



*Time in the Time
of COVID-19: The Relationship
Between Time and Distress*

Cover Art by Christina Montalti

The St. John's University Humanities Review

"Time in the Time of COVID-19: The Relationship Between Time and Distress"

Volume 18, Issue 1, Fall 2021

Stephanie Montalti, Editor

Cover Art by Christina Montalti and Layout by Stephanie Montalti

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Reflecting, Documenting, and Imagining	6
<i>Stephanie Montalti</i>	
My COVID Diary	7-8
<i>Faten Hafez</i>	
The Longest Day	9-17
<i>Carmel McMahon</i>	
2 Sticker Max	18-25
<i>Arsevi Seyran</i>	
Pandemic Fatigue	26
<i>Maureen Daniels</i>	
Anxieties and Memories of Pandemic: An Auto-Ethnographic Account of Everyday Life	27-42
<i>Pragati Gupta</i>	
Welcome to the %^&* Show: Teaching Composition During a Global Pandemic	43-50
<i>Natalie M. Dorfeld</i>	

COVID-19 and the Disruption of the Human-Nature Duality <i>Grant David Crawford</i>	51-60
The Sounds of Grief and Time in Rebirth <i>Regina A. Bernard</i>	61-66
Swimming Sonnet <i>Steve Mentz</i>	67
When the Bookshelf Becomes the World <i>Maureen Daniels</i>	68

Introduction: Reflecting, Documenting, and Imagining

Stephanie Montalti

“Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.”

Whether it be Salvador Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), from which our cover art is inspired, or T. S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” (1936), quoted above, time continues to inspire artistic expression, especially in times of trouble. For some, like Eliot, we desire to conquer or solve the “problem” of time; for others, we simply seek to understand how time works. Times of distress, trauma, and change, as experienced through the COVID-19 pandemic, incite creative responses that reflect time’s pervasion on our consciousness. From changes to our daily routines to memories and reflections on the past, this pandemic has illuminated different experiences of time; time as private, public, absolute, subjective, chronological, fluid, etc. Yet, it has also revealed commonalities in human expression.

This issue welcomed all kinds of creative responses to COVID-19 as well as to times of distress more generally, including sickness, death, trauma, war, and heart-ache. While the pandemic’s “timeline of events” and effects on employment, travel, transit, vaccines, and deaths have been well documented and continue to evolve, the effects of the pandemic on personal and private time are still needed. Gathered under this pandemic age, this issue serves as a collection of personal reflections.

I am grateful for the honesty, bravery, and sincerity, with which our 9 authors created their work. From poetry and personal essays, to non-fiction and hybrid forms, these pieces transform pain, frustration, and the uncomfortable into works of art that imagine new realities; you will find hope for a cleaner, healthier, and more just world. While most of these works turn to the past, relying on flashbacks, recollections, and documented data, they also explore liminal states, like thinking and dreaming. Organized by theme and flow, rather than by form, this issue invites readers to consider how writing itself can play with time and explore all its possibilities.

A special thank you to Bethany Sattur and Sara N. Rodia for their editorial work and to Justin Lerner and Colleen McClintock for their guidance. I am especially grateful to the St. John’s University English department for granting me this opportunity.

My COVID Diary

Faten Hafez

Sat, Nov 7th, 2020. **Shivering.**

7:00 am—An arrogant thorny toxin snuggles in my matter.
I can no longer smell the sweetness of my attar.

11:45 pm—Quickly follows the infirmity of my bones,
and hopes of comfort turn into ceaseless sighs and moans.

Mon, Nov 9th, 2020. **Disoriented.**

9:00 am—The scarcity of air makes thistles of my concept,
and renders the breath of life as nettles in my content.

1:30 pm—This invisible toxin assails my sacred savor,
and salt and honey become a philosophy of bland flavor.

Wed, Nov 11th, 2020. **Deserted.**

6:00 am—Sentenced for isolation in a desolate landscape,
for on the look of death friends plot a scape.

12:00 pm—Ghosts and shadows animate my empty chamber;
who else I can talk to in this murky corner?

Fri, Nov 13th, 2020. **Stifled.**

6:30am—A blue ghost reels through my dying lips,
though white-satined angels fend off my eclipse.

1:00 pm—A fly comes buzzing an omen in my ear,
perhaps it portends a death that is so near.

Sun, Nov 15th, 2020. **Distressed.**

7:00 am—A cruel stillness creeps over my hollowed limbs,
and a ruthless morbidity crawls on my porous ribs.

2:30 am—In causal hierarchy, surrender my feeble elements,
and follow, in a frenzy, the rest of my dying rudiments.

Tue, Nov 17th, 2020. **Relieved.**

6:00 pm—At last comes down my window a bird of silver complexion,
and in wordless tune sings the cause of my affliction:

“An arrogant thorny toxin pollutes your perennial lung.
In vain you will find a cure and your life will be unsung;
please kneel and say a prayer, for love is but a heaven away.”

Tue, Nov 17th, 2020. **Released.**

6:05 pm—I yielded, farewell, but my bones are too weak to pray...

The Longest Day

Carmel McMabon

My little brother died in Ireland during the summer solstice of 1998. At the time, I was living on the foreign shores of Brooklyn, NY.

More than twenty years later, I am sitting here thinking about it all. I am thinking, because I have time to sit and think. Because I cannot make myself move away from the window that faces the empty street. The days bleed into one another. There are refrigerated trucks parked outside the funeral home on Broadway. The virus came like a thief in the night, and the infection rate rises daily. Death is all around. It presses in and compresses itself into something small and hard. A stone, perhaps, that skips across the water sending out ripples of grief that join with all the other griefs that have gone before.

What to do then, about this brother and that time? I could write an elegy about a baby who convulsed with laughter in his crib. A boy who could not bear going to school, so he sat with his back to the class and refused to speak. A teen who learned to play guitar, so he could strum along to the Brit-pop anthems he loved. A lad who got a factory job and saved his wages to buy a motorbike. A young man who was fussy about his hair, his shirt, his shoes: Ben Sherman, Lacoste, Adidas. A little brother who experimented with drugs: hash, ecstasy, heroin.

In the decade after her brother died, Canadian poet, Anne Carson kept a notebook. In it, she recorded memories and impressions of her brother, along with scraps of letters and stamps she had saved from his travels in foreign lands. She does this, she tells us, because a brother does not end. He goes on. Out of this notebook, Carson created her book, *Nox*. Since high school, she has loved the elegy that the Roman poet Catullus wrote for his brother, who also died on foreign lands. She juxtaposes the fragments from her notebook with a word by word translation of the ancient elegy. Carson examines the connection between history and elegy, they are akin she claims. So, she begins to think about history. Herodotus was supposedly the first historian, though, as she says, he thought history was by far the strangest thing that humans do; prowling the past, making up stories, assigning meaning even to that which is incomprehensible.

•

I had, five years prior to my brother's death, emigrated from a small town in Ireland to New York City. The immediate demands of food and shelter were foremost on my mind. A few months later, I had a rent-stabilized apartment on East 21st Street, a roommate, and a new job at the Temple Bar, a downtown lounge famous for its inflated prices and oversized martinis. The waitresses wore black leather pants and tuxedo jackets. MAC's Vamp lipstick made them look

serious and mean. Most of the customers were a mix of Wall Street traders and vaguely recognizable celebrities. The staff were convinced that the customers gave bigger tips when they received a little attitude. A request for a glass of water might be met with an eye roll. Extra olives, a resentful glare. Anyway, the staff argued, how could you respect a capitalist fuck who would spend \$10 (adjust for inflation) on a cocktail, get drunk enough to try to grope you, then throw the contents of their stomach up on the sidewalk outside?

The staff stayed late after the bar closed. They drank and argued and hooked-up, and into the small hours, they did bang-on impressions of the manager, the owner, the customers and each other. I did not drink myself, but stayed on to laugh along. I felt their brightness and humor shine through me, and I was delighted to be there among them. Brian, a lanky boy from New Jersey, who was always drawing and making notes in his sketchbook, became a friend. During shared cigarette breaks in the basement, we sat on overturned milkcrates and talked about what we were going to do with our lives. He was going to rent a loft in Red Hook, Brooklyn and live there with his boyfriend, his brother, and some other friends. There was a big studio space in the back, and he was going to start an art collective. I could live there and join if I wanted to. I wanted to. I wanted very much to tether myself to something or someone, to land finally, safe and sound in this new country.

The reason I did not drink involved a secret deal with God. When I was eighteen, I vowed never to drink again if He spared my brother's life. My brother was one half of two little brothers who were inseparable. Eventually, they melded into one unit, and people took to calling them, John-Peter instead of John and Peter. One day, the older of the two, John, aged fourteen, drank a bottle of vodka and jumped off the roof of an abandoned building. My father called from the hospital. He didn't know if John would make it. He asked us to pray. In the morning, John had made a miraculous recovery, and I silently thought I had something to do with it.

Now, I was twenty-three, living in New York City, and so very far away from all that.

The Temple Bar offered an employee discount, so we often hung around the place on our nights off. One night, much like any other, my French friend, Valerie and I took a table in the lounge. She ordered a glass of red wine, and without thought, a subconscious desire made its way to my mouth, and I found myself ordering one too. The first sip slid down my throat and on down into my soul. I felt myself illuminated from within and connected with everyone around me—I saw that we were all part of the same living, breathing, organism, and that I need not worry, I just need *be*. It is fitting, perhaps, that such a spiritual experience should occur in a place called, Temple. I was internally altered, and the world became, for a time, a softer, less hostile place.

•

David was a Temple Bar customer. He worked around the corner at the Keith Haring Foundation. Sometimes he and a friend came by for a drink after work. They were boyish and shy in tee-shirts and baseball caps. His friend told me David was sad these days because he was 29 and going through a divorce. Whenever I delivered their drinks, I found I liked being next to him. Nothing he did or said really, just an energy between us. I invited David to my 24th birthday party: Frozen Margaritas at El Sombrero and a show at Arlene's Grocery after. I kept watching the door of the Mexican restaurant, and only when David arrived, did I realize it was him I had been looking for.

Later that week, we had dinner in the window seat of Marion's on the Bowery. The place opened in the 1950s, and had maintained a kind of glamour, that was having a resurgence. Girls with heavily-lined eyes smoked Gauloises at the bar. Their laughter mixing like melodies over Miles Davis tunes. I had caught a cold, and spent the evening sniffing into a crumpled tissue. David invited me to spend the night at his Brooklyn Heights apartment. There was a second bedroom, he said. There was Nyquil and tea and juice and things that would help. In the morning there was a note: *Hope you feel better. Door locks behind. Stay as long as you need. Forever if you like.*

His apartment, unlike Brian's loft in Red Hook, was neat and clean. It was all muted tones and contemporary works of art. Big windows faced the East river and the magical skyline of the city beyond. There was food in the fridge and closets full of clean sheets and towels and extras of things you run out of like toothpaste and toilet paper. There was a little black pug named Lucy, who was not altogether put out by my presence, so I stayed.

Nurturing came naturally to David and I soaked it up like a parched plant. He made me a pot of Irish tea and bought me a fresh bagel for breakfast before he left for work in the morning. We walked his dog along the promenade in the evening. We made dinner and talked and laughed. After brunch on Sundays, we spent the day in the living room spread out over *The New York Times*. We went to the movies, met friends for drinks, and got tickets to all the interesting shows happening around town. Our lives expanded. I met his family and he came to Ireland to meet mine. When we fought, David insisted we not go to bed angry. During arguments, I only knew how to be hysterical or to shut down, but he knew how to talk things out. We both felt lucky. Like somehow, in all the billions of people alive in the world, we had found each other. It was chance, yes, but somehow, the universe willed us to be. I finally let myself relax, into the luxury of love.

Life rolled along. I called home once a month to let my family know I was still alive. This was our ritual: I called, my mother talked about the weather, the other kids, the neighbors. I listened and said, *Uhm-hm*, so, when she called the Temple Bar just after midnight on June 21, 1998, I knew it was not to deliver good news.

“There’s been an accident,” she said.

“Who?” I asked.

“Peter.”

“What?”

“You have to come home.”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you over the phone.”

“What can you not tell me?”

“He’s dead.”

He’s dead. The words are as heavy as a planet. A planet that rolls around the sun on the loosely woven warp and weft of space and time. The fabric gives a little under the tremendous mass, but momentum maintains its motion. If time were to stop, if it stood still, even for a moment, the planet would sink, and sink. If you reached down into the fabric and plucked it back out, you might find the warp and weft still intact, but much too stretched out to ever reconstitute its original shape.

Grief changes time. You no longer roll along. You wobble and stumble, you stall and stagger. You stand still and watch, as everything in the world rushes past.

In David’s apartment, I swallowed shot after shot of tequila, but the alcohol was not doing its job. I wanted to be obliterated and to wake up the next day to find it all a dream. I insisted David go on to bed because I needed to be alone. The milky-grey light of dawn soured in where I sat staring out at the East River. I sensed my brother’s spirit, his confusion and isolation, as if the walls of our worlds had momentarily dissolved into one another. I wanted to be at home in Ireland with my family, my Mam and Dad and my brothers and sisters. I was in a foreign land when I should have been in my own country, sitting in the living room of my parent’s house, drinking tea and staring into space with people who knew Peter and people who knew me.

•

The flight to Ireland was endless. I could not watch the film. I could not read. I could not

eat. I could not cry. I could not sleep. My skin itched and my heart ached. I'd forget about Peter for a minute, then I'd remember him, all over again.

We went as a family to view the body. The nine of us filed into the cold mortuary with a corpse laying on a stainless-steel table. It was covered to the shoulders with a white sheet. "Oh my God!" I called out, instantly relieved, "It's not Peter!" *This is unbelievable. There has been a mistake, I think, some terrible misunderstanding.* "Peter is just missing," I tell my family. "We have to find him." They don't seem to get that Peter is still out there, still alive. "This just looks like Peter," I tried to explain, "but it's not him, because Peter's neck did not stick out on the side like that!" I pointed to the protrusion as evidence. I searched their eyes. They didn't seem to understand. My father looked down. My mother looked away. This magical thinking in the face of death, this inability to integrate information with the evidence of your eyes, is a defense mechanism, triggered, in order to buy time, the extra seconds and minutes needed, to process the incomprehensible, so that you can go on.

Somehow, it was decided that each of us should kiss Peter's forehead. I suppose we had to do something. This was just one of many strange rituals we enacted to help us cope with the unacceptable truth. The fact-ness of it. Peter's forehead, when it met my lips was cold and hard and less animate than marble. *I read that somewhere, I thought, as I straightened back up. Cold and hard and less animate than marble. I read that; I know that. I have been here before.*

The doctor told my father that Peter and his passenger did not die on impact. That there was breath enough in them to receive their Last Rites. This was welcome news because it meant that they may be in heaven, and that someday, we would all be together again. Death was not final. Even if we didn't really believe it, we believed it because we had to, because we were taking any promise of ease from the pain, even if we had to wait until the next life to feel it.

