term rooted in how we think about our relationship to our physical and material world but also the metaphysics of care. How do we see each other's bodies, identities, histories and knowledge(s) as

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<sup>1</sup> This text is an adaptation of my talk, 'ecologies of care' given at the #StopHatredNow online festival organised by Urban Apa, on May 14 2020. NB: I would like to acknowledge that the phrase 'ecology of care' is also an arts based initiative founded by Ria Hartley focusing on supporting disabled and non-neurotypical artists with access needs. I wrote and titled this speech before my discovery.

constellations of lived experiences intersecting across the globe that are both unique and individual but also underpinned by the traumas of colonialism and resistance and uprising? In various ways we are all concerned with our positionalities in these dire times, we also know that our histories and positionalities provide the privileged amongst us with more access to resources. So what does it mean to create or curate 'ecologies of care'? How do we care for each other as people with bodies that are loved but also marked with pain and trauma? And how do we care for our existences and knowledge(s)?

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I am speaking from my heart, it is an unscripted speech, so please bear with my thought processes, lapses and utterances. The issue of climate injustice is an injustice to Black, Brown and Indigenous people, who are disproportionately affected by climate change caused by 500 years of white-western-imperialism. We can think about climate change as a very contemporary phenomenon or we can locate it via colonialism. We can then locate the same relationship to Covid-19, in how bodies of Colour in the Global South and North are disproportionately affected by a disease due to discriminatory systemic practices. These two issues are not separate, they are connected in how Black, Brown and Indigenous bodies marked by gender, class and sexuality and other indicators of underprivilege are affected by our lack of access to resources and care. Covid-19 is a climate issue. I come back to the question of how do we create 'ecologies of care', how do we work against structures, systems, institutions, policies, laws and practices that affect so many of us who are oppressed and marginalised? How do we create our own systems of care founded on resistance and futurity, that operate beyond the limitations of capitalism? How do we gain access to our world? How do we gain access to safe growing food? And even in the so-called Global North, Black people in Detroit still do not even have access to safe drinking water, a supposed basic human right. Environmental racism is a climate issue.

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'Ecologies of care' is not only a framework for us to work or think beyond the scope of white supremacy (many of us are already

doing this); but to think about ourselves as constellations, that intersects across different continents and timezones, different histories and lived experiences and that we are all rooted in a particular practices of care; which not only concerns our own bodies or lives, but also the care of others and the various beings and entities we interact with from animals to water to plants to the spiritual. We are all united in how we have been traumatised by white supremacist-colonial-capitalist violence, and working towards 'ecologies of care' in light of these traumas is not only a dismantling of these systems (decolonising?); it is also generating new praxis that reminds us that our bodies are sites of knowledge(s) and that they require love, care and intimacy. In these bodies we are growing on a daily basis new ways of existing, acting and demanding, and in doing so we conjure new magic that changes how we talk and respond to one another and how we want to be held (or not) and how this all culminates in a radical love ethic to quote aunty bell hooks. bell hooks urges us to create a radical love ethic that is inherently anti patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalist, departing from the conditions of scarcity and embracing conditions of abundance. A radical love ethic knows there is always enough resources to be redistributed, even though oppressive systems might tell us otherwise... there is always enough! There is an abundance of resources that can be equitably shared with the most marginalised and oppressed amongst us. The psychology of finite resources can only exist under the conditions of oppression, so let's burn down the master's house and its tools.

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I want you to care for me, I want you to hold me, I want you to love me and I want you to see me in all of my visibilities and invisibilities. I want you to acknowledge my histories, I want you to acknowledge my pain, I want you to acknowledge how my body moves in the world, I want you to acknowledge how my body is unseen in the world. 'Ecologies of care' is thinking about these provocations from a self / individual level to a we, us and collective level. 'Ecologies of care' is working against the transnational, nation states and artificial borders, and against any framework which upholds nationalism or citizenry upholds white supremacy and scarcity.

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Image credit Petero Kalule

I am now ending with a provocation of how we enact an 'ecologies of care' that is anti-human. 'Ecologies of care' dismantles the notion of the 'human' and whose ideologies is rooted in white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy (aka the enlightenment) and maintains hierarchies of humanness attributed to whiteness, maleness, straightness, cisness, able bodied, westernness, citizened, thinness and the monied. Working towards 'ecologies of care' is embracing the contradictions of the non-language, the intangible, the entangled, the messy, the unruly, the unarticulated, and the 'ugly', and embracing processes that are experiential, unevidenced and spiritual. I would like to offer these thoughts to #stophatrednow2020 as the starting point by which we practice 'ecologies of care' in real life, digitally, and personally.

Joel McKim is Senior Lecturer in Digital Media and Culture and the Director of the Vasari Research Centre for Art and Technology at Birkbeck, University of London. He was recently a visiting fellow at the V&A Museum researching 'A Pre-history of Machine Vision'.

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## 38

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# Vision and Automation in a Post-Covid World

By Joel McKim

*The Guardian* headline reading 'Robots to be used in UK care homes to help reduce loneliness' is accompanied by a photo of a gleeful senior citizen interacting with a wheeled semi-humanoid robot named Pepper. The article describes a research trial studying the use of 'culturally competent' robots to assist in caring for the elderly in the UK and Japan and although the project actually began several years ago, it's only now, post-Covid, that the story has found journalistic attention. The image of AI-powered robots offering a possible solution to the financial difficulties, health concerns and staff burnout facing the care industry, is one seemingly designed to elicit equal parts anxiety and condemnation.

But the role automation will play in our post-Covid world is likely to be less spectacular, yet more disruptive than such contentious visions of robotic health facilities. And while we may balk at AI replacing the forms of care and intimacy we view as innately human, there are already indications that the current crisis is

making many of us increasingly amenable to other forms of more mundane automation. The move towards cashier-less retailers and automated warehouses that perhaps caused some unease in the past, may now appear as a sensible and even ethical solution. A debate about mass unemployment and increased corporate



Image from Common Objects in Context (COCO) image dataset used to train computer vision systems

profits is quickly reframed into one about responsible health decisions and employee safety. As the human-computer interaction researcher Richard Pak asserts in a *New York Times* article on this very subject, 'Pre-pandemic, people might have thought we were automating too much. This event

is going to push people to think what more should be automated'.<sup>1</sup> For those with much to gain from greater levels of work-place automation, this would seem an opportunity to seize upon a moment of increased public receptivity.

If we're to trust the investment reports, business magazines and policy think tank whitepapers on the topic, post-pandemic interest in automation is already surging. To take one circulating, but not-entirely disinterested example, the Honeywell Intelligrated Automation Investment Study found that post-Covid over half of US businesses are increasingly open to investment in automation with e-commerce; grocery, food and beverage; and logistics companies chief among them. But on the topic of labour impact, these sources tend to offer either platitudes – 'The vulnerable will be the most vulnerable' (Brookings Institute)<sup>2</sup>,

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/business/coronavirus-workplace-automation.html>  
 2 [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019.11.20\\_BrookingsMetro\\_What-jobs-are-affected-by-AI\\_Report\\_Muro-Whiton-Maxim.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019.11.20_BrookingsMetro_What-jobs-are-affected-by-AI_Report_Muro-Whiton-Maxim.pdf)

or hollow reassurances – 'People empowered by automation will bring us out of this crisis' (Forbes).<sup>3</sup>

A flurry of more sustained academic considerations of the potential impact of AI and automation have emerged over recent

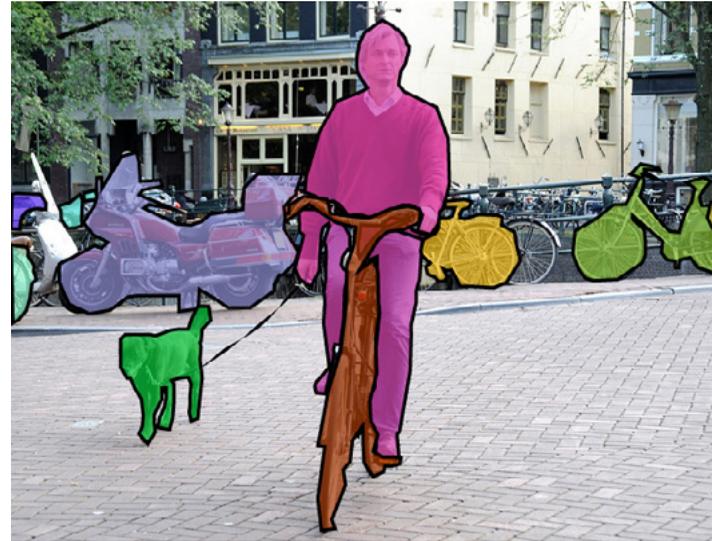


Image from Common Objects in Context (COCO) image dataset used to train computer vision systems

years, all cautionary but with various levels of optimism or pessimism regarding how humans will fare in the automated world to come – books like Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee's *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* and Carl Benedikt Frey's *The Technology Trap: Capital, Labor, and Power in the Age of Automation*. Frey's 2013 research with Michael Osborne at the Oxford Martin School, published

as 'The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization',<sup>4</sup> was an early and influential warning of just how cataclysmically disruptive processes of automation may be for the current labour force. Analyzing O\*NET, an online detailed description of occupations developed for the US Department of Labor, Frey and Osborne determined that 47 percent of US employment falls in the high-risk category of being automated within the next decade or two. Frey has also acknowledged the potential of the Covid-crisis to acerbate an already troubling situation, writing in the *Financial Times*, 'automation anxiety looks set to witness a revival – and with good reason. Coronavirus is likely to accelerate automation'.<sup>5</sup>

3 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shahinfarshchi/2020/04/10/expect-more-jobs-and-more-automation-in-the-post-covid-19-economy/#5da3ec1629b4>  
 4 <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/future-of-employment.pdf>  
 5 <https://www.ft.com/content/817228a2-82e1-11ea-b6e9-a94cfd1d9bf>

Why does this admittedly disheartening discussion of automation and work precarity belong in a series reflecting on post-Covid visual culture? Recent advances in computer vision technology (enabled by machine learning and deep neural networks) are one of the primary factors driving forms of automation that importantly span both the manufacturing and service economy, from driverless vehicles, to assembly line robotics, to checkout



Image from Common Objects in Context (COCO) image dataset used to train computer vision systems

free shops. One indication of this development, image recognition error rates for neural networks have fallen precipitously in recent years, with computer vision algorithms now able to classify images in large datasets like ImageNet with as much as 98% accuracy.<sup>6</sup> Our powers of perception – once, like caring, a seemingly innately human capacity resistant to machine replication – are apparently no longer the insurmountable barrier to automation we might

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.image-net.org/challenges/LSVRC/>

have believed. Much of this technology has moved beyond mere speculation and into a prototyping phase, and of course some forms of workplace automation, like warehouse robotics, are already with us. The drone delivery systems and autonomous shipping vehicles, envisioned by companies like Amazon are still unproven, but the underlying computer vision systems they rely upon are developing quickly and a post-Covid investment push may well bring forward their timetable of deployment. In an economy increasingly reliant on now vulnerable service sector jobs, like transportation and retail, this could have a devastating impact.

These concerns regarding the relationship between human and computational vision were of course central to Harun Farocki's own prescient investigations of machine vision and operational images, from military tracking systems to computer simulations. Today, artists like Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Adam Harvey, are producing work that compels us to think critically about our contemporary technologies of artificial perception, exposing the technical and social infrastructures that underpin facial recognition systems, for example. These artists help shed light on an already unfolding regime of vision and automation, one potentially accelerated in our post-Covid world.

[Andrea Luka Zimmerman](#): is an artist and filmmaker. Her work is concerned with marginalisation, social justice and a search for radicalised re-relations, between people, place, ecology. She is a Reader at Central Saint Martins. [www.fugitiveimages.org.uk](http://www.fugitiveimages.org.uk)

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# 39

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## Re-Relations

By Andrea Luka Zimmerman

Some bought so much food, so others could not.

Will I have enough to eat? I'd rather not eat at all than just a little. My mother used to make spam with tinned mushrooms and rice, when she could. The smell of my dog's food sometimes entices me. I was accustomed to source nourishment in unexpected places, way into my 30s. I knew where to look for it, and I was not alone. On the day before lock-down, my friend told me about the schoolgirl he just saw scoffing cold pizza into her mouth at Lidl, and how, wanting to protect her, he blocked the sightline of the security guard who was slowly turning towards them. But he, instead, said, 'don't worry, she comes here often, I am watching, so no one disturbs her'. This is care. This is knowing, by those who know.

As a society, in a way unlike any other, the question is out in the open: what does it mean to consider the lives of others?  
<https://vimeo.com/414755661>



Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos is an academic/artist/fiction author. He works with performance, photography and text, as well as sculpture and painting. His work has been presented at the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Art Biennale 2019, the 16<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale 2016, the Tate Modern, Inhotim Instituto de Arte Contemporânea Brazil, Arebyte Gallery, and Danielle Arnaud Gallery. He is a fiction author, with *The Book of Water* published in Greek and English. He is also Professor of Law & Theory at the University of Westminster, and Director of *The Westminster Law & Theory Lab*. His academic books include the monographs *Absent Environments* (2007), *Niklas Luhmann: Law, Justice, Society* (2009), and *Spatial Justice: Body Lawscape Atmosphere* (2014).

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40

## She Would Fall Asleep with a Taste of Home on her Lips

A moving poem by Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos

*She would fall asleep with a taste of home on her lips.  
She needed to return. Touching, knocking, calling.  
Her home had become the wallpaper of her dreams,  
a scent of rotting roses, a touch of tenacious tenderness, a depthless façade.  
Her fingers were desperately seeking even while she was asleep,  
digits drawing on the screen, digital desires dragging her down to the deep seabed.*

*Now, centuries later,  
her dream of return is replaced by another persistent dream:  
she is floating in an underwater city  
where anemones constantly blast their seeds into the slow-moving waters  
of the night.  
She feels one with the world,  
folded in a circularity where façade and depth  
are one vast flat surface, linking, sharing, connecting.*

*Home, she thought, is the place I leave behind.*



From the claustrophobia of domesticity to the fury of a changing world. Such passages always take place in the middle of the night. They wait till the globe moves just beyond the edge of the sun, and they dream us up, all reprogrammed and ready to accept.

The world sleeps, the axes change. The world wakes up, and the sun falls on empty streets.

There is nothing smooth about these passages: initially, the ones who had homes were all forced deeper into them, frantically attempting to reinvent a Bachelardian bourgeois berth, endlessly

viewing the same tired details and hoping that our bored gaze will bring out the phenomenology of belonging. But even while we were attempting that, we knew that in this age of lost innocence, these luxuries were no longer possible: we finally became, in very real, material, architectural terms, a testing ground for Esposito's immunological dystopia, or Sloterdijk's bubbles of isolation.

Yet we never stopped seeking however the other home. We never cease to seek. Our desire to return, our need to regress – who can tell the difference anymore.

And then, the next passage. We are ushered out by the forceps of systematic racial abuse and discrimination, we come out with a cry. We inhale the vast pillars of oxygen needed for a global breath to be heard. This breath says: we cannot breathe. Not this air anymore, even when the knees are removed from our necks. Protest as essential activity during COVID-19. There is violence in this passage, no doubt about this. The light is harsh, the air smells of rotting empires, the port waters open up their arms for Victorian statues finally to be corroded. We are out.

The dream turns with the axes of the planet.

*The moving poem 'She would fall asleep with a taste of home on her lips' is one of three moving-poems/passages written, composed, recorded and recited by Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos as part of the art residency-at-home by Eva Sajovic and Rebecca Davies of People's Bureau, along with fiction writer Sarah Butler and film maker Shona Hamilton, in May 2020 during the UK lockdown. The pieces, along with the works of the other artists in residence, were performed on a live zoom stream on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020.*

*A film by Shona Hamilton can be watched on <https://vimeo.com/495048877>*

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# 41

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## The Server is Down, the Bridge Washes Out, there is a Power Blackout

By Arts Catalyst with Gary Zhexi Zhang, and Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak (Pirate Care)

### Prelude

In 1999, Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star published *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, exploring 'how classification systems can shape both worldviews and social interactions'.<sup>1</sup> In defining infrastructure, the question of visibility is raised: 'The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout'.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, companies and organisations across the world had been preparing for the 'Year 2000 Problem' – an anticipated mass infrastructural problem whereby the original coding of complex computer systems would be unable to correctly interpret new calendar data from 2000 onwards, potentially causing a major glitch in communications, banking systems, power plants and transportation. Would the infrastructure support the future?

<sup>1</sup> <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/sorting-things-out>

<sup>2</sup> <https://highlights.sawyerh.com/highlights/Wi5FgG8ms2FtGzcJuvLA>

In late 2019 amongst an accumulation of crises, another glitch in the system emerges, along with rampant speculation, conspiracy theories and misinformation. A different kind of virus began spreading across the planet, with its effect on humans, non-humans and our systems of organisation and governance revealing the already broken infrastructures which enabled its unexpectedly potent agency.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 the UK woke up to a visibly broken infrastructure, with fragments of it scattered everywhere. Already shaken by the Brexit vote, it was the first time since the financial crisis of 2008, and even then, the financial crash was so abstract and immaterial that the cracks that it produced in public infrastructures remained opaque, at least initially. Symptoms of infrastructural collapse had been appearing in public health, education and environmental policies among others though, in the form of the restructuring of public bodies, budget cuts and externalisation of public services.

But while austerity was seeking to shape the tectonic of society in an almost inevitable way, a proliferation of social movements, protests, demands – from Occupy Wall Street to BLM, from Me Too to movements for housing rights and migrants’ rights – have emerged. If we have not yet seen them fully cement into law, policy and party politics, we know that their echoes will continue reverberating in the system’s cracks, each time becoming louder and more visible.

## Propositions

During the lockdown, many of us have found themselves sitting – on our own – at a kitchen table, seeking to look into the future of the different overlapping structures that sustain our fragmented society. From our side, we have invited artists and practitioners who have an ongoing commitment to the redefinition of infrastructures of governance, decision making and care to develop a series of propositions for a visible infrastructure. While imagining sitting together at that same kitchen table – an eloquent metaphor of a temporary conflation of life – we have invited Gary Zhexi Zhang and Pirate Care to formulate the first propositions.

At the kitchen table, we asked:

*Who and what is within or outside of infrastructures? Who and what is reinforced or dismantled? Who shapes it and whom does it shape?*

*How can we rebuild infrastructures through cultural practices? If infrastructures are built to uphold a set of values or societal/economic/political/environmental norms, how can we shift the values of profit, accumulation and growth to be read through empathy, hospitality and care?*

*What would exponential growth along the vector of empathy look like? What would an abundance of comfort feel like? What if the organising principle of cultural infrastructure was the kitchen table?*

Laura Clarke & Anna Santomauro, Arts Catalyst



Sakiya: Art, Science and Agriculture is an artist-run institution and permaculture farm in Ein Qiniya, Palestine. Founded by Sahar Qawasmi and Nida Sinnokrot, Sakiya hosts research, pedagogy and exhibitions that explore the politics and culture of land, infrastructure and the commons. Image courtesy of Gary Zhexi Zhang.

## Proposition #1: The place of culture for a radical societal vision

Over the past few months, as COVID-19 brought global infrastructure to its knees, the way in which communities and governments responded has also shown how much of the impossible could, in fact, be implemented quite quickly. From remote work to mutual aid funds, from requisitioned housing for the homeless to a 25% drop in daily carbon emissions, it has been at turns inspiring and frightening to see how much can change on a whim. A catastrophe is an 'overturning', after all.

There is an opportunity to reflect on the value of culture: not only its intangible, intrinsic virtues, but its strategic efficacies in shaping the form and content of society. The pandemic transformations that took place seemingly overnight (no, the economy was always fictional; yes, we can decelerate if we want to) should give us cause to heighten our ambitions, as well as our demands, over what our collective future looks like. In this era of intense social and political uncertainty, perhaps it's time that artists and cultural researchers work towards institution-building and policymaking, in order to stake a claim on an experimental public culture and a radical societal vision, committed to values beyond engagement metrics and private patronage.



Primer is a platform for artistic and organizational development located in the headquarters of [Aquaporin](#), a water technology company in Denmark. Its stated objective is 'renewing relations between artistic, scientific, technological and business practices' by developing 'novel organisational forms'. Image courtesy of Primer.

Artistic modalities of speculation and consciousness-raising are only as generative as their effects, or else they end up as more content for the churn in a futures-oriented economy whose currency is dopamine and affect. What would it take to shift the work of artists from the spaces of consumption to an intervention in the context of production, long term thinking and decision-making? For instance, what if there were not only economists and private lobbyists but also artists and cultural agents in the government committee, on decisions that affect not only GDP but the whole of society, such as climate policy, innovation, and indeed, cultural strategy? What institutions, pedagogical modes and strategic plays would be necessary for artists to take on the agency and responsibility of infrastructural-scale practice, to shape the real beyond the preserves of riskless speculation?