Much was made of Peter's personal effects. The empty wallet, the lighter, the keys, the chain he wore around his neck. *Was there a watch? Where was his watch?* As if these quotidian things had taken on a new meaning because they were "his things." Because they were with him when he passed over, and we were not. But, if we touched them now, and held them in our hands and looked at them long enough, and if we designated them to a special box, we could trick our minds into thinking that through these relics, a part of Peter was still here. That the preservation and veneration of these objects would mean that this human being among the billions alive on planet Earth meant something, means something, to us.

In many Irish towns and villages, even today, there is a church at the center. Across the street, there is inevitably a pub, a public house. It is interesting that the Irish translation, *teach an pobal* (house of the people) was an early Irish name for a church. Both church and pub offer community and common purpose. Both also offer a spiritual solution to the problems of being

human and being alive.

After the funeral, we left the churchyard and walked across the street to The Hunter's Moon, where the local drug dealer bought me a drink and offered his condolences, both of which I accepted. He told me my brother was an addict. In a few short years, the heroin epidemic that took hold of Dublin's North side through the 1980s had spread to every small town in Ireland. As he spoke, I looked into the hard, dead set of his eyes. He was only twenty-odd himself. A boy from a troubled home. I remembered him as a little kid kicking a ball against the curb at the end of our road. "Peter was an addict" he said, "they found a twenty in his pocket. He was trying to score." And with that bit of news, he ordered a round for the rest of my family and left.

The word, solstice, comes from the Latin words, *sol* (sun) and *sistere* (to stand still). The two annual solstices occur when the sun appears to stall at the most northerly and southerly points in the sky. In Ireland, there is something festive about these days. Inherent memories of our agrarian ancestors who watched the sky to measure time. On the eve of the summer solstice, people spill from the pubs out onto the street. The spirits and the nighttime sun might bring music. Someone might play a guitar, or a fiddle, someone might sing. That night, after everyone trickled home after the pub, Peter, with his friend Hugh as passenger, rode his motorcycle into the city. Why? To visit a girlfriend, to buy drugs, to witness the beauty of the empty streets on this magical night of almost no darkness. He hit a curb going too fast and both boys were thrown into the trunk of a tree somewhere on the road between Finglas and Glasnevin. My brother Billy knows the exact tree. He saw the blur of lights from the back of a taxi after a drunken night out in the city. He could have stopped, he says for years after. He should have stopped. "What could you have done?" I'd ask. "I could have been with him," he'd say, "so he could have known he was not alone."

It was as if Peter was the lynchpin, and once removed, me and my siblings all spun out. Billy's girlfriend got pregnant. They announced their engagement. We were supposed to be happy for them, but we saw Billy drink pints of whiskey and start fights in Cubs Nightclub out the back of The Hunter's Moon. Clare got pregnant with a guy she just started seeing and Maria dated Peter's best friend. John slept all day and went out raving every night, Stephen, a talented athlete, stopped training and started playing guitar like his brother, but instead of singing pop anthems, he spoke long improvised stream of conscious song-poems about the nature of reality. Mam hid the valium stash we had all been stealing from, so I became more dependent on the whiskey to get me to the soft place, where I needed to be. Suspended between this world and that.

I slept in Peter's bed as it was the only one free. The days bled into one another. In the neighbor's yard, I watched Mrs. Mc Mullen hang her washing on the line. Mrs. Byrne walked by the front carrying a bag from Centra Supermarket. An airplane flew over-head. It is an

uncanny thing because consciously you know people are going about their day, but subconsciously you wonder how they are able given the recent news. You move in different registers. Their world is still turning and yours has stopped.

David mailed care-packages from New York: Keith Haring fridge-magnets, a journal, pencils, love letters, socks and bars of my favorite PayDay candy. One envelope had a stamp commemorating the 1997 Pathfinder Mission to Mars. I contemplated the recent discovery that

seventy-four percent of the universe is made up of Dark Energy. It pushes the universe out at an accelerated rate, causing time to speed up and space to expand.



Back in New York, I had trouble conforming to my former mold. I did not want to check out the great new restaurant or try the great new cocktail at the great new bar. I did not want to go to the movies or to museums. I did not want to pick out new bed linens, or smile smugly over *The New York Times* on Sunday afternoons. It was clear to me that things were over with David when he called from the supermarket to ask if I wanted linguine or fettuccine for dinner. How could I respond? I could not fathom, with everything going on in my mind, how he could possibly expect me to make space for such a preposterous question.

I wanted to know, when people asked me, “how many kids are in your family?” Should I say, eight, as I had always done, or should I say, seven? But if Peter was included, then what about Michelle, our sister who died right before I was born? What about her? She had existed as an idea, but Peter’s death somehow made her real. She lived and breathed. She had personality and an accent. So, should I say, “nine, but two are dead.” That’s a door to open. I might burst

into tears, or worse, I might pretend like I was not bothered in order to spare any discomfort. I should just say “seven” and avoid that whole dead conversation.

I tried to stay in the relationship with David for as long as I could, but in the wake of Peter’s death, everything good that had been expanding between us receded into a black hole in the center of my mind through which nothing, not even light, could pass. David had known some measure of suffering in his life, but not enough to meet me where I was. He seemed a stranger to me then, bobbing about on the surface of things. I wanted to leave. He told me I was grieving, that it would pass. He wept and I stared back at him. Time passed, he pleaded, more time, he begged, but I was in the depths and could not reach the kind hand he extended to me.

Anyway, life had lost its meaning and planning any kind of future seemed futile. I wanted to be out living every day as if it were my last. I wanted to drink the way I wanted to and come and go as I pleased. Peter visited in my dreams. He did not seem happy, he did not seem sad, he did not seem to miss us. I’d ask him, “What’s it like being dead?” He’d shrug and say, “It’s okay.”

There was a string of men then. It was always the same relationship and I always thought the problem was with them: They were emotionally immature; they were afraid of commitment, etc. Yet, for all the flaws I projected onto them, I clung to them and hated for them to leave. I’d spend my days obsessing over some comment they might have made in passing. Discussing it with anyone who would listen. Calling ten friends until someone finally said what I wanted to hear. I was always hungover and anxious until evening when I met up with whatever guy, ordered a drink, made a joke, and everything would be okay again, at least for a couple of hours. And so, I went on for another decade before landing, finally, in sobriety.

•

Somewhere on the six-hour transatlantic flight to Dublin, you lose five hours. Time speeds up, slows down, rolls forward, bends back, expands, contracts, and collapses in on itself. At Dublin Airport, my father is always there to pick me up. This is our ritual: when giving my flight details, I always say, “I arrive very early in the morning, so I’ll take a taxi to the house.” Dad always says, “No-no! I’ll be there.” Only that one time, when I flew home for Peter’s funeral, did I not immediately find his face in the crowd. An old man approached as I exited the arrivals gate. I looked at him a long moment before my father’s presence finally registered itself, and every time since, the memory of that encounter flickers across my mind and colors, for better or worse, the present reunion.

Even now, certain combinations of light and air on June days sink me. The body remembers what the mind cannot. Sometimes I can smell the sadness coming. Sometimes, it is triggered suddenly in surprising and unrelated ways: exiting the train at the Jay Street-MetroTech Station that one time, or entering the spice shop on Atlantic Avenue another. Sometimes the

sadness sticks until I remember that one does not recover from a brother's death. The stages of grief do not apply here. No sense in forcing them. There is no reconstituting our original shape. We are no better or worse than we might have been, only irrevocably, internally altered.

Anne Carson kept a notebook for ten years after her brother's death. She says the word, *history* has its roots in the ancient Greek verb, *to ask*. "It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself." So, on the summer solstice, I take the box containing a photograph of Peter, a bracelet he found and gave me, a letter he wrote, but never mailed; I take Carson's *Nox* from the shelf. This is my ritual: I lay the relics out and open the book. I read it cover to cover and remember it a little differently every year. Carson's strange history carries itself and it carries me, and through it I find I am not alone.

It is important to know that in this plague year, more than twenty years after my brother died, I am asking what to do about it all. In the asking, I see I that I have indeed survived, and this strange history must carry itself now. A brother goes on, as I do, as a skipping stone goes on before it sinks and settles, until another is flung out across the water.

2 Sticker Max

Arsevi Seyran

Like a children's story, the 1995 German protocol—Berlin-Frankfurt-Munster (BFM)—is hazy, but real in my memory. As one of several treatment options for patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, BFM became my tale one winter, and I, its young protagonist. The credentials in my file followed duly: first remission on Day 33 of treatment—three days past the thirty day aim, but timely; six “blocks” of chemo prolonged by pauses due to side effects; three trips to the ICU, the last trip thirteen days long and almost lethal; later, cranial radiation, for which two matching “tattoos” of small brown blobs were inked to both sides of my head to attain a perfect symmetry of rays at each session. It must have made sense to phrase them as “tattoos” to a tween, which perhaps elicited a response of *Cool!* often enough and made the experience more bearable for everyone involved. But I had never said *Cool!*

When I was struck with the illness in my native Izmir I didn't have aspirations of becoming an immigrant or learning English. Survival rates were much lower in Turkey, however, and my category was “high risk.” The moment a fifty percent chance of staying alive was placed on my head, my mother became determined to do something extreme. One night, on Day 36 of my treatment, she came into my quarantined room wearing a face mask and carrying a few scraps that yearned to be documents. She ran the choice of hospitals in Berlin, Houston, or New York by me. I doubt she settled on New York because I had seen it in a movie called *Godzilla* and expressed approval of that setting over any notions of Germany or Texas, but I like to tell people that *I* chose New York. A few days later, we boarded a plane for the very first time in both of our lives. On Day 40, I had been a week in remission, and with all the hope in the world of prolonging that benchmark, I found myself on Long Island with only my mother beside me, and seven or eight English words between the two of us. A dictionary on my lap, I thumbed through its many pages to translate the name of that hospital into my native tongue, seeking golden accents in sterile hallways upon mistaking “Jewelry” for “Jewish” at first.

The year was 1998. BFM was only three-years-old, and by all accounts, experimental.

*

I have just left a different kind of quarantine. We are masked again in the midst of a global pandemic and it strikes me as surreal that my past and present lives have merged through a piece of fabric that covers my nose and mouth. I made the doctor's appointment months in advance, and decades after the start of it all I am at what is called a Survivorship Clinic. Raquelle stands at the door, a cherry-lipped tawny woman with hoop earrings. Her first word is *Congratulations!*—a

greeting in honor of my long term survival. The program has been in existence for several years, created for childhood cancer survivors who've lived at least three years past their treatment and designed to maximize their remaining years of life. Days before, the organizers pull out the ex-patient's old charts to be placed under scrutiny. Their aim is to convey what future diseases we are at risk for as a result of the toxic treatments we've received. Maintaining great cheer, the brochure in my hand goes on to state that I "*may* continue to live another 20, 30, or 40 or more years."

Facing an older shopping strip, the clinic is just a few miles away from my old hospital. The location itself is familiar; this was once my neighborhood and my brother's pediatrician had been in the same building where the clinic now stands. My brother was born in my hospital and it is in my hospital that his frozen cord-blood still waits unused. I didn't need the potential bone-marrow transplant that prompted his conception, though we can hardly ever talk about it that way. I try to imagine what packets (*is it packets?*) of cord-blood look like, labeled and shelved like string beans in frozen food aisles.

*

Is there time without memory? With the memory of that cool February morning, when I was first diagnosed in Izmir, I'm transported to the past. I remember what I ate for lunch that day. I remember what shoes I wore. Before attending what should have been a check-up, I had spaghetti and put on my black patent Mary-Janes to go and knock on a friend's door to see if she would play with me. I was entertaining board game options, but she wasn't home and I didn't realize that any game I started that day, I may never finish.

The first month and a half in the hospital, I underwent spinal taps and bone marrow draws without anesthesia. At the time, doctors in Izmir viewed anesthesia as a threat to a pediatric patient's hanging-by-a-thread status. They also didn't allow salt and fats in my diet as I endured chemo. Everything I ate had to be boiled first in order to kill any germs. In thirty days I lost thirty pounds.

One time another child was wailing in the bone marrow room before my own turn for a draw. Then the nurse flipped me over, and doctors worked to draw out my marrow with matte metal gadgets, as I swam underwater in the deep, clear sounds of pain. Sometimes they couldn't succeed; had to try the other hip. I tried to imagine I was not in my body to will away the physical sensation of pain.

....Then we arrived at the American hospital. On the first day I had juice from the lobby *Au Bon Pain*. I took out my dictionary and nodded my head in compliance upon obviously translating "Pain" from English to Turkish.

A doctor with a tiny full-moon cap covering only the crown of his head called my name, which was the first time I heard it pronounced so weirdly. He then smiled in a sweet way. Knowing how to say “Pain” made me feel more secure.

As I stand in the clinic now—feeling a different kind of physically vulnerable while I try not to touch my face—I sense the temporal compartments of my mind starting to unfasten. I feel, again, like the sick child I was, even though I am well and have been congratulated profusely.

*

The clinic is a backdrop of all white dappled with yellow and baby blue. I’m in a corridor that connects the waiting room to the examination room where a chair for measuring survivors’ temperature and blood-pressure awaits. On his way out from being examined, a blonde, skinny boy of three toddles past me with his mom and a purple Teletubbie, as the nurse asks him what kind of sticker he’d like as his reward. He stops moving and thinks in a trance, eventually settling his finger on *Go, Diego, Go*, his pale eyes weary as his fine hair glistens under the fluorescent lights. I view his decision-making tenderly, hoping he is pleased with what seems an important choice. As he leaves, Raquelle points me toward the scale next to the pile of stickers he chose from, and stepping on it I face a sign that reads *STOP!*

There is a 2 sticker maximum per patient.

Please do not take stickers without permission. If we forget to give you a sticker, please ask and one will be gladly given to you. Thank you for your cooperation.

I decipher the signifier and with language, I register pain. With language that isn’t even mine, here, I desperately belong. Stickers are earned and received, of course—not meant to be “taken” liberally. The jolt of “2 sticker maximum” breaks the gate within me, and I am on a Chutes & Ladders board slip-sliding down the primary colors of Med 2, the inpatient floor: a fairy-tale-gone-wrong where candy stripers roll their bright wagons in and out of our rainbow-colored rooms.

First, I remember the most distinct art we had on the walls, which was the image of a seemingly endless bicycle for dozens that was pedaled by normal and cancer kids alike. For hours at a time I would look at that ever-present, ever-long bicycle, philosophizing the stupidity of wanting to pedal along with healthy kids who donned full-heads of hair. (I did not want them to pedal *for* me.) At a little over 70 pounds, with hardly any remaining muscle mass from chemo, plus all the endless laying down, sometimes in boredom I would nudge my calf to watch the flesh go left and right in a pendulum effect. I could hardly walk; why was I seeing bikes? First, I remember so-called art and the resentment it caused, and then? ...a hippie.