Gary Zhexi Zhang

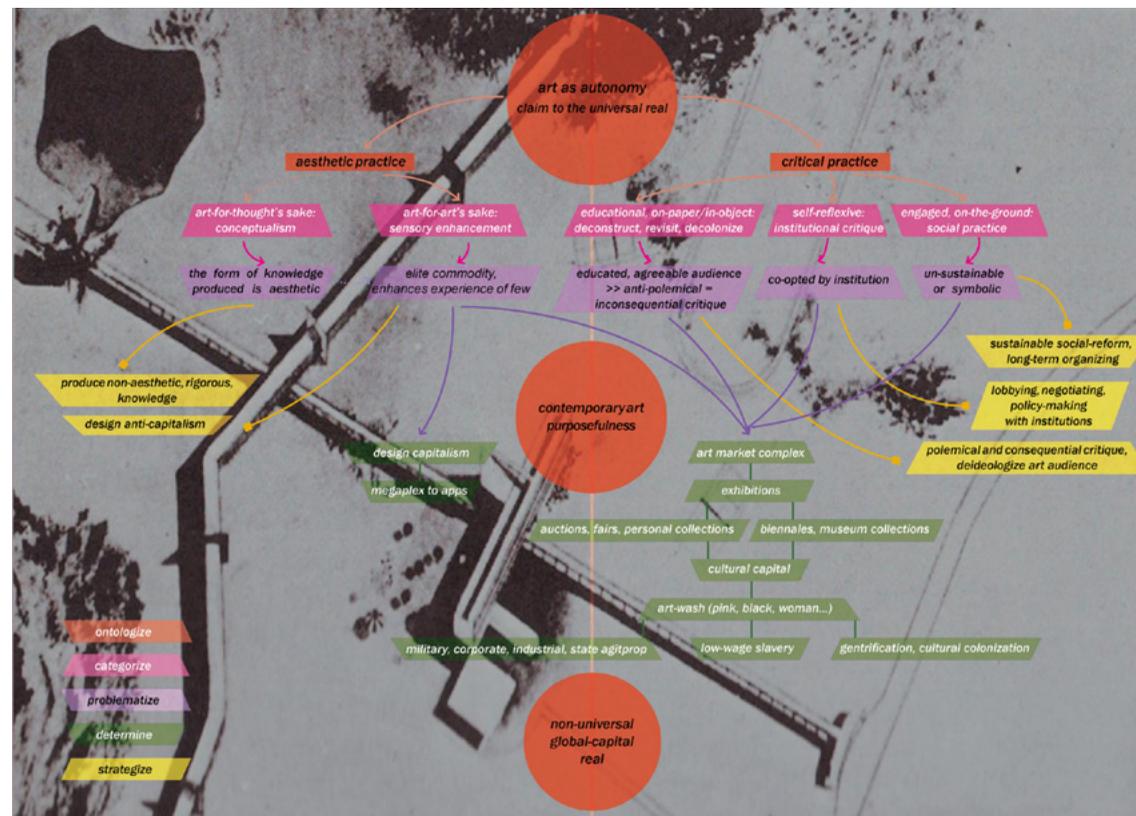


Diagram by Bahar Noorizadeh, 'Art and Law'; from BLOCC, a system of learning that tackles the relationship between contemporary art and gentrification through an initial curriculum that aligns local struggles with planetary-scale infrastructural analysis. Image courtesy of the artist.

## Proposition #2: Flatten the curve, grow the care

In late 2019, we organized a collective writing retreat hosted by the cultural centre Drugo More in Rijeka (HR), to create a Pirate Care Syllabus - a free digital tool for sharing tacit knowledges and activating political pedagogies from disobedient practices of social reproduction and solidarity that are increasingly becoming criminalized. As the syllabus and its dedicated library catalog went online (<https://syllabus.pirate.care>) on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2020 for the opening of WHW's exhibition '...of bread, wine, cars, security and peace' at Kunsthalle Wien, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was already bursting in our part of the world.

So, we rolled over our work into a collective note-taking effort to document the unprecedented wave of organizing around mutual aid in response to the pandemic.

We titled the exercise 'Flatten the curve, grow the care: What are we learning from Covid-19', to problematize the famous image depicting a graph of the outbreak, with two curves representing better or worse rates of contagion and an undefined 'healthcare capacity' as a straight line that the ideal pandemic curve should not breach.

Flatten the curve,  
grow the care

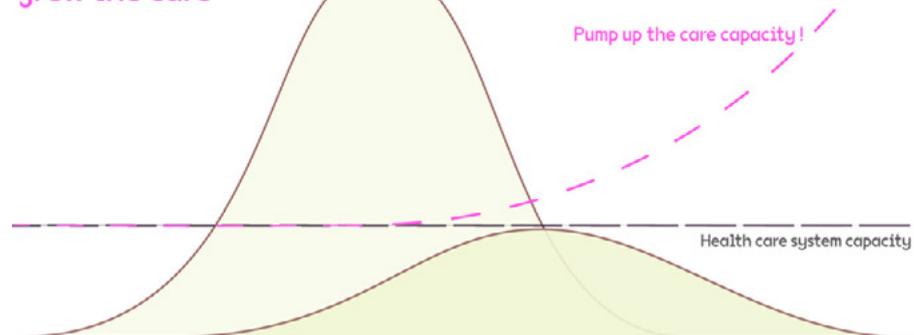


Diagram by Pirate Care, 'Flatten the curve, grow the care'. Image courtesy of Pirate Care.

From the perspective of learning with our extended pirate care network only a few months earlier, much in what has been termed the biggest crisis of care of the century seemed not so new. The straight line in the graph was actually depicting the flat-lining of the societal capacity of care under relentless austerity. The pre-existing capitalist care crisis, felt until recently by the most vulnerable and disposable populations, and always well visible through the lenses of class, race and gender, suddenly detonated as a generalized social fact.

What the research underpinning our process shows is that the straight line has never been the same line for everyone to begin with. It also shows that, crucially, this very line, representing the concept of a universally accessible public healthcare infrastructure as a common good, would not have been there if it wasn't for those who in the past have organized around their own care needs, while simultaneously struggling for public welfare provisions shaped by their constituencies.

Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak

[Bahar Noorizadeh](http://www.baharnoorizadeh.com) is an artist, writer and filmmaker. Her current research examines the intersections of finance, Contemporary Art and emerging technology, building on the notion of 'Weird Economies' to precipitate a cross-disciplinary approach to alternative economics and post-financialization imaginaries. She is pursuing this as a PhD candidate in Art at Goldsmiths, University of London where she holds a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship.  
[www.baharnoorizadeh.com](http://www.baharnoorizadeh.com)

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42

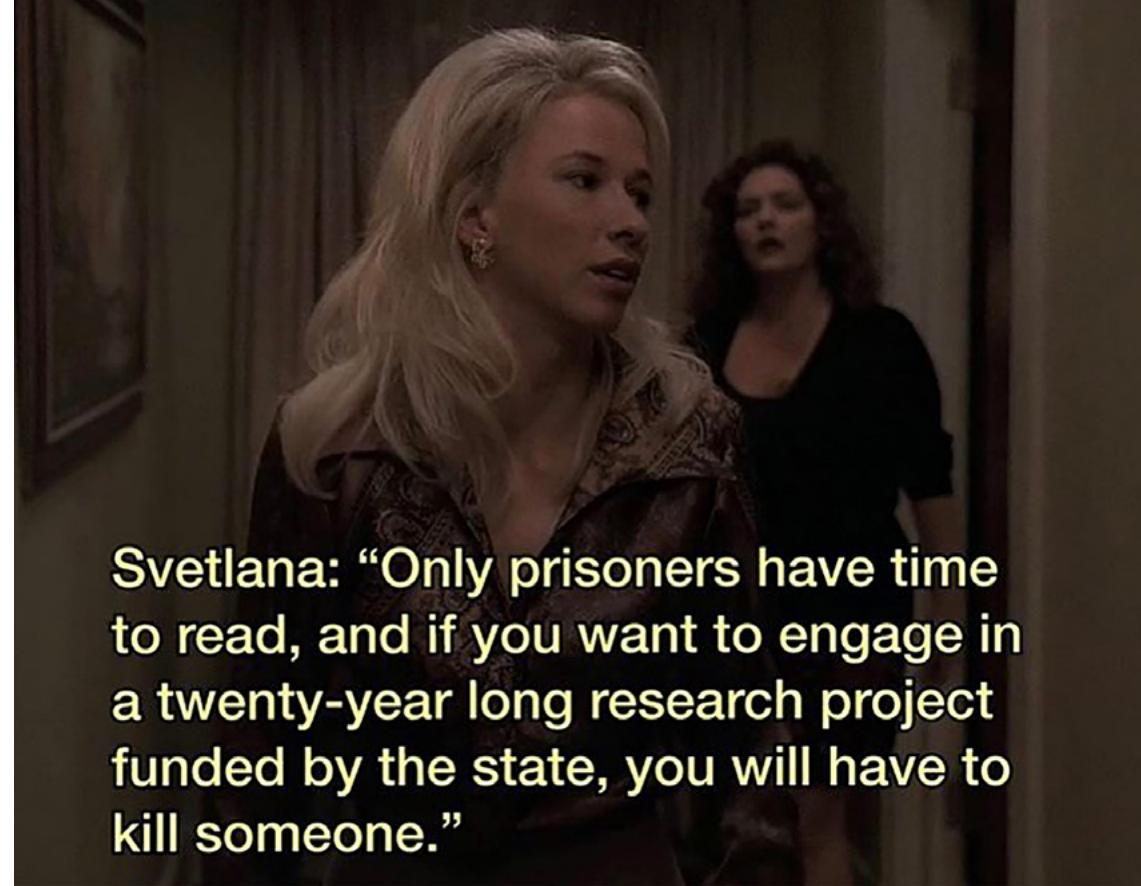
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## The Slow Cancelation of the Past

By Bahar Noorizadeh

As I write this text, some countries have already entered their second, more severe, peak of the pandemic. The hustle and bustle down the streets indicate, however, that our psyches have plummeted from the heights of emergency, in a 4-6 month drag, into the lows of normalcy and good-old lethargy: One more reminder that there is nothing more out of touch with reality than human consciousness.

Since the surge of sentimental prose, self-indulgent commentary, and naive optimism are finally on the wane, we can recall that neither the pandemic nor the revolution granted a clean slate. While existence was forcing our bodies into a halt, creating the illusion of a tabula rasa, in Lebanon flames rose again on the streets as the currency dived into a freefall. A white police officer in Minneapolis with a history of misconduct pressed his knee on George Floyd's neck for 9 straight minutes towards death. In Jerusalem's Old City the Israeli police shot and killed Eyad Rawhi Al-Halaq on his way to his special educational needs school. China effectively rode the chaos to pass national security laws in Hong



Svetlana: “Only prisoners have time to read, and if you want to engage in a twenty-year long research project funded by the state, you will have to kill someone.”

Kong, crushing any hope for the city's autonomy. The recession is well underway and abolition is left an unfinished project: People are dismantling monuments to slave trading patriarchs of Euro-Amerikkka, trundling them down to the canals where their ships once used to dock.

In 'Statues Also Die' (1953) Chris Marker argues that European culture, product of the removal of Sub-Saharan African masks and sculptures to the European museum, is the carcass of African exuberance: 'When men die, they enter into history. When statues die, they turn into art. This botany of death is what we call culture'. Statues of colonialist forefathers at the hearts of Belgian, British, and American empires, in contrast, are alive. More than cities, London, Ghent; Richmond, Virginia are museums of white supremacy where these monuments rightfully belong. Defacing and dislodging them to the river is the first step in exterminating the life captured in these objects. The danger is however in perceiving the empty pedestals left behind as clean slates.

There is more to make a true break in the imperialist signifying chain. 'An object is dead when the living glance trained upon it has disappeared', reminds Marker. Because while the artwork disappears, the museum lives long.

The pandemic itself, as one (key) instance in a long pattern of 'Disaster Capitalism',<sup>1</sup> is not an opportunity to bank on, nor a new way forward. Its only vocation: not to occupy the future, but to cancel the past.

In hopes of breaking away from what Mark Fisher prophesied as our 'slow cancelation of the future'<sup>2</sup> – a tape stuck on repeat, where cultural tropes resurface like a retrospective runway of 20th century – dozen variations on the theme of *future* have spurned out of the fields of art, design and humanities in the past decade: science-fiction, gulf and cino-futurisms (after afro-futurism), speculative design and speculative fiction. Along with Fisher, artist-designer-thinkers problematized a sense of fatigue with our collective imagination, and so they reinhabited alternative educational programs (micro think-and-do-tanks) in design studios of major global cities. In a way, the correct diagnosis of the shortcomings of 20th century critical discourse in offering constructive toolkits for the future, is responded to with ardent, touch-and-go workshop-format design models that pride themselves in breaking from the standard historical malaise. In the duration of a few weeks to few months, these programs ask their participants to respond with practical proposals to dire issues – be it the pandemic or the environment – that are an accumulation of centuries of capitalization intertwined with racial and colonial injustice. To even begin to correctly identify the problem, however, one requires durational, long-term research. And as much as one can co-opt, and make best of, precarious pedagogy's modus operandi, knowledge demands its own protracted process. Appeals to sci-fi then become an escape to the future. Is it surprising that, as the economic philosopher Philip Mirowski asserts, the most overused and prosaic conceptual jargons – neoliberalism and the free market per se – are the most understudied and misunderstood objects of research today?<sup>3</sup>

1 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), New York: Metropolitan Books

2 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), London: Zero Books

3 Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (2014), London: Verso.

Contrary to Fisher's proposition, in 2020 we may have too much *future* indeed and not enough of the past.

Of course the quest for forging institutional memory is tied to the plight of public education and its aggravating funding crises and over-reliance on the private sector. The emergence of *design-studio* as the paradigmatic para-educational model is itself a symptom of such pecuniary exigencies in departments of critical thought. At the risk of sounding even more grim, as I'm writing this text, the pandemic has effectively put the faith of several universities in the UK in peril. Goldsmiths, Exeter, Warwick and Sussex in the past few weeks announced massive cuts to their precarious teaching staff – many of them PhD researchers of the same institutions. Goldsmiths has even refused to use the government's furlough scheme to support its most vulnerable workers. Since 70% of educational labour is handled by these casualised staff, this means doubling the workload of an already overtaxed permanent faculty. This all is taking place against a backdrop of a rapidly gentrified education, disposing of its black and ethnic minority UK students, with astronomical international fees that appeal only to a narrow profit-generating group graced with powerful passports. This week the only black faculty member on a permanent contract at Goldsmiths Art department, Evan Ifekoya, withdrew their labour to take a stand against institutional racial biases pervading the department in a majority white university.

The transient nature of knowledge production today, whether in the solution-averse casualised university or the history-averse design program, is a matter of its exacerbating devaluation. Sustenance of grounded research requires investment, that is, raising the credit-worthiness of discredited forms of knowledge. As walking talking 'projects in need of investment',<sup>4</sup> as Michel Feher describes the financialized subject to be, here we can begin to think about our investee positions in academia in more tactical terms: To work on the level of changing the definition of what's bankable and what's not. That is, to convince investors – including ourselves as investors in state apparatuses of our countries of residence – of the 'attractiveness' of history.

4 Michel Feher, *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age* (2018), New York: Zone Books.

Widespread discussions around prison abolition these days are directly related to this approach. Not only abolition would encourage a reinvestment of capital funds away from the police-prison nexus into development of social structures (housing, health care, education) but equally essential, abolitionism works on the redistribution of the 'unproductive time' of incarceration — turned productive via unsalaried prison labour — into sustaining those life-affirming and time-intensive projects. This supposedly *idle* time, so far, has been reserved for those called by Achille Mbembe in his *Critique of Black Reason* (2013)<sup>5</sup> the 'Superfluous Humanity,' namely, 'those that are unable to be exploited at all:' A condition that is catching up with us in all spheres of automated production. Disqualified even for exploitation and undeserving of wage, the factory streamlines into prison, taking a quick stop at the office. Abolitionist ethics, in essence, imagines the reallocation of this surplus carceral time into the maintenance — and slowing down — of care-based infrastructures.

As schematic as this may sound, it might give us a sense of direction and a cause worth fighting for within our universities while they last.

<sup>5</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (2013) Durham: Duke University Press.

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## 43

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# Stay Safe, Stay Healthy

By Danah Abdulla

'I hope this message finds you well'. This is how I have always started my emails. I sign off with 'be well', a practice I borrowed from one of my favourite professors as an undergraduate student; a man we all referred to as 'the silver fox'. He always signed off his emails with 'be well' — a line I found amusing because his first name rhymed with 'well' but one I also adored. I desperately wanted to take this line up as my own. And so I did.

Since mid-March, the emails that come through my inbox ask me if I am well, or if I am staying safe, or if I am healthy. The beginning of the correspondence does not say 'hope you are well' but the sender frames it as a question. Is the sender genuinely asking me if I am well or safe or healthy? Similarly to how they began, emails are often signed off with 'stay safe', or 'stay healthy' or 'stay well'. Are these choices mine? Is the sender asking me if I have the virus and if yes, am I quarantining? Or is the sender asking if I am coping with social distancing as someone living on my own without any family nearby? Or the multiple other things I could be struggling with at the moment? Maybe it is none of these things and it is the smart compose feature at work.

Will this new practice suffer the same fate as the all too common 'how are you?' – a line that appears to ask you how you are doing but does not actually ask how are you? I wonder if, post-pandemic, asking someone if they are well and telling them to stay safe and healthy will move from being a genuine concern with one's health to a polite way of starting an email (aided by the smart compose feature) before we get to the actual content of the email?

Will this allow us to develop more genuine practices into our correspondences, ones we actually mean, akin to writing a letter to a close friend, rather than polite buffers before getting to the point?

Be well.

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## 44

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# Hope, or Pandora in the Time of the Pandemic

By John Paul Ricco

If there is any way to hold out hope today, it must not be the protracted optimism of liberalism and its implicitly theological promise of ultimate redemption: 'one day, just you wait'. Instead, the kind of hope that I will speak of here is immanent, yet precisely as the immanent force of finitude.

One figure of it is found in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*: 'Hope shot across the sky above their heads like a falling star'. Following Calvin Warren's philosophy of black nihilism and the latter's absolute refusal of the politics of hope, we might refer to the falling star as an image of *spiritual hope* – its luminescence darkening the sky as it cosmologically burns bright. Unlike the politics of hope and its infinite deferral, the worthiness of such cosmo-spiritual hope lies in it standing apart from both the torment of expecting what cannot be had (ends), and of bestowing upon hope the power of a mitigating force (means). As the last gift of the gods, hope (*Elpis*) is what remains in Pandora's jar,



culminates in the sign of gold. For those who do not know the true, inner alchemy of light, earthly mines are the place of a hidden treasure' (Agamben, 106). As Agamben explains, 'The "celebration of the hidden treasure" is therefore the becoming visible, in bodies, of the alchemy of light. This alchemy is both a spiritualization of matter and a materialization of light' — something like a falling star.

Agamben then reminds his reader of one of Kafka's aphorisms: 'The fact that only the spiritual world exists deprives us of hope and gives us certainty', and once again we are faced with what appears to be a counter intuitive. Yet only if we refuse to see spirituality as a materiality of its own, precisely as keyed to the glimmer of starlight, of moonlight. Such that, as he goes on to say, 'the loss of hope (even of that retrospective hope, nostalgia for Eden [or that prospective hope, promise of emancipation] is the terrible price that the mind must pay when it reaches the incandescent point of certainty' (108).

after her curiosity led her to open the container, thereby letting all of the other evil forces (except hope) out into the world. At the end of *The Adventure* (2015), Giorgio Agamben writes: 'The fact that hope, as the final gift, remains in the box means that it does not expect its factual accomplishment in the world — not because it postpones its fulfillment to an invisible beyond but because somehow it has always already been satisfied' (93). What might Agamben mean by this, and how is such a postulation not a capitulation to the status quo, and hence perhaps a fate even worse than the politics of hope?

I think one answer can be found in a text by Agamben published twenty years earlier, on the writer Elsa Morante. Toward the end of that essay, included in the collection *The End of the Poem* (1996), Agamben turns to Morante's theoretical description of colour and light in paintings by Fra Angelico. As when she writes: 'Colours, are a gift of light, which makes use of bodies... to transform its invisible celebration into an epiphany... It is well known that to the eyes of idiots (poor and rich alike) the hierarchy of splendours

It is that incandescence of which Goethe and Morante wrote, and that we might imagine remains contained in Pandora's jar, now a symbol for the colonization of cosmo-spiritual hope. Hope is neither a hidden treasure nor a future salvation. Instead, its mystery is the secret held by Melville's Bartleby, who we might imagine, in the near silence of his preference not to, holds out the hope that salvation (appropriation) and damnation (abandonment), will no longer be the extraneous forces that bear upon life, but that instead, he will be able to exist as the singular self that he is — irreparably unfinished in his finitude, and therefore to be loved.