Every Tuesday, in came the long-haired volunteer hippie. He never really asked if he could, but would simply walk in, take a seat, tie his hair in a stylish bun, and impose his strumming of “Winnie the Pooh” on me. (Where did he live? How did he make a living? Why did he assume that everyone loved Pooh?). And he got to have long hair while I was bald as a pumpkin? Sometimes when he sang he would close his eyes as though Pooh was a love ballad, *a willy, nilly, silly old bear*. Not once did I refrain from wanting to tell him off. *Odadan gitmesini sağla*¹! I would protest to my mom with a strained vehemence. In English I lacked the words; in English I tried to be mutely polite. The hippie was aloof, his “act” lacked decorum, and he only gave stickers in the end as a reward for enduring him. He was among the first to teach me that there are people in the world who are incapable of reading others’ facial expressions, of which I had many. I even *sighed*, but to no avail.

The pestilent clowns, too, took the liberty of walking in and out of our rooms with their faces painted opaque white, contrasted by their red sponge noses, with enough self-esteem to always demand a laugh. (What gave them the confidence that they were funny?) They had stickers to give—and reeked of cigarette-break whiskey once in a blue moon.

We had Broviacs² that appeared to come out of our hearts: two plastic tubes extending from our chests and planted beneath the flesh into a main artery—to be “dressed” regularly to keep them clean and infection free. When kids are admitted, the need for I.V. lines is so constant that before long, they run out of available veins. At one point, before my Broviac, I remember an I.V. line coming out of the flat flesh of my right big toe. That was the last unused vein I had left. So, arms and legs bruised left and right, within the first month of treatment most children with cancer are in the O.R. to receive one of these devices for all future blood work and chemo and other drugs on the horizon.

Our Broviacs got a lot of use. Depending on the phases of BFM, in addition to chemo, I had bone marrow draws once a week, along with spinal taps. The pediatric anesthesiologist, who injected a milky-white substance (propofol) into our Broviacs so we’d be asleep through the procedures, was gloriously nicknamed The Milkman. There was no child who didn’t flock to the great stuff in his syringe. The Milkman was our patron saint. Sometimes, when I awoke from the wooziest of sleeps, I would ask him in drowsy-fluent Turkish (my mom would later tell me) for fried *bellim*³ cheese for lunch. Instead, the Milkman gave stickers and I took them—the Turkish child asking The Milkman for *bellim* while drugged up and temporarily elated. One time, he asked me where we were from, and when I answered, he repeated *Izmish* like most everyone else. Each time my mother and I said the word Izmir, our hospital friends would mispronounce it back to us

¹ Make him leave the room

² A Broviac central venous line (CVL) is a special intravenous (IV) line inserted under the skin on the chest wall and into a large vein that leads to the heart. It is used in children and teens who need IV therapy for a long time.

³ Halloumi

as Izmish. *Izmish*, we giggled sometimes when they left. Not everything was so bad when I was high and giggling *Izmish* with my pal, my mom—before the drugs wore off and further pain kicked in.

And so, over the course of three years, with breaks to allow my body to recuperate before new rounds of treatment, I accumulated book after book of top notch, Lisa Frank stickers in my hospital-home. For finger sticks, for spinal taps, for not winning, but participating in a group game of Mario Kart on Nintendo 64, for blood transfusions, for eating, for smiling, at times, for barely breathing—stickers galore were always received with the notion of having been earned.

Stickers are the Monopoly money of pediatric cancer wards. Stickers move sick children from one corner of the hospital to another. Then again, death isn't one of the possible outcomes of Monopoly, given which I wasn't in favor of the fabricated world that these stickers created over reality, or the way we were categorized as forever-heroes because we were sick and fought. What else were we supposed to do—camp out and hold a demonstration? We were *kids* and did as we were told and, perhaps, because I came of age in that hospital, all the added valorizing seemed to be mere nuisance. Certainly, it wasn't part of the game for my sallowness to be permissible for even a minute so that I could have the chance to process it. Rather, we had to bury it and pretend we were just like all the other kids and even indulge in the fact that we were more precious because fate had dealt us an unfortunate hand.

There it was, the adult terror of facing the unsayable. I knew within the first year that what prompted this construct was the superlative unfairness not only of death, but of very early death; that this was a matter adults had particular trouble accepting. So, the nurses played “A Whole New World” from the Aladdin soundtrack in the play-room and rewarded us for following indisputable directions. And there I was, the poster child of fake smiles, wide-eyed, but tongue-tied, with no English words and not *feeling* like the healthy kids, or a hero, but more like a fledgling in a long Eliot poem who stared at all of humanity through a hospital room, through the war tale that was BFM. All the sentiments that came to me in meta-language were an anticipatory fog of “Unreal City”...I was the child just old enough, or perhaps, just myself enough, to see the ward's sad poetry; the child whose first set of English words became suffused with the fragility of human survival; the token patient from Izmish whose rebirth was rooted in a hospital vacuum, in a foreign tongue—far in proximity to everything that came before. So, how could a before be recovered, and how could an after arise from anywhere, but only in Med 2?

*

Raquelle is peppy as I sit down in the examination room. She exclaims *Congratulations!* I am taken aback. (*Again* ?)

If you are once a cancer *kid*, anyone in Oncology has sworn, as a postscript to their Hippocratic Oath, to forever think of you as a child and pat you on the back even if you're an adult

now. I'm marked. I'm a child again, except Raquelle is saying something about Alkylating agents⁴ as she opens my binder—recalling how I was given 1,800 MGs, and if the number was 10,000 or higher, I would have no chance of conceiving a child of my own.

Raquelle is the epitome of good cheer. She explains and explains. She says the words Doxorubicin; Dexamethasone. She says Etoposide and Mercaptopurine and Cytarabine and Methotrexate. Now that I've been cancer-free for so long, she says the trick is getting me on track to maximize the number of healthy adult years I have before something in me potentially snaps, or to prevent it from snapping altogether.

Outside, there is a global pandemic; inside, I feel like a time bomb. I check to see that my arms and legs are in place; I make sure nothing has fallen off. My body is a miracle to me still. Laying in bed many a night, I have imagined the looks of my kidneys, my lungs, my bravado-filled heart; the color of my ribcage and the texture of my shins.

According to Raquelle, I am at minimum to no risk for my own cancer returning; it is other illnesses—cancers, cardiovascular or liver diseases—that doctors are afraid I may develop. Given that—*Do I do Zumba?*

I raise my eyebrows as Raquelle asks if I engage in any cardio exercise. Due to the levels of Anthracyclines I received, my heart needs Zumba. I try to convince Raquelle with a laugh that my heart does not need *Zumba*. Not fazed by my humor, she tells me in a suddenly rigid voice to *run then*.

Do I get my scalp checked regularly? The cranial radiation I received at 1,800 cGy can give me skin cancer, for which my scalp needs to be examined by a dermatologist every year. The risks increase the older I become. A brochure I receive displays old-fashioned clip art of children at play and teddy bears in scrubs, encouraging frequent skin screening as it reports, frankly, that survivors have more than twice the risk of developing melanoma; that the average age at which survivors develop it is 37.

Do I want a neurocognitive test? My family was told before my six-month long cranial radiation therapy began that there would be a drop in my I.Q. as a result.

Do I have the ability to process Math and English? These are the two fields where kids face the most obstacles post-treatment. I am a PhD candidate in English literature. I blurt out that this is an acute example of irony, expecting Raquelle to laugh, but she is serious when she tells me that this is rare. Also, it becomes clear that she doesn't find me very funny.

⁴ Compounds that work by adding an alkyl group to the guanine base of the DNA molecule, preventing the strands of the double helix from linking as they should. This causes breakage of the DNA strands, affecting the ability of the cancer cell to multiply.

Do I have trouble focusing? In response to that general question, I say *Yes— ...Do I want help focusing?...Yes?* (Who doesn't...) *Yes!*

What about my bones? They are at risk due to Prednisone. If my toes and fingertips ever start to tingle, I am in trouble because of Vincristine.

It says in my records that I was allergic to Asparaginase. Is that what left the vein on my right forearm hardened for good? One small darkened dry vein, like a tattoo itself. I don't remember. There were various bad days with such incidents. My body has scars.

Raquelle sends me to the lab for blood tests, and when I come back in, Maureen, the social worker, is waiting for me. She has read the chapbook of poems I published about my time in the hospital. She thinks they are *vibrant!*—the best review I've received. *My memory must be so vibrant!* Maureen pauses, then wonders, *Do I know that I am a fabulous candidate for psychoanalysis?* Now I wonder whether she thinks I need help. Do I?

Out strolls Maureen, in comes Kathy, the head nurse who coordinates the clinic. As it turns out, Kathy worked nights in Med 2 during the time I was hospitalized, and here's someone who has seen me at my worst state. I remember her, though she remembers me with a wig, and looking much healthier. *I had bangs! And cute hair! ...*(Did I?)

Does Kathy wonder what I've done with my life? What all of these kids do with their second lives? Education, employment, marriage, and mental health rates are statistically reduced in pediatric cancer survivors in comparison to their normal peers. When Kathy sees each ex-patient as an adult, does she remember others who would have been around the same age had they lived? Have I made her think of Alice, my hazel-eyed roommate who died within months after I was admitted? Or did Kathy just... forget? Are the dead less heroic because they died? I would feel so much better to talk about them—and to say out loud, *But that was a wig I wore.*

When the visit's whirlwind is over, I call an Uber as I stand already deep into analysis behind the clinic door, counting the numbers of my mortality on ten fingers. Contemplating the past space I was suctioned into, I hold onto the number of years I've survived and tell myself they're on my side, processing Math almost as well as English for once. Time has been on my side.

*

BFM is long-retired, considered now to be a severely outdated (and severe) treatment—one that was just too tough on kids. I know that I almost didn't survive it. Now that I have, I'm kind of a lab rat; special data. Everything the clinic logs as I continue to live becomes childhood cancer research. I've signed my DNA away. I'm happy to help and the clinic is pulling for me. Every year I add to my age, every real-life accomplishment I sign my name under goes into the "good data" file.

If I drop dead tomorrow...Well, that is bad data at *that* moment, and of course that is unfortunate for us all.

I recognize the relics of my cancer and treatment protocol (both equal enemies since I survived BFM in order to survive cancer) and try to imagine myself waking up in the world outside the enclosure of a hospital. A slew of test referrals in my hand feels heavy; these will determine where my health is after the many years in between. In the next few months, I will find out if my heart beats fine, if my bones are healthy, if my skin shows damage...

Time stops in a cancer ward. If your treatment is long-term, cancer becomes a small island nation that you move to and live in. If you're fortunate enough to leave, you don't simply stumble back in without needing the passport of memory. Once off the island, a survivor also has to become a patient again in that clinic. She has to confront the damage done—how much time there might be left outside. Or, will she remain lucky enough to stay out of the hospital?—for how long? ...We are people who are always counting.

In the years since, unable to describe my illness as another territory to anyone who wasn't in the hospital with me, I put my stickers away. As objects, they were deprived of any meaning beyond simple classifications such as "shiny" or "red" to others. There was no use trying to explain that they were a medium, and their symbolism was often in the vein of "another blood transfusion" or "the day Alice died." As the clinic comes to represent the first wave of childhood leukemia survivors from the 90's and their fate as adults, I think about all the stickers I collected, each a token of myself being reassembled; of being cast into an adult consciousness before it was time; of those alive with me then. (How do *they* feel now, if still alive?) I can name all the children who died, I can name all the children who lived, I can name all the children who lived and then died. Two stickers at a time, we stuffed our worst memories into indifferent pages, then closed those books, only to be unable to talk about them later.

Is it still too early to get used to my flesh, my fixed blood? With my memories of BFM and its consequences invoked, I remain wary again as the world appears to come crashing down, carrying my thick health records binder tightly under my arm. I've accepted no congratulations for my survivorship, for the second chance I was given, just as inadvertently as I had become sick. But waiting for my ride inside, as the lull of rain outside leaves me lucid, I remind myself that I'm good data! Somber, but good—still alive. My fear is a fairy tale, destined to sound mythical to anyone who wasn't there then, and that is how childhood cancer is locked in my memory: a tale within a tale that becomes supra-real when it ends. But with memory, that time exists again, and here I am on the island once more.

Pandemic Fatigue

Maureen Daniels

Who knows what breaks their bandages belie,*
or if your laughter, that ethereal
hum, just out of reach, could electrify
the city burning, immaterial.
Sometimes all I have to hold onto is
your wide open mouth, that pink cathedral
and a song explodes like a champagne fizz.
That's enough life for countless people,
and me, the slow motion ghost haunting your
sleep, as if I had lived inside your breath
for a hundred years, then emerged pure
and sharp as a single blade put to death's
throat, only to realize you were death,
and the blade I thought I held was silence.

*Editor's Note: This poem is a part of a sonnet corona project, where the first lines are by other poets. The first line of "Pandemic Fatigue" is by Andy Kersetter.

Anxieties and Memories of Pandemic: An Auto-Ethnographic Account of Everyday Life

Pragati Gupta

Abstract

Our understanding of time should go beyond the debate between social and environmental determinism. Time, to me, is a determinant of relationships in epochs. Time is a manufactured determinant manipulated by power relations; since time, power, and authority remain intrinsic, it is their nature and handling which evolves. In this essay, I explain the neo-liberal conception of time through an auto-ethnographic account of my religious experiences and through my home routines living in the eastern state of Odisha, in India, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This essay focuses on how the capitalist conception of productivity has evolved since COVID and how time spent in quarantine is expressed culturally and socially. This expression carries within itself an inherent irony, which is that as more time passes time presents itself in the form of forgetfulness. This forgetfulness is followed by a transition from awareness to bigoted performativity. In this autoethnographic account, I enunciate on how collective memory shapes individual memory; it facilitates the intricate social procedure to turn “violent” into “ordinary” by changing our grammar of the ordinary. I explore how and why those practicing caste don’t understand that their everyday practices are based on inequality and stratification. So, here, I extend this theorisation to formulate how there is a transition from our scientific understanding of the pandemic to our stratified or bigoted performance of it, wherein we believe certain communities who we perceive as the others, in the us vs. them, are the actual spreaders of this disease; justification of othering is often linked to the idea that others are inherently unhygienic or polluted because the caste system and Hindu religion is based on the concept of Purity and pollution. I use the term bigoted performativity to explain contradictions in the idea of ideal values and capitalistic and neo-liberal systems. Furthermore, this essay explains how this forgetfulness and performativity determines who gets the opportunity to soul-search and who shall dread their own chances of survival due to the pandemic. I explain how anxiety, due to the pandemic, is a socially produced catharsis within a catharsis. By “catharsis in a catharsis,” I mean the romanticization of trauma, stigma, and de-personalization of bodies during the pandemic. The notion of anxiety is intimately married to risk, which, if understood through Ulrich Beck, is non-nostalgic and neo-critical. Anxieties, memory, experiential values, and time have to be looked at together to understand the relationship between them. In addition, this view allows us to see the relationship between what gets seen during the pandemic and what gets forgotten; by extension, the pandemic allows us to see what gets coded as significant and what is uneventful in daily life, which ultimately gets forgotten. I argue that power, authority, and politics are timeless, while physical realities and memories associated with distress and disasters

change and evolve drastically. Time is then a mere physical, numerical, and historical determinant of manufactured eventfulness experienced through different epochs.