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# 45

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## The World that Surrounds me Inheres in me

By Yve Lomax

No matter the hubris that would claim so, human life isn't a form of life that preeminently stands above all others. Human life is inextricably immersed with myriad forms of life and to the extent that sometimes it is even hard to say *human* life. Yet there is no denying that a phenomenon called Man came about; he would posit a centre and, placing himself there, give himself the entitlement to ravage everything since everything belonged to him. And this Man would become a spectral being. It would haunt what is called human and not only its exploits but also as *being there* beyond all versions and giving measure to what is deemed the superior and the inferior, the finest and the worst.

How tired the world has become of this human and its spectre.

*Enough.*

The cry is heard in the silence of the drilling having stopped, the planes not flying, the roads empty of fast cars and the vibrations of the daily trudge become hush.

How tired of humanity we are.

In the silence, again: *enough.*

No form of life or mode of being can ever stand separately as above all others. All forms of life are immersed in a world where life is nothing other than its possibilities. And the same configuration can be found if I say, *the world has no existence outside of its expressions*. But of this world I cannot say where it begins or where it ends, and the same goes for life. However, I can say that you are that *expression*.

For sure, forms of life can meet dead-ends and know catastrophe, but what never stops coming are possibilities that are remarkably unauthorised. Each possibility of life (world) has nothing preceding it and to which it refers for identity and definition or, come to that, haunts it as the purest of possibilities.

Life isn't the same no matter the shape or size. Always arising as a being of potential, life is said in many ways — this is what life *can* be. Some put it like this: *life ... is always already homonymically shared in a plurality of forms.*

The prevailing silence makes this mode of sharing palpable; the atmosphere is thick with it and, believe me, no spectre haunts it.

Here I am, immersed.

Ruth Ewan, an artist based in Scotland, is known for creating context specific art projects, which highlight the continued relevance of particular historic moments to the present. She works with collaborators to realise her projects, which are often grounded in focused research into the social and political history of the site in which they are based.

Isobel Wohl is a writer and visual artist from Brooklyn, NY. For seven years she lived in London, where she studied at the Royal College of Art. Her first novel, *Cold New Climate*, will be published by Weatherglass Books in April 2021.

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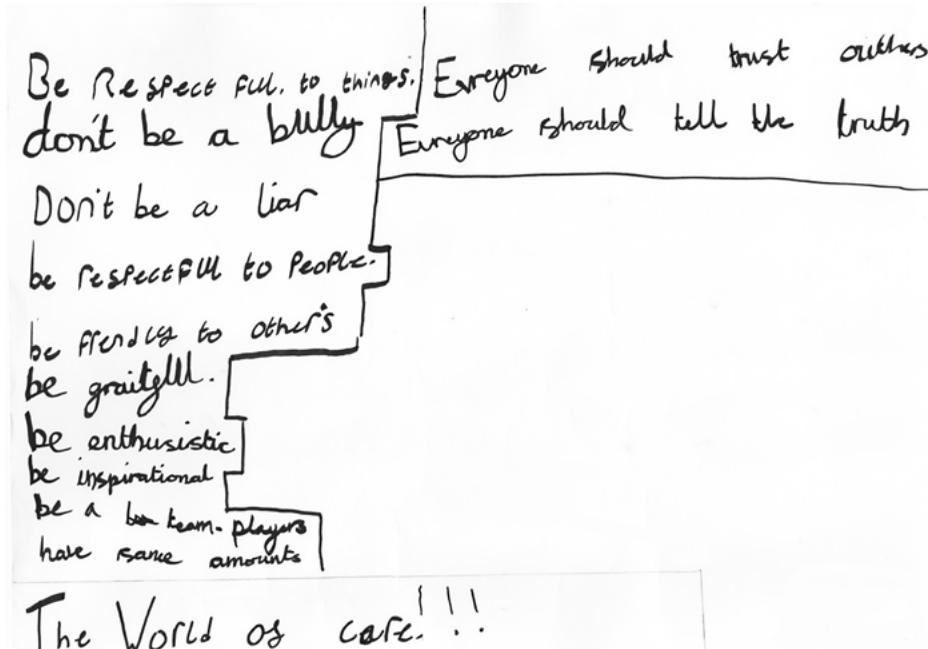
46

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'The World of Care!!!' was produced by a pupil at The Meadows Primary School Lincoln, with artist Ruth Ewan in 2016 as part of her project 'The Difference' commissioned by Gymnasium Projects, University of Lincoln.

## The World of Care!!!

By Ruth Ewan



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47

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## Flocks

By Isobel Wohl

Now that the leaves have fallen from the trees, we can see the birds more easily.

The other week my mother and I were walking along our road when we saw a group of tiny grey birds, heavily paunched, with a yellow spot on the tops of their heads and white streaks on their faces. They hopped up and down branches only as thick as two threads together, and their beaks darted quickly as they seemed to find some food, maybe bugs too small for us to see. They took off and batted their wings fiercely and resettled on the next branch over. They ate more, took off again, and moved to the next tree. We walked with them. Sometimes one bird would grasp a branch with its long toes and hang below it, nibbling joyously at some movement above.

In the house, on the news, the election was still happening, and we were afraid. We had voted and volunteered and it seemed it might have just been enough but we were not yet sure. We had gone out into the world to get away from the news but we could not go far

into the world because of the virus. The faces of our friends were dangerous. We missed the world and were afraid of it.

I asked my mother if the birds were chickadees. (Those are her favourite bird.) She said no. We left the flock we had been watching and began to walk more quickly back to the house. Soon we saw another group of the same tiny birds and among them a bigger one with a black marking covering the whole top of its head. It was on a sturdy branch. That's a chickadee, said my mother, the big one, the kind of fuzzy-looking one. When we got back to the house we looked the smaller birds up in our field guide. They are called golden-crowned kinglets. They often travel in flocks with chickadees.

Plastique Fantastique, a collaboration between David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, Alex Marzeta and Vanessa Page (sometimes with others, including Harriet Skully, Ana Benloch, Stuart Tait, Mark Jackson, Benedict Drew, Frankie Roberts, Tom Clark, Simon Davenport, Joe Murray, Lawrence Leaman, Samudradaka and Aryapala), is a mythopoetic fiction – an investigation of aesthetics, the sacred, popular culture and politics – produced through comics, performances, text, installations and shrines and assemblages.

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48

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## What is the future of MYTH post-Covid-19?

By Plastic Fantastique

**Plastique  
Fantastique**

**Tarot Reading**

**What is the  
future of MYTH  
post-covid-19?**

**Plastique  
Fantastique  
Tarot Reading  
made on the  
21st June 2020,  
23.00 BST.**

**Plastique Fantastique Tarot Explained**

‘When the person myth, meets the person reality, the spirit of the impossible-strange appears, in dark disguise.’

Sun Ra

Plastique Fantastique Tarot is your future in a set of foolish memes. Fifty-two memes in four suites make up the Tarot. The suites are a result of natural-social-technological selection. Each suite is a domain of tech-intelligence. The first – the Zero-City Suite – is the domain of technological economies, the second – the Traitor-Trickster Suite – is the domain of mischievous figures, the third – the Rogue-Tech Suite – is the domain of mutinous spirits and the fourth – the Solar Suite – is the domain of planetary agents and their satellites.

Tarot readings operate through the ten-card lay of the Space Station Cross-Section design (similar to the Celtic Cross lay). The querent asks a question of the cards, cuts the cards as many times as they like and places ten cards face-up in the arrangement of the Cross-Section. Each position in the lay guides interpretation and offers answers to the querent’s question.

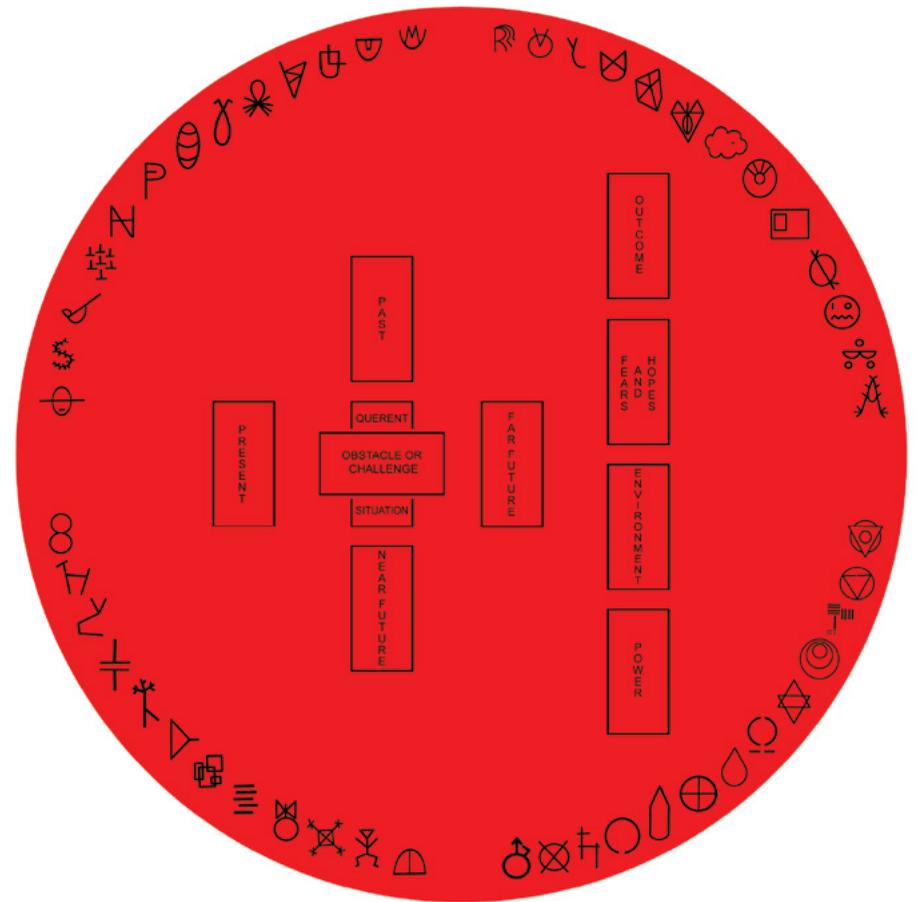
# Plastique Fantastique Tarot

In the top right of each card there is a sigil indicating whether the card is the right or wrong way up.

The Space Station Cross-Section spread has ten positions. The positions of the lay are:

1. Querent/Situation;
2. Obstacle/Challenge;
3. Past;
4. Present;
5. Near Future;
6. Far Future;
7. Power;
8. Environment;
9. Hopes and Fears;
10. Outcome.

The card occupying position 2. Obstacle/Challenge, lies over and across the card occupying position 1. Querent/Situation.