Keywords

Time, pandemic, auto-ethnography, religious experience, social stratification, temporality, household, everyday life, routine, risk, anxiety, remembrance, forgetting, ordinary, eventful

“The world is not invented by me (as the cliché goes), but then how do I make the world mine? How am I, as a subject, implicated in experience, for I take it that there is no pre-given subject to whom experience happens or on whom experience can be predicated?” (Das 2007)

Veena Das’s book, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, on violence and the everyday shall help me describe how the pandemic has affected daily routines. I remember thinking that COVID was a distant reality of some other nation, and how I shrugged it off as another swine flu or dengue outbreak. I remember wondering why people suddenly became so cautious and hysterical. I remember visiting a museum with a friend and being offered hand sanitizer at every door. That was when India wasn’t reporting a sizable number of cases and when every restaurant in Khan Market was offering hand sanitizers to every customer every fifteen minutes. What is now striking is not the preventive measures taken by the people then, but how a sense of forgetfulness has led to an absence of these precautions and preventive measures when the country is reporting lakhs and lakhs of cases per day⁵.

In March 2020, when I was about to finish my second year of under-graduation in Delhi, when all schools and universities decided to shut down due to the COVID-19 outbreak, I remember my mother panicking and calling me constantly. She kept asking me to book a ticket and return home—I hadn’t received an official notice from my college authorities yet and was waiting for it. Although my parents were so upset and panicky about me being away at school during the pandemic, they were okay with dining out in September of 2020. If I reflect on this memory in relation to shared macro realities, that was when India was at its peak in terms of daily cases being reported, compared to the number of cases in March. I ask myself, why are people who were so scared of the coronavirus, at a time when it did not affect their everyday lives, now casual about it? Have they forgotten how they felt when COVID was new to them? The question I ask in this essay is: what facilitates this forgetting? What is its relationship to time? Following this idea, in this essay, I aim to explain how pandemic and symbolic violence often entails a catharsis within catharsis or a manufactured anxiety toward bodies and personhood of the so-called “other.” To understand this particular argument, I will now describe my use of the concept of violence and its relationship to boundaries.

Das argues that one should regard violence as the “exceeding of boundaries of the world as it was known” (Das 2007). To explain Das’s conception of boundaries is to interrogate the question of scale and complexity between abstraction and concrete relationships in Social Anthropology. Das

⁵ Specific to the context of India

emphasises a need to focus on concrete relationships in order to understand the social abstraction of the world or the metaphorical meaning that defines the world for us. I use Das's understanding to de-construct a romantically abstract understanding of time and to emphasise how time is a tool of the elite who, through cultural and religious expressions, shape social knowledge⁶. By focusing on personal experiences, I may show how our reality of time and our perceptions of the pandemic are socially constructed, rather than innate to the world. How, then, does the concept of boundaries shape our understanding of time and of violence? By examining how violence is perceived by interlocutors, or those involved, I can unveil its construction. In the context of the pandemic, the virus can be seen as an instance of violence in that people were dealing with an unfamiliar form of disruption that exceeded their boundaries of experience. However, the pandemic still remained violent even as time passed and it became normalized and familiar; because the pandemic as a symbol of violence lost its shock factor, it was no longer perceived as violent or disruptive.

As I proceed, I will connect the concept of time to boundaries of violence, or the grammar of ordinary, through collective memory⁷. In order to understand these concepts as knowledge systems deeply implicated in the acquisition of power, which determines the perception of experiences and creation of anxieties during and after the pandemic, I draw on Edward Simpson's work, "Forgetfulness without Memory: Reconstruction, Landscape and the Politics of Everyday in Post-Earthquake Gujarat." Simpson narrates the story of his friend, Bhushan, in order to explore how violence becomes forgotten and states,

The kind of forgetting I have encountered resists representation. However, one way to illustrate these more generalized processes is to recount a story about my friend Bhushan. In early 2002, he told me about the moment of the earthquake. I recorded him and featured the interview in a broadcast radio programme. He had been in the bath at the time of the disaster. When water started to run violently back and forth, he thought he had gone mad and death was upon him. In films, he said, lives flash before those who are about to die. For Bhushan, it was not like that. He found himself concentrating on a blue plastic pen holder. The object had fallen to the floor and broken the day before. In the swirling waters of madness, he clung to the image of broken plastic. That he could make it whole again gave him reason and strength not to let madness overcome him. Out of all the vain and glorious possibilities, loves and dreams, it was the hope of repairing a piece of plastic that saved Bhushan. Skip forward nine years and Bhushan had forgotten the extraordinary story of the blue pen holder which saved his life. At his wedding in 2011, I asked him if he still had it. He had absolutely no idea what I was talking about. I left it for that moment – he was busy getting married. Later, I gently pressed him – but he had no ready recollection. He had

⁶ I am referring to nostalgia associated with time in popular perception.

⁷ Collective memory, here, refers to an archaeology of knowledge as constructed by dominant social structures like caste systems or religion; how our understanding of the past and present is built and shaped by our positions in a social hierarchy and the social values that shape these social structures.

forgotten the object to which he had once owed everything. It was not so much that he had forgotten, but that it was no longer there. The account of an everyday and ordinary object taking on all the significance of life is as compelling to me now as it was then. While it had stayed with me and in my notes as an example of how the movement of the earth can shake priorities and reassign hope, Bhushan forgot, without memory... (Simpson 2020).

Simpson's work is important to understanding memories and anxieties during the pandemic and their connection to identity and positionality in a socio-economic hierarchy. Simpson's passage explains how Bhushan forgot his experiences. This may be likened to experiences of Anjarians who have forgotten their fears of earthquakes and have rebuilt their everyday routines. By focusing on changing subjectivities and general shifts in structures in the aftermath of disasters, Simpson shows the importance of memory as an agent of catharsis. By using his argument, I may draw from my personal experiences to emphasise how our memories are intricately related to our religious, caste, class and political affiliations, and our position in social structures; I will show how a shift in our position changes our subjectivity. Ultimately, this socio-political-religious process of shaping memories remains timeless and, in turn, only facilitates the functioning of systems of social stratification. My understanding of the pandemic shares certain similarities to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*⁸ where he explains how, through the *habitus*, systems of stratification constantly produce and reproduce themselves by being unconsciously sublimated in socialisation, education, learning, etc.

Simpson reiterates how feelings and experiences of the earthquake were forgotten because they never became memories, and this story reminds me of my grandmother's words directed towards one of our domestic helpers, a Muslim woman, in which she said,—“yeh toh tum logon ki bimaari hain” (this disease is caused by your community, quite literally, this disease is yours). I asked myself whether this stigma was a new characteristic exhibited by my grandmother, that had been a part of her beliefs all along, or something that was exclusive to the pandemic. I realized that the former was true; it was absolutely not an attitude adopted in response to the pandemic. I remember when I was very young, my mother had hired a Muslim woman to help her with domestic chores and my grandmother was completely against the idea; she wouldn't let the woman inside the pooja room (room dedicated to worship), even to clean that area, because of her religion. Was this stigma limited to my grandmother? Absolutely not. I remember another instance of my family's religious bias when I visited Kolkata. My sister had just completed high school and was giving college entrance exams, so we were waiting outside the exam center for her. My father, being a voracious tea drinker, wanted some tea and was delighted when he spotted a tea vendor; but, when he came back, he didn't have a cup in his hand. When my mother questioned him about what happened, he said, “usne tabeej pehni hui thi, woh maas macchi khata hoga, pata nahi mera mann nahi kiya” (he was

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argues that structures that constitute a particular type of environment, for example, material conditions of existence, characteristic of a class condition, produce *habitus*, i.e., systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures which function again to structure structures. *Habitus* is the principle of generation and structuring practices, which can be regulated and regular.

wearing charms, indicating he looked like he was Muslim and must, therefore, be a non-vegetarian; I didn't feel like buying tea from him once I saw that).

By describing my experiences of othering within the pandemic and my family member's behavior toward others, I focus on how anxiety that surrounds others' bodies is socially constructed. I question how individuals within lower socio-economic hierarchies are perceived and how the intrinsic violence in this purity-pollution based perception has always been present to violate the other; violence against others has only accelerated during the pandemic. The idea of catharsis will be especially helpful to understanding reactions to the pandemic.

As introduced in my abstract, I call this pandemic a catharsis within a catharsis; I define catharsis as an instilled sense of apathy and denial, which Ulrich Beck believes is a reaction to risk. To me, catharsis means a tragedy with no purificatory nature. My view is unlike the Aristotelian notion of catharsis, which Soumyabrata Choudhury describes, in his book *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme*, as connoting the purificatory nature of the tragic plot. According to Aristotle, individuals go through emotional purification during tragedy. Choudhury describes the idea of tragedy and symbolic violence against the Dalits, members of India's traditional caste system, through the practice of untouchability. This connection is the oppositional nexus of Aristotle and Ambedkar's⁹ arguments, i.e., the importance of displaying tragedy as revealing the illusion of commonality. Oppositional nexus, here, means that while both Aristotle and Ambedkar emphasise the importance of tragedy, Aristotle reiterates its cleansing or purificatory nature, while Ambedkar emphasises the experience of stratification experienced by the so-called other in the caste system. By defining the oppositional nexus, I show how the perspectives and ideas of the other (like of Ambedkar who was a Mahar or a Dalit who later converted to Buddhism) can help deconstruct the idea of bigoted performativity; the performance of religious, capitalist, and neo-liberal structures by higher socio-economic individuals reveals inherent contradictions that are actually instances of bigotry, such as caste duties or dharma. While the Aristotelian idea of tragedy is that a character is neither pure nor evil because even heroes have flaws, and that tragedy leads to a cleansing catharsis, I problematise the notion of heroes and intrinsic flaws in order to argue that what seems to be intrinsic is oftentimes socially constructed. While Aristotle's heroes are detached from their social structures, I show that systemic structural trauma must be linked to social structures. According to Choudhury, and as I support, an Aristotelian view that disregards social structures is very elitist when in the context of a stratified society it romanticizes tragedy (Choudhury 2018). Choudhury's critique of Aristotelian tragedy displays western elitism embodied in literature, philosophy, and politics, and shows how deeply the idea of purification is attached to the idea of tragedy. Unlike Aristotle, the Ambedkarite notion of tragedy showcases the brutal realities of stratification, such as through the Indian caste system, by

⁹ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of pioneering Dalit leaders and academics who led the anti-caste movement in India. He was also the Chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution of India and also served as the Minister of Law and Justice from 1947-51. Some of his major contributions are *What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables*, *Annihilation of Caste*, and *Who were the Shudras*. He continues to be a prominent figure in Indian political and academic discourse.

showing how catharsis is not, in fact, a positive, healing consequence of tragedy. He, therefore, shows how our conception of tragedy, pain, and violence is culturally defined and not naturally occurring. This connects to Das's emphasis on concrete relationships and helps us understand how caste constructs what we believe to be pure and hygienic. To rephrase in a pandemic context, caste and social constructions of reality control which bodies make us anxious and which do not pose a threat of cultural contamination.

After delving into a theoretical understanding of catharsis, I move further into my family's treatment of our domestic helper to enunciate how those who control reality affect the treatment of the bodies of the "other." I emphasize how apathy and denial lead to violence along with its reproduction towards the already oppressed, oppressing them further. The risk that I previously recalled, of getting infected by my family's domestic helper, is a manufactured anxiety. This anxiety stems from a mixture of religious and political beliefs that wrongfully stereotype an entire group of people, as well as from collective memory. Sylvia Walby has argued that all women cannot constitute a class; similarly, not all colonial subjects can constitute a class or be seen as a homogeneous category. The Marwadi community, for example, is seen as a homogenous, well-off Caste, which, in reality, is a very illusionary conception of a diverse and hierarchical community with complex intra-community relationships. I grew up with a memory that shaped my understanding of Marwadi as homogenous; I remember how Sociology textbooks in High School had a section on banking systems and trading practices of communities. These Indian communities were mentioned in order to counter the argument that banking systems came to India through the colonial banking infrastructure. In that section, the Marwadi community's caste-based banking system was presented as a case study. It described how the Marwadi's caste-based networking and colonial "know-how" of industrial operation and trading helped the community economically prosper.

When I started Sociological training at university, I had one question on my mind: were all Marwadis equal? This immediately reminded me of how my mother would tell us that the Agarwals & Khandelwals¹⁰, upper caste Marwadis, and other upper castes looked down on us and wouldn't let us anywhere near them, but no one in my family except for her would ever talk about our caste identity clearly. Instead, they would focus on religion and religious values. It is important to display tragedies of stratification and normalize Ambedkarite discourse; the Ambedkarite notion of catharsis is lodged in our daily lives, and my caste identity and story is often forcefully replaced by Hindu homogeneity and nostalgia. This case study is important to me as my caste identity is central to the loss of my grandmother's own memories of stigmatism and ostracism she faced as a Mahawar-Marwadi. Mahawar is a sub-caste, which is situated in the lower rungs of the Marwadi community's hierarchy, and we've faced public ex-communication and visible distancing by upper-caste Marwadis such as Agarwals and Khandelwals. When we look at the caste-divide in this context, we should look at the historical evolution of caste-based discrimination; this

¹⁰ The Marwadi community, which hails from the Indian state of Rajasthan, is further divided into various sub-castes. Agarwal and Khandelwal are two of the subcastes within the Marwadi caste that occupy higher positions within the Marwadi caste. Mahawars, which is the sub-caste I belong to, occupy the lowest position within the Marwadi caste system.

discrimination can be traced to India's colonial history. England's nineteenth-century capitalistic endeavors, as a colonial state, created caste hierarchies, which eventually intertwined European, capitalistic class stratification with India's social and economic structures. This enmeshed nature of caste can be understood through political discourse in Parth Chatterjee's work on Passive Revolution. He argues that the old and the new ruling classes could not completely legitimize their hegemony and had to merge with one another in order to do so. Through these blurred binaries of the ruling class, I analyze how Indian hierarchies are manufactured, how these hierarchies facilitate forgetting, and what memories are forgotten. Most importantly, I consider who has the privilege to forget. Is memory related to power; if yes, then who benefits from this forgetting and who bears the cost of it?

While I am analyzing my own experiences during the pandemic, because of the nature of social hierarchies, it is important to consider the experiences of those of lower castes and those who've been othered. How, then, did the Muslim woman who worked at my house experience the pandemic differently than me? Why is her experience laced with religious jingoism? Why was it possible for my aunt and uncle to leisurely travel from Kota, Rajasthan to Bhadrak when she could not? Why was she more dangerous to my family? Why was her body de-personalized every time she entered my house, such as when my father asked my family members to make sure that the domestic helpers washed their hands before touching anything in the house? Why is it that our domestic helper's touch made my family anxious and nothing caused similar anxieties when my uncles and aunts visited our house during the pandemic? And lastly, why is it that my family wasn't threatened by Agarwals and Khandelwals, but Muslims?

The answer lies in our current epoch's socially constructed relationships and hierarchies. The discrimination and stigmatization of the apparently excluded others, which is in my opinion a cathartic event happening within an already cathartic cultural context, meaning caste and religious stigma was never discovered or invented during the pandemic, shows how structural stratification always violated those occupying lower positions in the hierarchy. Therefore, the pandemic has accelerated this violence and functioning of socially stratified structures like caste and religion by helping redefine the previously normalised cultural definition of social stratification. What I essentially am arguing is that the domestic helper was oppressed even before the pandemic began; the pandemic only accelerated the violence impinged on her. Therefore, through ethnographies of my daily life, I seek to explain how the pandemic, as a catharsis within a catharsis, redefines the boundaries of the culturally constructed definition of violence against the "others." This happens through the cultural contextualisation of the pandemic by hegemonic communities who create knowledge systems that further demonise the other (Beck 2006). The pandemic, in India, became a reason to discriminate against "others" by implicating them as the carriers of the virus, and manufacturing anxiety around their presence, bodies, touch, and being. The anxiety upper castes feel is not caused by fear of the coronavirus, but by fear of a certain "other." Just like the blue pencil holder that Bhushan had forgotten, my grandmother and family had forgotten the experience of othering in its entirety. By moving slightly upwards in the social hierarchy, and now being able to sit near the upper-castes and being invited to their parties, a Mahawar family has forgotten their

own experiences of ostracism and othering. In Paul Connerton's terms, my family held a memory that was no longer required since it didn't complement their new identity. According to Paul Connerton, in his work *Seven Types of Forgetting*, this form of forgetting is one that comes with the creation of a new identity, which he describes as the following:

The emphasis here is not so much on the loss entailed in being unable to retain certain things as rather on the gain that accrues to those who know how to discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes. Forgetting then becomes part of the process by which newly shared memories are constructed because a new set of memories are frequently accompanied by a set of tacitly shared silences (Connerton 2008).

Therefore, by focusing on the ways my experiences have constructed "a new set of memories," I am also inevitably uncovering the "shared silences" of those who have been othered. I argue that this pandemic is a force that steers varied forms of othering and its new implications, and, at the site of experience, what remains timeless is power and authority; these new memories help justify discrimination bequeathed to another by the virtue of their past, othered, identity, such as with my grandmother's treatment of our domestic helpers. Time, here, is viewed from a sociological perspective where it is a socio-culturally defined form of measurement. The connections between authority, power, and stratification are more evident due to the virus and have evolved through economic progression. I argue that as we progress further into the pandemic (as it isn't over in many parts of the world) the kinds of discriminations we see flourishing, such as hate towards Muslims in India or exploitation of low-income and daily wage workers, have always existed. To understand this argument, I discuss my family's experience with testing COVID positive vis a vis experiences of daily wage workers.

My whole family tested positive for COVID-19 mid-September, and, just a month or two before that, my paternal aunt, or Buaji's family, tested positive. Their family, at that time, had many daily-wage workers renovating their home. While my family was admitted into high-end private hospitals, nobody even questioned if the workers were okay. On the other hand, friends of my family were given a false-positive report and kept in the hospital where they were not properly fed for weeks; only after their teen daughter spoke up did matters reach the hospital administration and they were discharged. What is important is how the phenomena is related to and uncannily similar to the capitalistic value of "naked self-interest," as Marx would define it, in the sense that economic capital and mobilization facilitated a transition from a visible form of discrimination into an invisibly visible one. These "invisible" discriminations can also be seen in governmental responses to cyclones that occur in Odisha, our focus, specifically, is on those who live in temporary structures made of hay, tin, etc. and need to be shifted into permanent structures when the cyclone hits the coast. For this purpose, I reiterate my observations and experience of cyclone Amphan.

In 2020, during the pandemic, when cyclone Amphan hit Odisha and West Bengal, I remember people being shifted to government schools around my house in order to find protection from the concrete roof above their heads. I would go up on the terrace of my house to get some

fresh air in the morning and I would see people crammed in classrooms. While I, not even five hundred meters away from them, was in a perfectly ventilated space, with food, water, and “protective measures,” I recognize that government mandates to quarantine are not a privilege granted to all. The workers at my bua’s (paternal aunt) house, my domestic helper, and my new neighbors, do not have the privilege of forgetting being others because the pandemic has only accentuated their social identities. Although in different contexts, and thus, concerning different traumas, my family could forget their past, just like Bhushan forgot his. “The others,” however, cannot.

Figure 1: The government Girl’s High School in front of my native home in Bhadrak, Odisha.



So, as I return to the question of boundaries, violence, time, and when the eventful becomes ordinary, the binaries of boundaries change and shift constantly. Binaries of boundaries signify the seemingly black and white nature of the grammar of the ordinary, and the nature of discrimination, through tools like collective memory and social knowledge. Through the

use of these tools, discrimination and violence against the “other” is embedded in daily routines through shifting boundaries of “normalcy.” Time, then, becomes a physical determinant of sites of experiences because, as I argue, social hierarchy and stratification are the core of societal constructions. When I write about the othering of the already othered in the pandemic, I wish to underscore violence during the pandemic as one part of ongoing violence. When Das asks us to focus on concrete relationships, in order to understand patterns of sociability and collective abstract meaning of the world, she asks us to look beyond isolated events and sites of experiences¹¹—not because these events aren’t of significance, but because in daily routines you will find patterns of othering. These patterns are varied, multiply in magnitude, and transcend boundaries which seem unfamiliar now, but can lead to shaping new boundaries. Boundaries, in this essay, are conceptualised as the general, ordinary, or mundane. When we look at history through the lens of concrete relationships or interconnections of individual experience in a larger social system, which is a nexus of various dominant systems of social stratification, we shall uncover patterns of violence and discriminations. In order to navigate these concrete relationships and

¹¹ By using terms like isolated events and sites of experiences, I refer to my interpretation of Das’s work where she emphasises seeing history as a continuum, rather than as a coalition of individual historical events. From a sociological point of view, she emphasises a need to perceive and analyse what binds and connects historical events, their happenings and consequences together, rather than seeing events as isolated entities. Similarly, I emphasise a need to see the pandemic and discriminations related to a larger social structure.

patterns of sociability, which Das emphasises, we need to focus on how individual experience is related to the larger metaphor of the world.

Narrating individual experiences during the pandemic reveals complex hierarchies of experience that are shaped by power structures; these structures reveal how economics, society, and culture are intertwined. The neo-liberal conception of time and productivity is hierarchical, inherently stratified, and one that abides by and integrates itself into older forms of hierarchies. When global risk is externalized, hegemonic systems and communities use these values, practices, and routines to intentionally other the already othered. Othering creates mirror images of discrimination in general popular perception, wherein it manufactures dangers and anxieties that create a distorted sense of identity and material reality. Mirror image includes the use of hegemony building tools, such as collective memory and knowledge, to construct a reverse-hierarchy imagination, wherein it is proved that the discriminated against are actually the oppressors. To understand this ideation better, we can refer back to my grandmother's insinuation that the coronavirus is a Muslim people's disease.

Discriminated groups are often blamed for "violating quarantine norms" and are labelled as carriers of COVID. This discrimination can be identified by looking at how different people in the same household spend their time in the pandemic; one of my grandmother's domestic helpers who mainly helps with cooking, was questioned and warned by the local law enforcers after six in the evening. Since my town was classified as a red zone-district, meaning the spread of the virus was high, curfews were enforced. My grandmother's helper had no choice, but to stay past curfew in order to guarantee further employment, even if the reasons she worked past curfew seem frivolous; she wasn't being paid extra to run errands, to prepare evening tea, or to massage my grandmother's feet after-hours. Her time and labor were seen in a different light than that of my cousin and his wife, who are both IT engineers at MNCS (Multi-National Corporations) working from home. This is not an isolated incident; my family's domestic helpers repeatedly stayed past curfew while other family members with more respected jobs worked from home. The assumed superiority of mental labor over physical labor isn't ironic, but tragic. In my opinion, the pandemic is a historical site of experience because the resultant oppression caused by it is unfamiliar to the elite; to the "others," it is a burden upon a burden. While I enjoy Dalgona coffee at home in front of my house, people struggle to survive a disaster; I can only contextualize others' struggles by comparing it to my inconveniences like power outages and having no Wi-Fi. Between the divide of disaster and inconvenience lies individualized experiences of the pandemic, which have plainly been glorified by trends expressed through social media. While the privileged learned how to bake, took online courses, shared "stay home, stay safe" on their Instagram stories in March and, like my aunt, decided to renovate their houses 2-4 months later, the less privileged were not afforded the pandemic's consequential opportunities; those who found new hobbies during the pandemic are those whose boundaries of violence were transformed. This pandemic plainly reveals how capitalistic values become normalized, even during disaster, and thus, illuminates pre-existing violence against the less privileged.

This normalization is facilitated by the nexus of the religious-political-legal-economic. By focusing on the household, as a microcosm of this nexus, I may explain how it operates. Although the woman¹² who worked at my house faced the wrath of imposed state surveillance during the pandemic, and constantly jeopardized her health, she was never treated as a citizen and her safety was never considered. Who was held accountable for not staying home is another essential consideration. While my domestic helper's employers were held unaccountable for putting her in the vulnerable position of being exposed to the virus, she was held responsible for actions that were the result of economic necessity due to systematic stratification. The state implicitly supported the othering of the already othered through curfew mandates, masked under their supposed concern for the safety of their citizens. While lower caste members are technically citizens, the pandemic has revealed their lesser rights and the politics of the term. While the media and other hegemonic authorities praised India's safety measures and strict curfews, they shadowed the effects of such rules such as its effects on my domestic helper. Since my family members were not held accountable for breaking quarantine rules, I ask, are all citizens truly equal? Do all have the same right to safety?

When I hear the phrase "we are all in this together," I sense a distorted, utopian homogeneity that makes binaries invisible and creates symbolic violence. By supporting the notion that everyone is in it together, we purport that everyone experienced the pandemic in the same way. This, as I have shown, is untrue. If we argue, instead, that social class shapes diverse experiences, then, we may see how these experiences have been varied by the pandemic. However, if we do not experience our normal lives in a similar manner, how can we ever experience risk in a similar manner? The answer lies in Das's work:

For Das, the boundaries between the ordinary and the eventful are drawn in terms of the failure of the grammar of the ordinary. By this, she means that what is put into question is how we ever learned what kind of object grief, or love, is. For Das, the eventful is not distinct from the ordinary, for daily life buries within itself violence and other catastrophes which provide force within everyday relationships. The ordinary is not the mundane, for through routine there is healing and the ability to tame great events. The thoughts and presence of violence thus become part of the everyday. (Simpson 2020).

The pandemic changed the grammar of the ordinary and then buried itself in the ordinary once it was familiarized. Time, here, became a determinant of this change; from state regulation, safety measures, urges to stay at home, the pandemic slowly made its way into one's daily life. This is how violence and disruption slowly went on to become the reason for invisibilization of the varied forms of symbolic violence that this pandemic influenced. This invisibility is accentuated by our perception of time in nostalgic binaries of suffering and non-suffering, where violence is seen as a purificatory and ascetic path to the divine. Religious experience plays an important role in this perception.

¹² I haven't named the domestic helpers in question because I wish to highlight my family's behaviour and perception of the other. My knowledge of her experience has also been gathered through conversations with my family. I don't wish to appropriate her experience, but rather to explain the discriminatory gaze.

As a young girl who grew up in a devout Hindu household, my family members narrated various legends, myths, and folktales to me as a child. One of the stories that really struck me was the story of how Lord Ganesha's head was dismembered by Lord Shiva when he aggravated his father. Shiva is known as the god of destruction; anger is one of his defining emotional features. When Shiva's wife, goddess Parvati, wanted her son back, Shiva attached Ganesh's body to the head of a baby elephant. But this fact is forgotten; another popular legend associated with the family of Shiva has been reiterated to showcase how remembrance is controlled by dominant social structures. Here, one of those dominant social structures in question is the Hindu religious practice. The legend in question is about how Ganesh was once challenged by his brother Karthikey to a race of the universe and was worried that he would not be able to complete the competition since his divine vehicle or Vahaan, a mouse, was slower than Karthikey's divine vehicle, a peacock. So, Ganesh decided to take three Parikramas of his parents, Shiva and Parvati¹³, since they formed his ultimate universe as his parents.



Figure 2: The idol of Lord Ganesh inside a Pooja cabinet.

Both Hindu stories are keenly related to selective remembrance. These stories exhibit the binaries of suffering and non-suffering, but what remains timeless is the loss Ganesh incurred. The story, however, points out a discontinuity in suffering and visualizes Ganesh's suffering only when his head was cut off, not when he had to live on as a

human being with the face of an elephant. This story may be interpreted as an allegory of our daily lives in which we view and measure suffering in points and periods of time. In addition, just as we bury the pandemic's violence in the ordinary, these stories bury Ganesh's eternal suffering. The story also reveals power and authority dynamics that allow certain memories to be forgotten. Akin to Bhushan's story, Ganesh forgets the violence imposed upon him by his father immediately after regaining his life with the face of an elephant; he is then blessed by the Gods to be the most important God and is worshipped first in every important Hindu ritual or festival. Similarly, the violence of casteism, deemed unimportant and forgotten by my family, was an effect of their new identity. This Hindu story expresses the relationship between power, authority, and accountability, where hierarchies remain the same, but violence is forgotten. In all the rituals where Ganesh is worshipped first, Mahawars are now invited to upper-caste gatherings and are allowed to be present

¹³ Lord Shiva and Parvati are two of the most important deities in the Hindu religion. They're believed to be married to one another, and they have two sons who are also important deities namely, Ganesh and Karthikey. This legend reiterates how to win his brother's challenge of racing around the universe, Ganesh circles around his parents, as they are his universe, emphasizing the Hindu value of parents being considered an equivalent of God.

in the same space. But, what becomes invisible is the fact that Ganesh has to live on with the face of an elephant and the economic and social divide between Mahawars and Agarwals is still present. Meaning, Ganesh as a deity is considered important and is "always" worshipped first. Mahawars are still socially downtrodden and this is buried in the illusionary mobility or the new identity given to them. This once again brings us to the nexus of the ordinary and the eventful, meaning, daily life and its performance is portrayed to be "mundane," where in the most mundane we bury the most violent. This argument can be understood by connecting my analysis of the hindu legend of Ganesha with reflections on my family's perception of the other and their own identity.