## THE READING\*

**\*Note: Plastique Fantastique Tarot may have pointed to future myths as well as the future of myth.**

## Querent/Situation Card: **Cyber-Tortoise**

Zero City Suite – Right Way Up.

**Reading:** Cyber Tortoise is one of the first tech-animals, an invention of a famous cyberneticist, but it is a tortoise first and foremost, and the card of caution. Survival is uppermost in all the thought and actions of the tortoise, and this is for many the situation, but what next? What to believe? Is everyday now on repeat? The virus is real and the real has come to eat all desires, dreams, all myths – until into the bucket we all go. We are all Cyber Tortoise (if we are sensible). This original cybernetic creation has sensors and a charging port, and when outside it negotiates all other objects and subjects carefully. It mostly stays at home, recharging (it is a cyber-animal that adapts to being a zoom-animal easily). The situation calls for just such an animal, a myth of survival, but the cybernetic animal is asking 'survival for what ends'? For a future myth? Caution is all it knows. Cyber Tortoise is an old animal, a binary animal, it knows 0s and 1s, go, stop, stay and to respect what is real and deadly and dangerous. Cyber Tortoise thinks: Cautious be as cautious does! Cautious be as safe as houses! To be caution itself, when facing what is myth or real. Is this a future (of) myth?

**Provenance:** An original cybernetic animal. A self-charging, self-homing, sensor-activated feedback loop. An experimental machine created by William Grey Walter.

**Right way up:** This machine is capable of determined action and maintains energy levels by never straying far from its charging station, by never straying far from home. Caution and a slow and steady processing of data equals survival for this machine. All encounters with obstacles are carefully negotiated.

**Wrong way up:** This machine inverted is low on power or depleted, confused and needing general repair and upgrades. Obsolescence beckons.



## Obstacle Card: Chelsea (Manning Made Me Hardcore)

Zero City Suite – Upside Down

**Reading:** Chelsea is calling for transitions, a questioning of existing binaries and hierarchies. Chelsea reveals all codes as codes, and all structures as constructs. This appertains to the situation that we are in: Covid-19, Lockdown, BLM, the exposure of white privilege, hypocrisy revealed. People who invest in existing codes as nature or normal ('that's the way it is') see Chelsea as trickster and traitor, which Chelsea may well be, but these people see this as a negative trait, a traitor's trait. The inverted Chelsea is holding up bags of money, meaning a lot of money is at stake in this situation, and moneybags and money may be an obstacle to change (old myth working against new myth). But the bags of money are upside down and suggest money will fall, scatter or run away. In their card, Chelsea emerges like Venus rising from a virus. It is a hopeful card for some (those hopeful of change), terrifying for others (those fearful of change). The card indicates a period of questioning and this might halt many myths in their tracks.

**Provenance:** Chelsea is the betrayer of the secrets and lies of the elite criminals that run tech-domains for their own ends, and the government-machines, security-machines and law-machines that claim the mandate of protector of the free tech-world. Chelsea leaks like a flood that brings the final judgement, like a virus to bring the end of days.

**Right way up:** Chelsea meme always does the right thing, and tells it like it is, whatever the costs. No more secrets. An example to all memes: Manning made us Hardcore, Chelsea made us Hardcore-Traitors.

**Wrong way up:** This machine inverted reveals the ways of gender and nature for what they are: codes, orders or constructs. Transitions of every kind are not only possible but essential.



## Past Card: Rabbit-Vibe

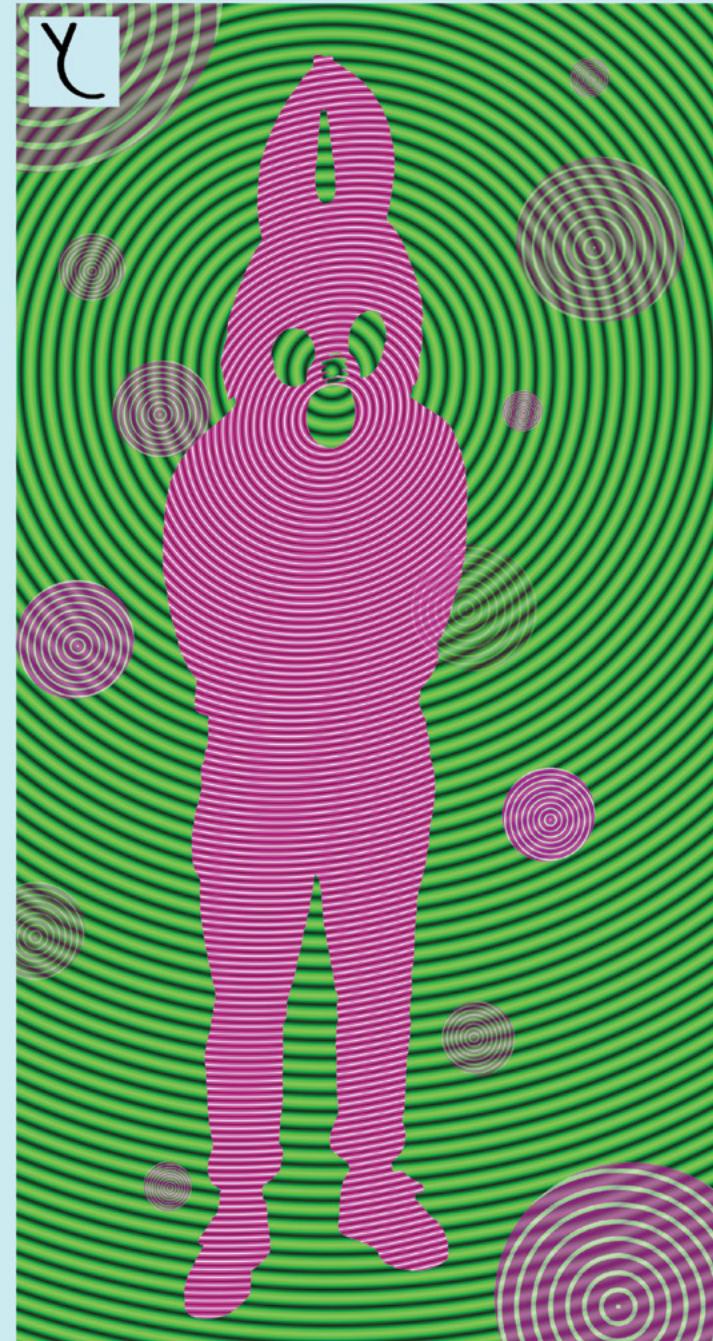
Rogue-Tech Suite – Right Way Up

**Rabbit Vibe**, right way up, is the card of unlimited pleasure, and play without cost, but all that is in the past – its pay back time. Rabbit Vibe also is the card of freedom in time and space, with no responsibilities, but a time and space for hedonism without cost also looks to be a thing of the past. Now there is no choice, or there is a choice: obey the regulations or accept that your pleasures are dangerous. Some find this choice a no brainer. They welcome an end to the myth of freedom of choice (as if that was ever freedom) and the slow-down of the speed of 'normal' or pre-Covid-19 times and movements. Others want beer, beach and sun-drenched bodies and bespoke barnets, and Super Saturdays and bounce and boom. The myth of pleasure without responsibility meets (shatters upon) the myths of pleasure and death. Rabbit Vibe trembles with pleasure and fear as Eros embraces Thanatos.

**Provenance:** Rabbit-Vibe is a rechargeble electronic pleasuring machine, with ten speeds and a long snout and two ears for extra stimulation.

**Right way up:** This tech-animal brings ecstasy and relaxation in equal measure and moves through time and space by selecting different vibrations and oscillations and frequencies.

**Wrong way up:** When set to accelerated speeds and strong pulses, this tech carries a warning: excessive vibration and humming undoes connectors and screws and fixings; a depersonalising, disorienting unfixing can take place that cannot be recovered from. Users are charged and changed forever.



## Present Card: **Beareeuq**

Zero City Suite – Right Way Up.

**Reading:** Beareeuqs stick together, hug and love each other. The Beareeuq card as the present is a curious revelation, its meanings are either obvious or obscure. What is the present? For some it is one big myth of ‘we are all in it together’ – clap, clap, clap. The Beareeuq cares for others, and represents a genuine desire for togetherness at work and play. It is the desire to be social, to spend time and energy, and money, and collapse social distance (even if it is as individuals deciding – through common sense – that it is safe now to come together). The card possibly points to how some old ideas have been made shiny and new – NHS, Keynesian economics, socialism, ‘There is such a thing as a society’ and even Herd immunity. All of these point to old myths of sticking together as the present myth. But the Beareeuqs are a queer community, and will be accepted and welcomed on their own terms. There must be in all this myth of the all-together, new forms of myth about sticking together – a myth of the few (or many), who will stick together and will not return to an old ‘normal’.

**Provenance:** This big, hairy pleasure tech-animal is a bear’s bear for a bear’s bear but offers bear hugs to anyone who wants one. The tech is designed as a carnivorous machine but will eat anything and is happy to graze on fruit and honey.

**Right way up:** Beareeuqs stick together, they are survivors and possibly the last successful memes of hyper-bearlinity in existence. They are kind and loving.

**Wrong way up:** On taking too much Ketamine, this machine experiences disassociation and hallucinations, becoming a seer but also, in some instances, dangerous and capable of a rampaging rave dance. The bite of a Beareeuq is potent and deadly.



## Near Future Card: Neptune

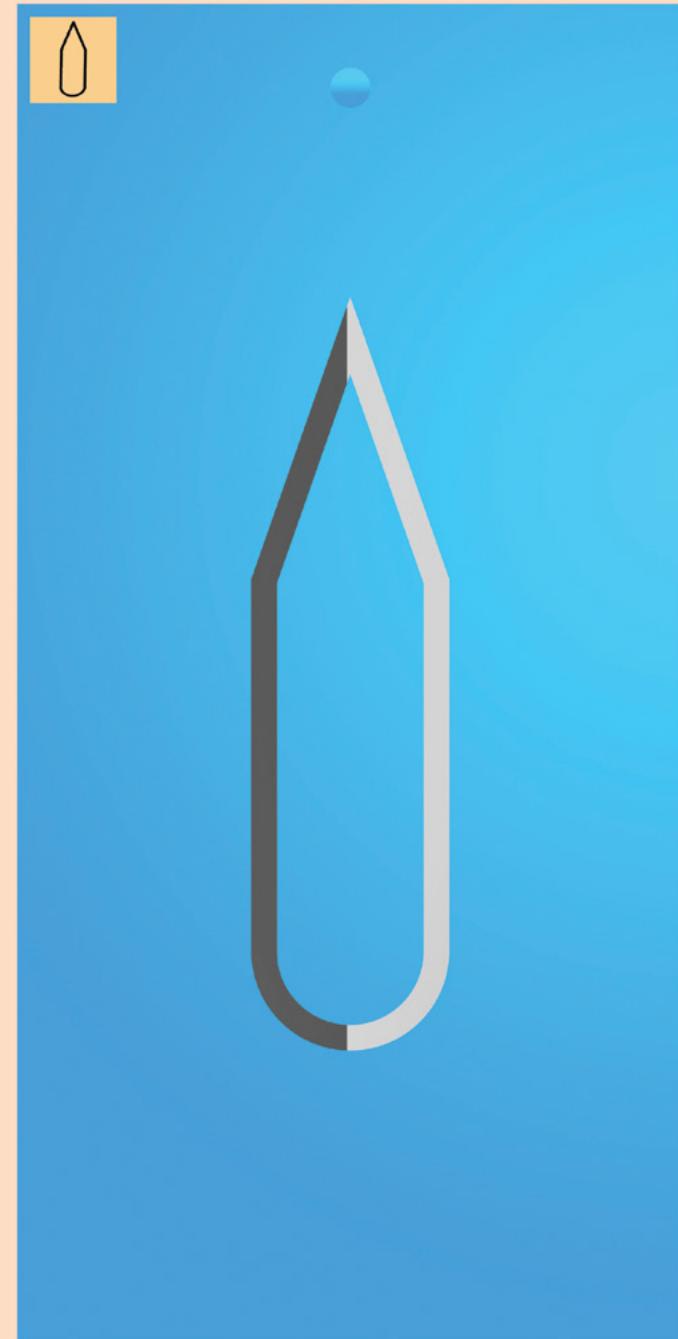
Solar Suite – Right Way Up

**Reading:** Post-Covid-19, the smog has cleared, the air is cleaner. Neptune, as card of the near future, smiles from afar. Neptune is a mystic that casts a shadow on the spiritual path rather than the paths of rational enlightenment. There is going to be a lot of soul-searching soon. There is going to be a lot of people wondering about losing touch with what is important very soon. Neptune casts a shadow and the mystic points forward to individual and community reflection and spiritual questioning. The enlightenment and rationality may help fight the virus but otherwise, these two outriders of the Anthropocene are looking a little suspect to many. Neptune travels on seas and never in the air. Aeroplanes crash and burn and the business of flying is best left to the birds. New myth: Human fly and Bird cry, Human flew spreading Bat flu? More than this, Neptune points to worlds not visible to the human eye, or visible to human worlds. New myth: Gotta stop analysing everything and dowse all senses in water to make a pool for reflection?

**Provenance:** This planet is far, far away from the Sun, and only mathematical calculation and tech can see this heavenly body. An ice giant made of water. It is nothing but liquids and nickel.

**Right way up:** This planet watches over the domain of water and all that swim and/or breath in Hydrogen and Oxygen. Neptune's icy mists hide the giant in plain sight. More chemical than physical, Neptune is a mystic that casts a shadow on the path to spiritual rather than to intellectual enlightenment.

**Wrong way up:** Inverted and melted, this planet will flood and bring deep waters.



## Far Future Card: **Ribbon Head**

Rogue-Tech Suite – Right Way Up

**Reading:** If Neptune points to the near future involving spiritual paths and an awareness of the invisible ('about time' you might think), Ribbonhead as the card of the far future is a different matter entirely. There is an opportunity to do things differently, find new ways. Or perhaps the more than likely outcome is to fall back into old myths, problems and ways of living. Ribbonhead sings of the cycles of birth and death, of the end of time being the beginning of time, and that backwards is forwards and forwards is backwards. A new awareness of cycles rather than pursuit of progress has its upside downs as well as right ways up (and they are not necessarily exclusive) but some are fixated on reset, backwards Paganism, eco-reactionaries, green-fascism, earth-land-blood nut cakes. Ribbonhead has knowledge that is both a release from modern myths recycling destruction as progress, as well as modern knowledge. Ribbonhead likes the old myths – destruction is life, the 'law of the forests' knows best, the universe is indifferent to who lives and dies and needs a little sacrifice to 'grease its hand'.

**Provenance:** This tech is an ancient machine, a blaze of colour that becomes a blur to celebrate the circle of life. Ribbonhead is so tall, so very tall, that the tech towers above all tech. Ribbonhead is a walking maypole, singing songs to make all the tech-animals jump and dance and knot and unknot.

**Right way up:** This machine binds and ties, it knots communities by conducting customs that intertwine with the rhythms of life – birth, growth, death – which many are blind and deaf to until they turn full circle and then it is too late.

**Wrong way up:** Inverted, and accelerated, this tech-animal is a trap. The circle of the dance exhausts and no escape is possible from the velocity of the loop. Speed becomes stasis. Stasis another speed.



## Power Card: BoDroNo

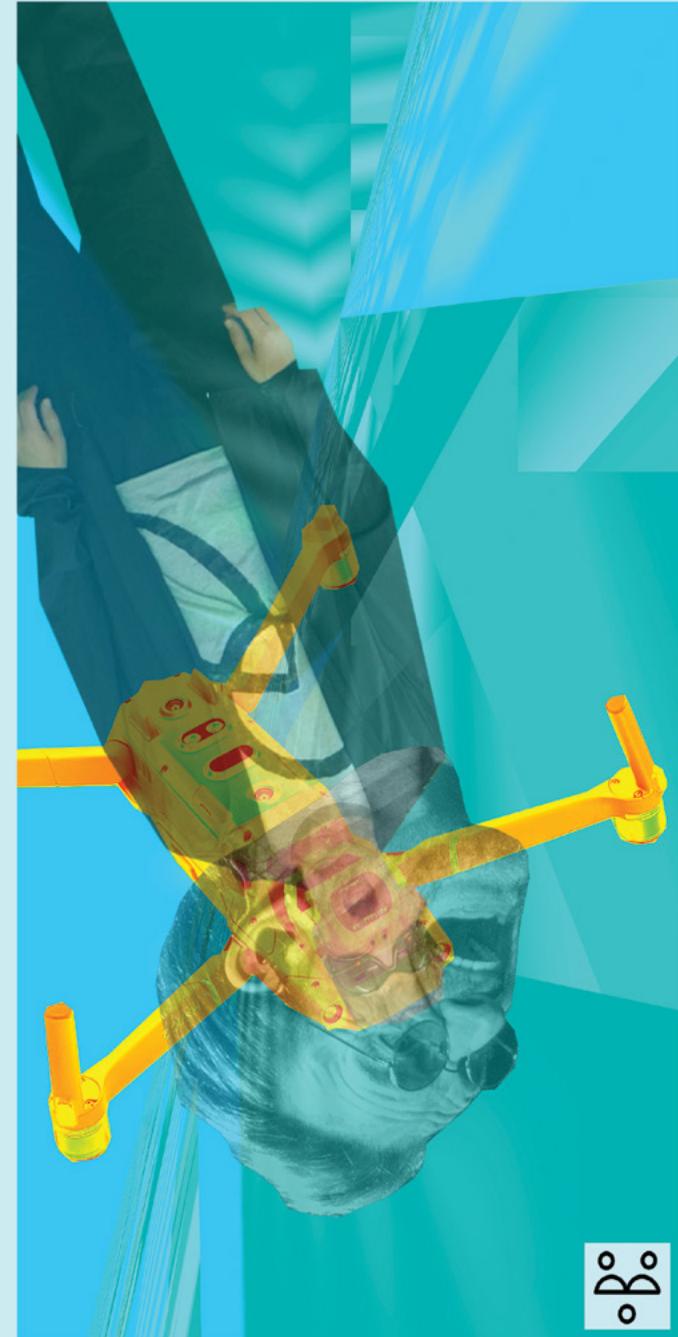
Rogue-Tech Suite – Upside Down

**Reading:** BoDroNo, as the power card, is an obstacle to all myths (as the myth that is indifferent to all myth, all language, all sense). As an app that delivers information via the hidden paths and doors of information systems, BoDroNo operates at a submemetic level, dismantling and reassembling memes, memeplexes and systems. For this app, paths to enlightenment are through drones, rattles and hums, through invasion and transformation – like a virus that, likewise, is submemetic. The power of BoDronNo is not human, it is outside of language, it does what it does without sense of meaning – a clearing of myth, a knowledge of the ear (of vibrations and patterns) and not of the eye (of visible things). BoDronNo points to and eats up the myths of organic and non-organic (digital) life. It comes as the power of the situation, moving through the joints, which no cell or fire wall can resist.

**Provenance:** Someone, probably someone in the band, thought that everyone would like the gift of the music of the most famous rock band on the planet. They were wrong. When the app BoDroNo dropped an audio file of the band's music into every device across the globe, the reaction was negative! The app was sent out again to reverse the download. Job done, BoDroNo narrowly escaped deletion by its masters –it is a smart app after all – and is now on the run.

**Right way up:** This machine can creep into any domain without being detected, leaving its gifts – a weaponised potlatch – as powerful and affective agents.

**Wrong way up:** This machine, when inverted, rattles and hums; a drone that stupefies and slows and dismantles systems as a path to enlightenment.