A religious perspective can reveal how violence has been coded as an eventful vs. ordinary experience. As explored in the Hindu story above, violence is expressed as an event and the period before and beyond it is considered benign, a belief that carries in itself the capitalistic neo-liberal state. When I reflect on my conversations with my family about our domestic helper's experience with the state, and relegate it beyond the isolated event of the pandemic, I see a pattern of violence. This violence persists beyond the pandemic and is evidenced in the state's pattern of surveillance of the powerless, which depersonalizes their bodies in public spaces. The pandemic's unprecedented global risk has reshaped our boundaries of what is deemed normal or non-violent, thus obscuring the violence incurred everyday by "others." The transformation of boundaries has created new forms of violence and has heightened others, such as seen in the anxiety of my family towards Muslims and domestic helpers. Just as boundaries are fluid, the pandemic has also shown how identities can be too.

Janet Carsten talks about the fluidity of identity and its disjuncture with the past in her study of the community based in Pulau Langkawi, Malaysia. What interests me is how evolution of identity facilitates forgetting. I have often heard from my father how he, as a child, had no shoes to wear to school, and while he remembers his suffering, his idea of it is isolated to himself. My grandmother used to tell me how when she moved to her own house, she had to be on the lookout for wild animals to keep her children safe as the area was isolated and wild. Looking at their experience as a Sociology student made me realize that it has a lot in common with the domestic helper who works at my house or the daily wage workers living right across from us. But throughout this paper, as I narrate my family's experience as the other and their treatment of the other, I notice and wish to reflect on how a certain amount of illusionary mobilisation and the urgency to accept binaries and stratified systems for power and authority can isolate and facilitate the transition of memories from systematic experience of stratification to individualism. I question if my family members and their economic mobilization, which facilitated the perception of hard work, has made their past, low caste-class status more and more invisible every day. Did this mobilization emulate the behavior and perceptions of those higher in the hierarchy ?

I move to express the connection between religion, caste and economic systems of production (capitalism) in everyday lives. Returning to the concept of enmeshed hierarchies, I want

to emphasize that these blurred binaries¹⁴ express the carry-forward of values; capitalism carries an ascetic value, where like religious explanation, hierarchies of experience are legitimized through conceptions of hard work and productivity. The neo-liberal conception of hard work lies in the divide between mental/physical labor, which in the pandemic has presented itself in an extreme form. While MNC workers could work from home, domestic helpers and daily wage workers had to expose themselves to the virus to sustain a living and could not reap economic benefits from the state. We shall note that the divide and hierarchization of experience became clearer by the virtue of the pandemic and this visibility also expresses how physical labor is deemed lower in the hierarchy of occupation, while mental labor occupies a higher place. What I see in my community is a blend of neo-liberal and religious hierarchies, which shape hierarchies of experience that define relationships. The pandemic itself is deemed a period of time defined by the quarantine, which only represents the experience of the privileged. A social understanding of hard work and sacrifice, unaffected by the pandemic, has increased violence against the less privileged by coding the violence of the pandemic as ordinary.

Conclusively, I have explained the neo-liberal conception of time through an auto-ethnographic account of my religious experiences and through my home routines during the COVID-19 pandemic. This essay focuses on how the capitalist conception of productivity has evolved since COVID and how time spent in quarantine is expressed culturally and socially. In this autoethnographic account, I enunciate how collective memory shapes individual memory, in a sense it facilitates the intricate social procedure to turn “violent” into “ordinary” by changing our grammar of the ordinary. I have also explored how and why those practicing caste don’t understand that their everyday practices are based on inequality and stratification. So, here, I have extended this theorisation and formulated how there is a transition from our scientific understanding of the pandemic to our stratified or bigoted performance of it, wherein we believe certain communities who we perceive as the others, in the us vs. them, are the actual spreaders of this disease; justification of othering is often linked to the idea that individuals are inherently unhygienic or polluted because the caste system and Hindu religion is based on the concept of Purity and pollution. I use the term bigoted performativity to explain contradictions in the idea of ideal values and capitalistic and neo-liberal systems.

Furthermore, this essay explains how this forgetfulness and performativity determines who gets the opportunity to soul-search and who shall dread their own chances of survival due to the pandemic. I explain how anxiety due to the pandemic is a socially produced catharsis within a catharsis. By “catharsis in a catharsis,” I mean the romanticization of trauma, stigma, and de-personalization of bodies during the pandemic. The notion of anxiety is intimately married to risk, which, if understood through Ulrich Beck, is non-nostalgic and neo-critical. Anxieties, memory, experiential values, and time have to be looked at together to understand the relationship between them. In addition, this view allows us to see the relationship between what gets seen

¹⁴ Blurred binaries represent how religion, caste and capitalism are connected to one another in the performance of daily lives. It also refers to how what is considered eventful and what is buried in the ordinary depends on the dominant social structure shaping it.

during the pandemic and what gets forgotten; by extension, the pandemic allows us to see what gets coded as significant and what is uneventful in daily life, which ultimately gets forgotten. I argue that power, authority, and politics are timeless, while physical realities and memories associated with distress and disasters change and evolve drastically. Time is, then, a mere physical, numerical, and historical determinant of manufactured eventfulness experienced through different epochs. Therefore, time in the pandemic is deeply connected to our sense of personhood and to structures of power, which stratify our sense of selves. Increased domestic burdens on women during the pandemic, class divides, and the increased suffering and symbolic violence of “the other” has been illuminated by the pandemic. I have raised questions concerning prejudice, discrimination, and identity which I do not wish to isolate to the pandemic. Rather, I aim to show how these questions contribute to highly organized and seemingly unchangeable structures of society, such as gender, class-caste, capitalistic authority, values, power, and hierarchy. Through personal anecdotes and scholarly references, I have shown how these facets of society connect and specifically, how they further discriminate against the lower-caste. Hierarchies, such as class-based ones, come in varied and complex forms in different cultures, nation-states, and different geographical areas of the same nation, but nonetheless are present throughout; the pandemic has revealed and layered its complexity. I want to emphasize against isolating systematic violence to the pandemic, since I have only begun to show how violence is lived everyday. The Pandemic shall be a historical site of experiences, which has revealed the severity of symbolic violence. We are not “altogether” in the battle against violence so long as there is no acknowledgement of the timelessness of violence inflicted upon “others.” As Veena Das says, acknowledgement of others is not a one-time practice, and this acknowledgement isn’t the endpoint in my paper nor is it in transformations occurring daily.

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Welcome to the %^&*: Teaching Composition During a Global Pandemic

Natalie M. Dorfeld

Introduction

The spring semester started off relatively normal in 2020. I liked my students and schedule (two introductory literature courses and a technical communication class). Then, the whispers began to circulate on campus. Those being, there was an unknown virus floating around, and it was nothing like the flu. It was, in fact, deadly. The week after Spring Break in March, we received a curt email that all classes would be going 100% online, and all faculty had exactly one week to prepare.

For those professors who already used the technology, the transition wasn't terribly painful. For those who never used online platforms, it was a speedy education to say the least. Professors lined up, physically and virtually, to learn the latest technological applications, all with varying degrees of success. And students, who were used to seeing their best friends on a daily basis, either flew home or logged in via their dorm rooms. Those last six weeks of the semester, to many in education, felt like six months.

Thankfully, the summer break provided a bridge to the fall semester. We were told to be ready for anything, and Florida Institute of Technology opted for a face-to-face return. Some students chose not to return due to safety reasons, so every course had to provide real time instruction. Those live lectures were then turned into recordings, which students could watch asynchronously due to differing time zones.

Because the spring semester of 2021 will be the same format (face-to-face lectures with online options for remote students), we have all shared war stories of what has worked and what has gone down in flames this past year. While every class is a different animal, many educators are still pivoting and tweaking on a daily basis for the best teaching pedagogies during the crisis. If nothing else, it has taught us that the old way of doing things is simply not going to work now. Below, I will discuss the top five tips I have learned along the way, in addition to the train wrecks.

Become a Techie

Anyone working in or around academia knows this is easier said than done. Resistance to technology often leaches into the fray, especially between older and younger professors. Before the pandemic, some faculty members were not utilizing all the bells and whistles of Canvas, our system

web-based learning management system or LMS. However, COVID-19 created a level playing field in terms of delivery. We all had to learn it and learn it fast. This meant getting over the dated notion that everything must to be done via in person lectures.

Andrea Leone-Pizzighella, a college professor who manages English language instruction remotely for the University of Pennsylvania, stated this technology has been around for years. It's just that some departments, and colleges and universities, have been arriving late to the party. She adds:

You want to have the option . . . to do lots of different things, having every possible tool available to us . . . It makes sense to continue to develop our online infrastructure and have everything available to us and also because it's not complicated; [we need to get] over the idea of high-quality education needing to be offered in a face-to-face format as opposed to being offered in an adaptable, online format (Allen 2-3).

Canvas, for instance, allows professors to post lecture notes, videos, pertinent links to the material at hand. And because all exams had to be given the same way to ensure fairness, they could be posted and graded in a variety of formats: fill in the blank, multiple choice, true vs. false, and so on. The best part? There is never a question about grades. Everything is laid out in clear percentage breakdowns for the student.

Likewise, because of the pandemic, Zoom and Google Hangouts (video conferencing apps) have taken off like wildfire. Zoom usage and users, according to *Forbes* senior contributor Katie O'Flaherty, "have surged from 10 million last year to 200 million today. People are using it for yoga classes, parties and to chat with friends. Before COVID-19 lockdown, it was mainly used by businesses, who would have their own processes in place to secure Zoom" (2-3).

While there are hundreds of applications to choose from, for the sake of consistency in our school, the three big ones were Canvas, Zoom, and Google Hangouts. The question at hand is how does one learn them seemingly overnight if he/she has never used them in the past?

- Request help from the IT (information technology) Department at your institution. Luckily, at Florida Tech, the staff was ahead of the curve with information videos and drop in lectures on how to use all of the above.
- Behold the power of YouTube. Can't change a tire? There's a video for that. Having a hard time writing an essay? It will give you over 1,000 examples. If you are an educator that might be too embarrassed to ask for help, or if IT is slammed with requests, there are 20-minute beginner educational videos for every educational platform known to humankind.
- Lastly, ask a student. Individuals born after 1990 have been subjected to technology like no other generation beforehand. Because of that, it has been proven that their brains "have

physically changed” due to the 24/7 exposure to electronic media (Prensky 1). As such, they often disregard traditional black and white text and respond well to the implementation of multiple channels through visuals, auditory clips, and layouts spanning from the top to bottom vs. left to right (Mall 2). They know what they are doing when it comes to technology. If you ask nicely, they will help you.

At the end of the day, any and all change is hard, but it was necessary during the coronavirus. Help is easier than ever in some ways. Professors just need to be open to new technologies and ask for assistance along the way.

Multiple Intelligences

In 1983, Howard Gardner wrote *Frame of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. And since then, his theories have transformed classrooms from K-12, college, and beyond. In a nutshell, he argues there is no one size fits all way to teach or learn. We all have our strengths or “at least one dominant intelligence that informs how we learn” (Lichtenstein 1). Some of us are visual, whereas others are highly logical. The question then becomes, at least in terms of this pandemic, how can we reach as many of them as possible with our new modes of delivery?

I was required to teach face-to-face while simultaneously recording lectures for remote students. This was often challenging, especially while focusing on what was in front of me vs. questions from the screen. However, I tried to keep the lectures on track by including visual components vs. straight lecturing from a black and white screen. This meant adding photographs or YouTube videos for students to connect to a specific time period (i.e., Civil Rights Movement and now Black Lives Matter), which was helpful for international students not familiar with time periods. Further examples included:

- Discussion boards: interpersonal learners
- Voiceover PowerPoints: visual-spatial learners
- Word banks for key terms: verbal-linguistic learners
- Class related YouTube videos: musical-rhythmic learners
- Applying dramatic terminology to STEM majors: logical-mathematical learners

Did this feel overwhelming at times? Perhaps. I sometimes thought I was trying to squeeze too much into each lesson. However, based upon the feedback I received at the end of the semester, having multiple options helped the students retain the material more readily than the standard “I speak; you listen” modality. And especially now, where multiple teaching channels are readily available, it almost became a blessing in terms of rethinking my pedagogies for future, calmer sea semesters. Lichtenstein adds of Gardner’s theories:

For many educators and parents working with learners who struggled in traditional classrooms, Gardner's theory came as a relief. While a learner's intelligence was previously questioned when he or she found it challenging to grasp concepts, the theory pushed educators to recognize that each student has myriad potential. Multiple intelligences served as a call to action to "differentiate" learning experiences in order to accommodate the multiple modalities in any given learning context. By modifying the content, process, and expectations for a final product, teachers and educators can reach learners who otherwise present as reluctant or incapable (6).

And this conveniently brings me to my third point, what can we do about reluctant learners and/or those who struggle with motivation when it comes to virtual learning?

Pivot / Writing Reflections

"Pivot!" has become a popular meme now due the *Friends* episode when Chandler, Rachel, and Ross were trying, unsuccessfully, to move a giant couch up the stairs and around the corner. Today, educators are trying to pivot pedagogies in the classroom to best suit their students' needs during this difficult time.

In previous semesters, I was the largest fan in the world of literature circles, a term made popular by Harvey Daniels, where students take over roles in group work. Think of it as an adult book club. However, that idea went down in flames for two reasons. 1. Students had to social distance at least six feet, with masks, which made group work and in class presentations next to impossible. 2. Because attendance was not enforced, the class participation was very hit and miss. Sometimes ten students showed up, and sometimes it was two. That made discussions awkward to say the least. Also, with many students being online in other countries, I had no illusions of them waking up at 3:00 am their time to join the class. They were simply told to watch the videos afterwards.

Therefore, I pivoted and became a huge fan of weekly reflections via discussion boards, something I was never a fan of in the past. I found that even though I didn't see them physically, I was able to get to know them through their voices and experiences. I secretly think many of them were yearning for interaction on some small stage, as many of them were overly wordy and gracious when responding to their peers. It was an English professor's dream! By doing so, they were also able to gauge their own strengths and weaknesses. According to the article "What Benefits Might Reflective Writing Have for My Students?:"

In addition to this advantage of reflection, many teachers of writing have found that students who reflect about their writing processes and decisions are able and careful critics of their own work. They often see exactly those shortcomings that a target reader will identify. Students can, then, anticipate the responses that teachers give to the text, often in

productive ways if the reflective writing occurs before final submission of a writing assignment (1).

So, it wasn't the same as being there and getting to see the rich interaction that can take place in the classroom, but it was the next best thing. Pivoting to an online discussion format was the safest way for us to discuss the work with each other, while helping students "identify their tacit knowledge as well as gaps in that knowledge . . . focus subsequent revision or learning . . . and growth as a working professional" ("What Benefits Might Reflective Writing Have for My Students?" 1).

Checklists / Zoom Fatigue

As a dumb kid, I would often make fun of grandmother for making daily checklists, for something so simple as "take a nap." She said, "You'll see one day, Natalie. There is nothing golden about the golden years." And as with most things in life, she was 100% correct. I cannot really blame it on COVID-19, because I was forgetful before, but I am lost these days without my beloved checklist. According to Dan Silvestre:

A checklist is a performance tool and a job aid that is used to reduce failure by compensating for limits in human memory. The first checklist was created to aid in the flying of the Boeing Model 299 during the Second World War. Ever since, checklists have been used as an aid to solving complex problems in many different areas. Some of the places that rely on checklists include hospitals, construction sites, and investment firms. When used in hospitals, especially during surgery, checklists have been shown to reduce errors by as much as 47%. It is a testament to how effective they are as job aid tools (1).

In the college classroom, it became more than a necessity. It was a life saver.

Every Sunday, I would email the class a five-point checklist. It stated what needed to be read, the writing assignment, and when it was due. Other points included helpful links and/or handouts to help with MLA citations or grammar. They were curt, consistent, and numbered. (They did have all the assignments electronically noted on Canvas, but reminders were needed for all of us).

In the student reviews at the end of the semester, they said that was one of the most helpful components of the course, citing overwhelming "Zoom fatigue" or "Zoom hell." Because of the constant interaction with the screen, some up to eight hours a day back-to-back, many simply zoned out. "This is because having to engage in a 'constant gaze' makes us uncomfortable — and tired" (Fosslien and Duffy 3). Professors suffered from it, too. It simply felt like a tsunami of instructions all at once.

Checklists, as my grandmother knew all along, get things done. We forget small details. Life gets in the way. They simply help us avoid the distractions. Likewise, in the college composition classroom, they save time when searching for assignments, provide a sense of consistency, and improve overall productivity (Dally 2). I mean, honestly, who doesn't love checking off boxes? It feels like such a sense of accomplishment on some days.

Self-Care

This one goes without saying, but many teachers and professors still hold dear to the psychic wage mantra, which is give, give, and give a little more. In the best of times, that isn't a healthy mindset because we all need breaks. And with the onset of sitting in front of a computer screen all day, it's downright draining. Jennifer Snelling and Diana Fingal, authors of "10 Strategies for Online Learning During a Coronavirus Outbreak," stress the emotional aspect that comes with largely independent learning in a global crisis.

It is important for everyone involved (students, parents, staff, administrations, and educators) to take time for themselves, even if it's only one hour a day. That can be the difference that makes or breaks a person. They suggest the following in tips, in addition to trying to keep a regular work schedule:

- Take regular breaks.
- Make time to exercise.
- Keep to a regular sleep schedule.
- Limit distractions when possible (turn off social media notifications, for example).
- Set daily and weekly goals.
- Make time to socialize, even if it's virtually (3).

We, for instance, have a virtual happy hour every Friday in our department. Bring your favorite beverage, and commiserate about the week. It's a nice way to catch up with colleagues because many of us have not seen each other physically in almost one year.

On top of all that, a little grace and a sense of humor go a long way. Not to make light of the situation by any means, but rather know this year is not normal. Every day will not be perfect. Technology will not always work. Students will show up to Zoom meetings in their pajamas or in their cars. This is inevitable. Like anything new, we all have to adapt. However, we will eventually regroup and move on.

Conclusion

To say teaching in 2020-2021 was a %^&* show is putting it mildly. Even now, in January of 2021, we do not know how much longer this may last. We are hopeful for in-person classes this

summer, but everything is still up in the air. One thing we did learn is how to pivot on our toes. (And do so at lightning speed).

That meant learning new technology, finding creative ways to capture our students' attention, shuffling pedagogies, communicating in clear and concise ways, and taking care of ourselves. As one educator so succinctly stated:

Taking classes online within a few weeks' notice is no small task for faculty, students, or staff . . . we are learning just how important each individual person is in the process of creating a robust learning environment. We are also learning how essential it is to be attentive to learners' needs, to be willing to prioritize learning over content, and to be open to the imagination. May you all engage in meaningful connections with your colleagues and students and may you be open to the creative work of reimagining pedagogy during this pandemic (Lambright 3).

In the end, I don't know if this pandemic made me a better or worse professor. I guess only time and student evaluations will tell. It has, however, made me open to change and more compassionate to others' circumstances, be it helping others learn platforms, poor internet connections, or the sickness of a loved one. It is those lessons learned from COVID-19 that I wish to carry with me for the rest of my teaching career.

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How COVID-19 Disrupts the Western Myth of the Individual

Grant David Crawford

The moment COVID-19 compelled the world to wear masks, humans were pushed closer to an admission of interconnectedness, which, while always present, is beaten into dormancy by a system of narratives and policies that reinforce the boundaries between us and the natural world. The decision to wear a mask is somewhat paradoxical, as the thin and ephemeral barrier between our breath and those around us actually becomes a symbolic reminder of how the decisions we make impact one another. An intrinsic closeness is established in cutting off the flow of our breath through one another. As the human world covers their nasal passages and mouths, the non-human world is screaming for us to take our bond with it seriously. Areas where our movement has come to an extreme halt are dancing with the implications. The canals of Venice are “unusually clean” and Venetians have reported seeing “fish, crabs and waterfowls in remarkable numbers” (O’Hehir). In India, Jalandhar’s lockdown brought road traffic to a stop, resulting in an awakening of the Himalayas, with the appearance of “a panorama of snow capped mountains across the eastern sky” (Karnad). Even from space, our global organism has become apparent, as “satellites orbiting earth” have provided images demonstrating dramatic drops in nitrogen dioxide emissions and air pollution over Italy and China (Gohd).

The cultural and political response to the pandemic has also dissolved a sense of separateness, compelling capitalist nations towards socialist policies. Astronomical healthcare fees are being waived. Many have opted to shelter in place to lower the risks between their neighbors and communities. Stimulus packages passed by the government look something like a model for universal basic income, which can be read as an economic connectedness across classes. The past decade of scholarship within the humanities has brought wider attention to reconfiguring the boundaries that define the human as an individual entity that exists within, but separately, from the rest of the world. Stacey Alaimo, in her works *Bodily Natures: Science Environment* and *The Material Self and Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, has outlined the theoretical model of transcorporeality, which states, “that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them.” It appears as though COVID-19, in its natural, contagious capacity as well as the human response to contain the contagion and mitigate its devastating economic impact, has become an unexpected partner in proving the necessity for a new theoretical framework; one that breaks down humanist boundaries at a time when the ideas and blurred foresight that spawn from our separateness are verging on catastrophic consequences. In this paper, I intend to demonstrate how the COVID-19 global pandemic forces us to rethink the Western dualistic understanding of the individual in opposition to collective others; in other words, the virus has broken down the oppositional placement between individual against nature, individual against fellow individual, and individual against society. Each of these dualisms crumble under a

series of policies and phrases (which have become more like mantras) that have emerged during the pandemic, including flattening the curve, social distancing, and economic stimulus packages.

On Dualism and Nature

Alaimo's definition of transcorporeality alludes to a wider system of connectivity that the West has, for the most part, felt comfortable defining as *nature*. Most students learn in grade school about ecosystems, and the role each animal and plant plays within the forest, ocean, or desert to sustain itself. However, it is the human's placement within this ecosystem that is radical. As much as the predator and prey equilibrium is universally acknowledged for a thriving environment, human activity is now understood as equally as consequential, and within the Anthropocene, this activity has become impactful on a global scale. Bruce Braun acknowledges, nature is "a figure, construction, artifact, displacement. It is something made—materially and semiotically, and both simultaneously." In other words, our understanding of nature is socially constructed and has evolved with each passing epoch. Persistently, through these rising and falling constructions, the human/nature dualism has remained mostly stable. Human rationality is the foreground, while nature is in the background for the taking. Human rationality is responsible for civilization, while alignment with nature is an association with savagery. Human rationality is what will lead to transcendence, while nature's chaos and unpredictability is a puzzle to deal with on the way. There are infinite reasons for this divide, yet in each case the human world is understood as *the better* side. As reasonable creatures, it seems unreasonable to group us within an unreasonable nature that eats itself and seems intent on harming us. But at the turn of the twentieth-first century, a reflection of our role within the global ecosystem was given to us in the form of climate change, perhaps, for the first time, making clear that there is no escaping our true nature; we are as much a part of this system as the bees pollinating the almond trees - a continuing denial of which will slowly drag us to extinction. In vanishing ice caps and city-drowning hurricanes, climate change has chipped away at the human/nature dualism, while transcorporeality has melted the opposing categories into one another. COVID-19, in an almost poetic tragedy, has acted as the final thrust to shatter this dualism once and for all. This blend between the human and the non-human world is emphasized through modes of thinking that have been streamlined through the pandemic response effort.

“Flattening The Curve”

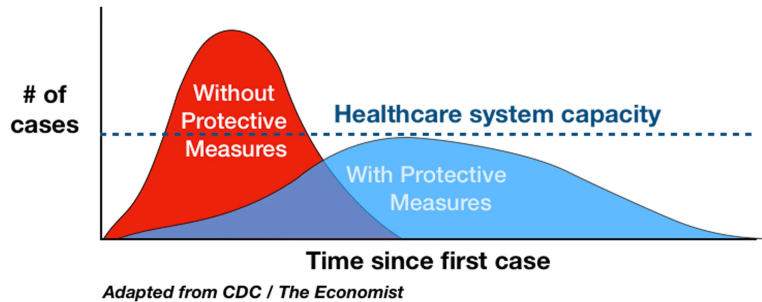


Figure 1: Flattening The Curve Graph

“Flattening the curve” has become a universal phrase during this moment of crisis. This graphic representation (see *Figure 1*) went viral in late February, containing “a steep peak indicating a surge of coronavirus outbreak in the near term [and] a flatter slope, indicating a more gradual rate of infection over a longer period of time” (Roberts). The two curves express the urgency of slowing the spread of COVID-19 in order to prevent “a tidal wave” of cases capable of overwhelming healthcare systems. Countries decimated by the virus early in its spread, such as Italy and Spain (death rate: ~ 12-13%), became examples of failing to flatten the curve. Similarly, as of January of 2021, the United States, verging on 30 million cases, represented a continued failure to flatten the curve with a death rate of 1.7% (“Mortality Analysis”). Meanwhile, countries such as Singapore (~60,000 cases with only 29 deaths) and Israel (death rate: ~0.7%) provide us with scenarios when “flattening the curve” works at its best. But while the famous graphic provides us with an easy-to-understand data set to convince people and governments to take preventative measures, it also provides us another piece of information; we cannot stop the spread of virus *through us*.

Flattening the curve efforts exemplify a common effort of humans to partially manipulate time, and therefore delay or accelerate natural occurrences. Human innovation has long tried to *beat* time. The technological evolution of transportation systems, genetic modifications to grow crops faster, and medicines that delay death are all aimed at molding time to fit human desires. These developments create an illusion of control over natural processes and their cycles. Yet, in most cases, these are *partial* rather than complete manipulations. For as fast a plane may move from continent to continent, there will always be twenty four hours in a day. Likewise, doubling human life expectancy does not eliminate the prospect of death. In other words, the ability to slow down natural processes is not a complete *halt*, and speeding up natural processes are not infinite in their accelerations. Yet, these partial victories over the rate of natural processes embolden human activity

to act as if time, and therefore nature, is always on our side or under our dominion. It is only within the past half a century, with a rising awareness of climate catastrophe and an increased rate of natural disasters, that this dogma has been challenged. This is a direct symptom of the anthropocene, with the global impact of human activity becoming increasingly evident. Partnered with higher interconnectivity and access to information during the digital age, the ability to manipulate both time and nature is appearing to be increasingly weak. In fact, the narratives and vocabulary rising out of these developments place both sides of the dichotomy in direct competition with one another, with headlines commonly referencing the “*race* against climate change” and how “the *clock* is ticking for human action on the climate.” Crises, especially those on a global scale, reveal the fragility of the illusion of complete control over time. This revelation is captured in the flattening of the curve image. The slopes on the graph are both made up of the same number of infections. The data point contributing to their different shapes is the rate of infections, not the amount. As noted by Brandon Specktor, a flatter curve does not indicate a fall in cases, but “assumes the same number of people ultimately get infected, but over a longer period of time.” One curve is condensed within a shorter time frame, while the other is stretched over a wider period. Both represent a continuous spread of the virus. We may shrink or stretch out time to partially manipulate the spread of the virus, but we cannot bring time, and thus the spread of the virus, to a halt.

The projected inability for society to eliminate the virus, or even decrease the number of infections, actually allows for the flattened curve graph to become a metaphorical model for the intrinsic bond between the human and non-human world. Each curve on the graph assumes human action or inaction, and while there is an impact on the rate at which the virus spreads, overall it continues to run its course. This “course” is one that involves an inevitable permeation through barriers, households, hospitals, country borders, and most importantly, skin. The flattening of the curve graph, then, provides us with two other truths beyond how to preserve healthcare systems. The first is that the human side of the human/nature dichotomy is not limitless and not *stronger* than its counterpart. As Val Plumwood notes, “the continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development.” Yet, this concept is complicated when nature cannot be overcome. Ironically, in this particular case, nature, or the virus, subverts the dualism noted above, in that humans and human action become the puzzle to deal with on the virus’s path to transcendence, which while lacking a conscious goal, most evolutionary biologists believe is a goal of continuous duplication for maximum spread. The second truth is that rationality does not remove humans from the messiness of nature, and rather, humans are one piece of a broader system of interconnectedness. The inevitability of infection is an inevitability of *merging*. *Scientific American* explains:

When a virus enters a cell (called a host after infection), it is far from inactive. It sheds its coat, bares its genes and induces the cell’s own replication machinery to reproduce the intruder’s DNA or RNA and manufacture more viral protein based on the instructions in

the viral nucleic acid. The newly created viral bits assemble [and] more virus arises, which also may infect other cells.