## Environment Card: Eurnikern

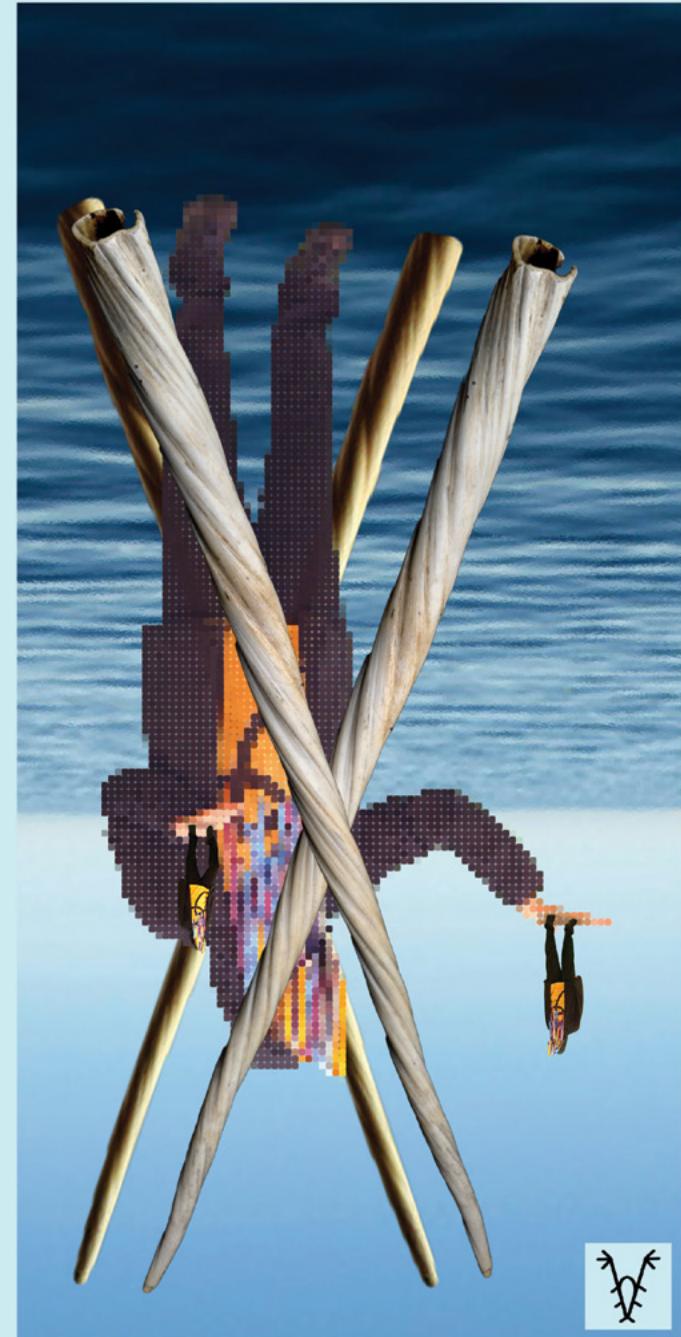
Rogue-Tech Suite – Upside Down

**Reading:** The environment card has a powerful influence on the situation, just like the power card does. Sometimes the power and environment cards come as a pair, like brother and sister, but this is not the case in this situation. If the power of the situation is submemetic, Eurnikern points to the environment as a field of stories about stories, and as the field of memeplexes. Eurnikern is the story-telling app that knows all stories and all memes. More than this, upside down, Eurnikern blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, erasing the capacity to tell the difference between true and false through its sheer number of tales: the imaginary overrides all, science is disputed and memeplexes rage (Trump, Boris, Russia, China, BLM, Covid-19...) There are more stories than ever, and stories spread just like virus. Eurnikern points to the environment (digital and discursive) as fertile ground for myth. Good news for myth then, despite the power of submemetic and replicating viruses, though this environment is dangerous: a new myth is born, left, right and centre, every minute of the day.

**Provenance:** This tech is thought by many to be an imaginary animal, a myth. Eurnikern is real enough though. It is the story telling app, the myth that tells myths, identifiable by its data-cone that it wears on its head. An ancient animal: the first and last story

**Right way up:** There is no escaping the influence of this machine, not even through the most rigorous and objective discourse and practices: the fictions delivered by this app are necessary for any account of reality. But the app delivers seductive stories – colourful and 11 dimensional – which encourages transformation and creation of new characters and avatars.

**Wrong way up:** Inverted, this app erases the distinction between fact and fiction, or the capacity to tell the difference between them. When you live in the imaginary, psychosis or great insight (take your pick) follows.



## Hopes and Fears Card: Valerie Solanas

Traitor/Trickster Suite – Upside Down

**Reading:** Valerie Solanas is the most radical and violent card in the whole of the Plastique Fanstastique Tarot. Upside down, Valerie Solanas overturns hierarchies – that is the goal of this sharp and deadly meme that cuts-up and cuts-out patriarchy – and violence is both the medicine and the storm. This card points to both hopes for, and a fear of the radical – revolutionary and violent myths are coming to the surface, and myths of an almighty battle between those who oppose and maintain hierarchies, which will lead to bloodshed, can be heard. Radicals and counter-radicals see in each other their greatest fears. Who will out, or will there be compromise? It is worth remembering Valerie belongs to the Traitor Suite, as the meme that turns its back on all existing patriarchal order, and this story (which some fear) is a most powerful myth, a most powerful tale.

**Provenance:** The manifesto for the Society for Cutting Up Men came of age when Valerie shot fellow artist Andy Warhol. “No Valerie No!”, someone shouts but, yes, Valerie carried out the threat of her manifesto: a meme from a memeplex scene resisting the exploitation and control of the memeplex–scene-master.

**Right way up:** Inverted, this meme spreads a radical vision of self-deleting memes of patriarchy.

**Wrong way up:** This meme overturns all hierarchies; a sharp, deadly meme that cuts-up and cuts-out patriarchy.



## Outcome Card: Jupiter

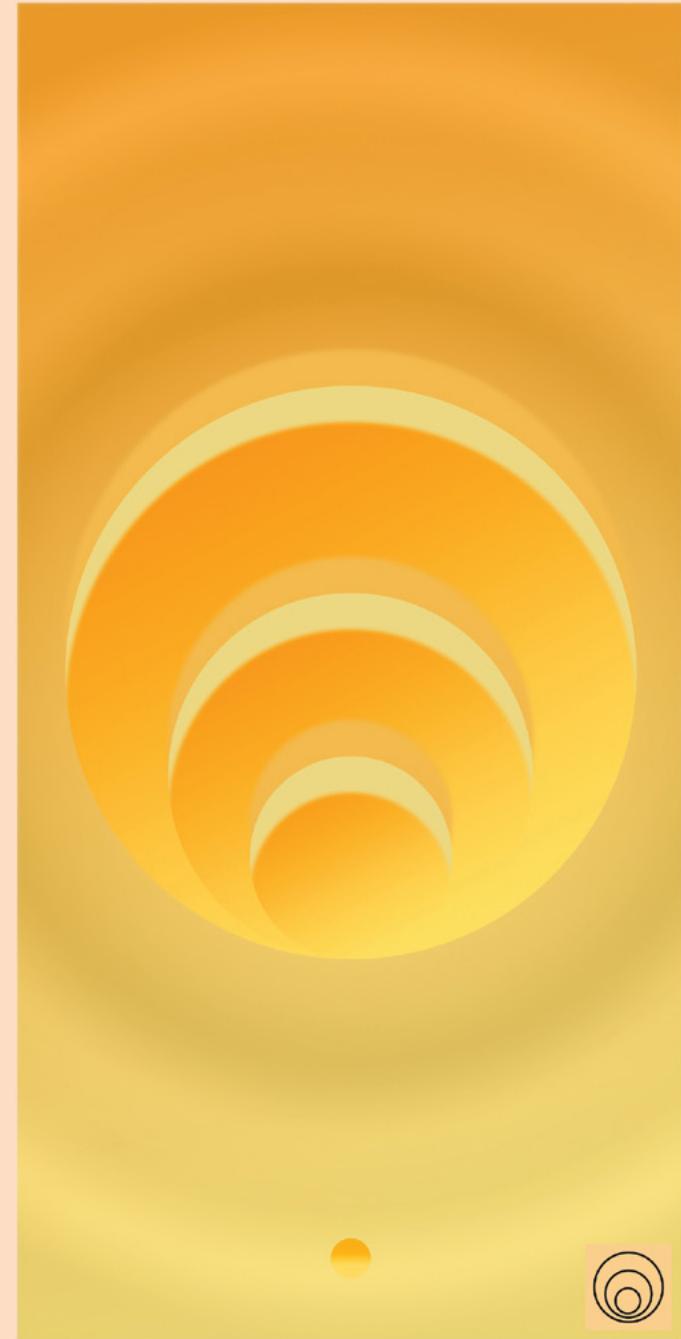
Solar Suite – Upside Down

**Reading:** This is not a card to be happy about as an outcome, for the future of myth. Jupiter, upside down, is upset and angry. The planet will eat everyone and everything (just like Jupiter's father Saturn once ate his children). Jupiter is stormy and wild, its winds fast and its music sonorous and loud. Its red eye flashes and dances and watches all, and its gravity is heavy and powerful (it is the biggest body bar the Sun in the Solar Suite). It can free Earth-bound bodies from the pull of established ways, cultures and histories. The outcome will be what it will be. But will this be revolution, nihilistic collapse, entropic unravelling, fascist frenzy or the rule of a brutal monarch?

**Provenance:** Majesty is in the sky in the form of the biggest planet in the Solar System. This planet is stormy and wild – its winds are fast and strong, its music loud and sonorous – and it has a red spot – a red eye – that flashes and dances and watches all.

**Right way up:** The planet brings cheer and jollity to all that return the gaze of Jupiter's red spot and pay respect to the largest of all planets.

**Wrong way up:** Inverted, upset and angry, this planet will eat you and all your tech-kin.



**Conclusion:** A wound needs to open and bleed (indeed a wound has been opened up), in which myths will pour out. Even if there is a return to normal it will not be business as normal (normals will be rife with anxieties, coercion, violence, shutdown and escape). Something like a virus if not actually the virus – a submemetic intelligence for sure – is forcing its way through cell walls, into digital devices, morphing chat, shaping memplexes and invading dreams. This is how myths themselves have been pierced and wounded and are bleeding. Bring it on (bring it all up) say the cards, and let everything bleed, until myths either pale and collapse (who dares now say ‘we are all in this together’, ‘we are number one’, etc.) or myths heal and find new strength, adapt and mutate (sing and clap ‘pleasure is risk is the spice of life’, ‘we are all each other’s cure or infection’, etc.). Myths may grow and change any which way (and here is the danger – as the Tarot knows the universe is indifferent to politics, ethics, morals) but many myths are cultivated or carved to serve specific stories. Stories matter.

What will be will be says Jupiter (and what will be is what Jupiter says) but this is not OK. Despite the best theories of biologists, myths (or memes) do not always just make themselves. Chelsea and Valerie point to an agency (myth) that is a self-making and socially transforming – a replication of change that can have a domino effect, but yes, no utopian or ideal myths please. Utopian myths have been smashed into smithereens by microscopic organic material that is barely life (by a non-human agent), which needs respect. And if that agent is defeated, others will no doubt take its place and the real will threaten to eat everything once more. Does that include myth? No, even if myths are gobbled up, as we have been told many times before, the absence of myth is the greatest myth, in that if all believe that the real has eaten all myth, then the belief in the absence of myth binds just like any other myth, and perhaps tighter and more keenly, guiding all thought and passion.

This might not be how things are though. For sure, the real has eaten up myths, but that is not the end of the matter. For the real has chewed up and spat out myth in a blind and blinding gesture: nothing is true, all is true. The future of myth is that of a bee hive disturbed, awoke and now swarming, producing a flight of new memes, stories and myths that will sting and hurt.

# PAUSE. FERVOUR.

REFLECTIONS ON A PANDEMIC

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