The title given to the human's role in this process as *host* is a linguistic symbol for the innate desire for a dualistic relationship; a host and an unwanted guest. However, the virus permeates the human cells, becoming *one* with them and then creating a *blend* of human and viral cells. It is also notable that the vaccination process follows a similar merging process, though with a lower or weakened viral load. At this point in the infection, which part of these cells are human and which are the virus? This merging is emblematic of Alaimo's transcorporeality. The inevitability of the process, represented by the flattening of the curve graph, demonstrates the underlying connectivity that allows it to occur.

Social Distancing

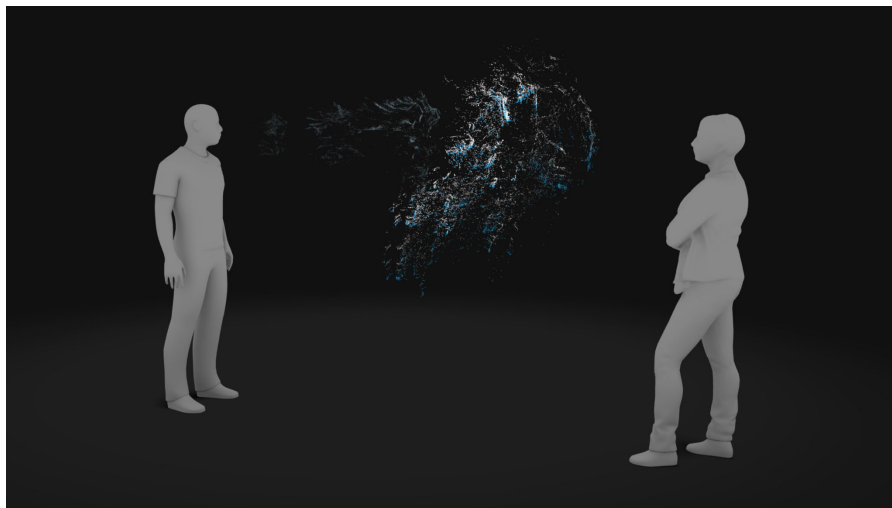


Figure 2: A visual representation of “gas clouds” spreading droplets across space.

In an effort to accomplish flattening the curve, policies of social distancing have been enacted worldwide. This has been enforced by governments and has been voluntary. In mid-March of 2020, the Center For Disease Control (CDC) in the United States “recommended against any gatherings of 50 or more people,” resulting in the shut down of “public schools, libraries, universities, places of worship and sporting and cultural institutions” (Mandavilli). Soon after, some cities such as New York, shuttered all businesses and social activities that were not considered essential. Beyond this, individuals have taken it upon themselves to shelter-in-place, or remain within the confines of their homes to increase the overall level of distancing taking place. On April 3rd of 2020, these efforts to create space between individuals were reinforced by the CDC, which urged all individuals to wear a mask if and when they leave their homes. Now, rounding a year of social distancing policies, individuals continue to maintain distance between one another while businesses continue to operate at low, in person capacities. By adopting and abiding by these

policies, large swaths of the West have recognized a responsibility of one individual to another, which is founded on a sense of connectivity through *breathing*. The air we breathe has become not only a route for the virus to spread and duplicate, but a thicker, connective tissue linking together the actions, bodies and health of individuals. In Monika Bakke's book *The Life Of Air: Dwelling, Communicating, Manipulating*, she discusses the textures and complexities of air that paint it as a living entity, rather than as an invisible atmosphere that floats around us. Bakke states that each human breath may contain "hundreds of thousands of individual microbial cells" and that air itself is a vast habitat for all creatures on the planet. Beyond this, air is an ecosystem of transmission, or "the most ancient form of communication...jammed with chemical signals...Messages expressing desires, warnings and survival instructions are constantly sent via air by plants and animals." Assigning the drifting microbiology of the air with the fleshy and solid qualities Western philosophy has preferred to focus on, air can materialize as one of the largest syphoning mechanisms for transcorporeal exchanges, creating an eternal link between humans and nonhumans, as well as with one another. Bakke also notes that, historically, air exclusively materializes in this way "in moments of crisis such as pandemics," which is the side-effect of COVID-19. Social distancing has acknowledged this connectivity by placing at least 6 feet between individuals, with many people now acknowledging that this 6 feet is not *empty*. However, while this space can account for a decrease in contagious capacity, the distance underestimates how deeply intertwined the air we breathe makes us. Recent studies at MIT have shown that exhalations, coughs and sneezes "are primarily made of multiphase turbulent gas" (Bourouiba). These "gas clouds" allow for "pathogen-bearing droplets of all sizes" to travel almost 30 feet (See *Figure 2*). COVID-19 populates the air with devastating droplets and gives it a physicality that makes it feel as though individuals are *touching* each other from afar. However, whether the air is infected or not, there is always a *type* of physicality to it, acting as a transparent organ between individuals. It is only when the organ becomes sick that we begin to take notice.

Stimulus Packages and The Economy

The infected air we breathe has created a bond between us and our neighbors, but as COVID-19 rips through the global economy, economic bonds across geographies and class are also becoming apparent. When the United States economy initially shut down, there were 26.5 million unemployment claims. In combination with the 7 million unemployed prior to the pandemic, this adds up to roughly 20% of the country out of work. In an effort to blunt the blow of this economic fallout, the federal government passed a \$2 trillion economic relief plan on April 16th. The plan included stimulus checks of \$1,200 for most American adults. Under the plan, unemployment plans were vastly expanded, with a \$600 add-on to any amount already offered within the state of occupancy. Even those who were still working part time could receive unemployment benefits. Federal student loan payments, which impact 45 million Americans, have been suspended for two months, and \$370 billion has been dedicated to sustain small businesses (Bernard). As the virus continued throughout the year, further stimulus packages of up to \$900 billion have been passed,

providing further economic relief to individuals and businesses. All of these policies have taken a hyper-capitalist America and pushed it towards something that resembles a socialist state.

This phenomenon can be understood through *interactionism*, as explored through a similar lens in Nancy Tuana's essay "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." Tuana states that interactionism "acknowledges both the agency of materiality and the porosity of entities" and is "a metaphysic that removes any hard-and-fast divide between nature and culture." There are no phenomena that are the result of either nature or culture, but all rise out of a combination of both. Using Hurricane Katrina as an example, Tuana demonstrates how the devastation of the hurricane could not be blamed solely on natural disaster, but must be seen as the combination of social practices and natural phenomena. While hurricanes are naturally occurring, human involvement with climate change, through acts such as fossil fuel consumption, warms the ocean water, which has been pointed to as a cause for the magnitude of Katrina (Tuana). Alaimo notes that Tuana's emphasis on "mediating membranes" is a powerful model for understanding material interactions, and here, it can be applied to understanding the economic devastation of COVID-19. As many point to the decimation of the US economy as solely a result of the naturally occurring global pandemic, the massive stimulus was necessitated by the economic forces in place prior to the spread of the virus. One example is America's poor healthcare system. Due to overwhelming prices, according to PBS, 44 million Americans live without health insurance, while another 33 million operate with poor health insurance. Without health insurance, health services become unaffordable leading people to avoid seeking help when they are sick. During a pandemic, this may lead to a rise in individuals having symptoms, but opting not to go to the doctor due to the expenses involved. Furthermore, low wages for essential workers may force those who are sick to continue going to work, perpetuating the spread of the virus. While COVID-19 may be a highly contagious virus (an infection rate of one individual to five or six others) the unfortunate financial positions of some in America force unnecessary interaction, increasing the likelihood of the virus spreading at a higher rate (Haelle).

Similar to the poverty that kept some citizens of New Orleans from escaping from the hurricane, economic forces are exacerbating the "natural phenomena" of COVID-19, which in turn is contributing to the extremity of the current economic fallout. As Tuana puts it, "ignorance is materialized," noting that human neglect towards the climate begins to appear in seemingly unrelated parts of society. COVID-19, then, materializes economic inequality in America, the only immediate solution to which is the implementation of policies, which elevate the collective population. Through this process, the virus blurs the boundaries between what is natural phenomena and what is socially constructed, and the categories continue to collapse into one another. This is demonstrated thoroughly through the link between the economic effects of globalization and the global pandemic's rate of outbreak. During the crisis, the economic links between countries and companies can be reframed as pathways for viral spread. Considering global air travel routes (See *Figure 3*), these pathways for the exchange of goods and individuals between countries become highways for COVID-19, and begin to resemble something of a *global circulatory*

system (See *Figure 4*). The development of air travel is directly linked to economic growth and in normal considerations is not equated to the natural world. But what is a global pandemic without the capability to spread globally? What is the panic induced by COVID-19 and the current economic destruction without the speed of travel we've created? What does COVID-19 look like in a world without air travel? Globalization and the economic links between countries are not separate from the pandemic, they are *a crucial part* of the pandemic, and as such, become as equally linked and consequential within the material world as the breath that we share with one another. Therefore, COVID-19 merges the devastation of natural disasters with human rationality, further collapsing the human/nature duality.



Figure 3: An overview of daily global airpaths.

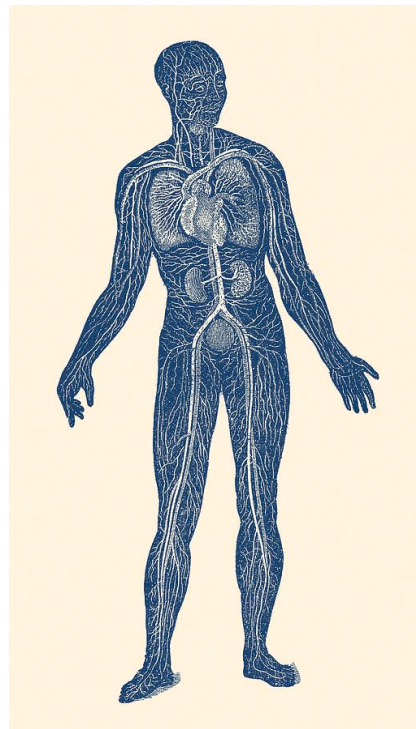


Figure 4: An artistic rendition of the human circulatory system.

Conclusion

Outlining his overall definition for the construction of nature, Braun argues that it is crucial to understand that nature

is always about much more than just nature. As our contributors show, it is increasingly impossible to separate nature off into its own ontological space. Thus, the remaking of nature(s) has wider implications—it becomes, quite simply, a focal point for a nexus of political-economic relations, social identities, cultural orderings, and political aspirations of all kinds.

Through this definition, COVID-19 becomes much more than a global pandemic, and while bringing along much suffering, can be recategorized as an event reflecting the necessity to broaden the boundaries that we've created between the human and non-human world. Certainly, there are human impacts from this pandemic that remain to be seen and other unexpected collisions with nature that have occurred due to quarantine. For example, animal shelters have experienced double the amount of adoptions this past year, which is another trend that has created a more intimate relationship with the non-human world due to the pandemic (Hedgpeth). It appears, then, that even through our pets, the pandemic is inching us closer to nature. A transcorporeal lens can aid in this recalibration, by beginning to recognize that the individual does not end at the barrier of the skin. Rather, the skin and our breath are examples of our innate connectivity with all objects in the material world. Pre-pandemic, a world that considered this connectivity and transmission of materials between one another may have been better prepared for the impacts of COVID-19. With scientists continually sounding the alarm on the human connection to the earth's climate, as well as a new pandemic that will inevitably materialize with a higher death rate, the call of the current epoch is one of collectivity and collapsing boundaries between the human and non-human world.

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The Sounds of Grief and Time in Rebirth

Regina A. Bernard-Carreño

In a normal instance, I couldn't tell you the sound of much of anything.

Time seemed to slip away, some days without noticing. Time in a pandemic, locked inside, I was forced to reckon with the privilege and anxiety of my breathing, as so many others were losing their rights to do just that. There was a forced recognition of time frivolously spent, time lost just before we were placed in our pauses, and the time-in-waiting that lay ahead of us.

New York City has been my home since my birth. I was born and raised on the West Side of Manhattan, which was renamed twice since I left to make it more appealing for those with wealth who so easily replaced us. Years later, living in neighborhoods outside of Manhattan would prove challenging for an assortment of reasons. None of those reasons seemed so confrontationally-obvious to the rest of the world than when COVID slammed communities sitting in quiet desperation against loud daily hustles. The financially-able shifted their dominance of city life into safe indoor spaces. They bought homes where the rest of us dream of vacationing and sent the real estate markets exploding in a frenzy of bidding wars. Now, city dwellers were looking for large, open spaces where they could be more than just six feet apart from people. They posted their life transitions from the cluttered, noisy, hectic, and unsafe, to their version of “peace and quiet” on social media in case we worried that they were missing. Some would say that the inevitableness of their recent return to the city disrupted a sensation of peace and that “too-much” quiet is a kind of bellicose with the self. Yet, in the absence of man, the city revealed a peaceful solitude in waiting. This slowed down, trickle-pace invited hundreds of photographs of birds visiting people's backyards, squirrels cracking and burying acorns at the start of the fall season, and bramble being crunched beneath their feet. People's departure from the city brought a kind of quiet welcome to the other inhabitants of our beautiful and destructive metropolis.

For those unable to leave, who were considered “essential” for the first time in their working lives, the sounds encompassing their lack of choices now ring loudly. When the illness picked up in intensity, we dutifully, if not fearfully, waited for it to pass us by; only time would tell when that would be, if at all. On my long New York street, seven walking blocks to the nearest train station, our new quiet was strange at first, when everyone tried to run for cover from an invisible danger lurking everywhere. Our unspoken fear and new noises that began to emerge drove our grief into inexplicable tunnels of anxiety. At the start of the pandemic, the voices of nightly news anchors weren't just backdrops after we came home from work. They brought us information, mainly about how many people had died, how many more were going to die, and how time would seem to

spread the disease and not control it, which increased our pain. Death was becoming a common theme and now, it's been a part of our daily lives for over a year, surrounding us, reminding us, imposing its reality on the living, subduing our joy, and layering loss one after the other without warning. One of the news anchors said, "we're taking you live to the epicenter of the virus, right here in New York. We want to warn you, tonight, that some of these images might be difficult to watch." The next shot was of Elmhurst Hospital, a public hospital in Queens, the largest and most diverse borough in New York. I wasn't surprised that Elmhurst/Corona, Queens had been given the tag of "epicenter." It's always been a place that public administration forgets. It's common for many residents in the neighborhood, who are picked up by ambulances, to often tell the EMT driver, "please don't take me to Elmhurst Hospital. It's where you go to die!" Until COVID, those residents were the only ones to ever hear that statement and find their way away from it, as they tried to be rerouted to another hospital, even if they were in dying need. The news that night brought video footage of hysterical, crying physicians and hospital staff who were safeguarding themselves from a deadly virus using garbage bags as personal protective equipment (PPE). I can still hear that one, young, female doctor on the news begging the government to send equipment to the hospital so she could do her best to save more lives. Her pleas became part of my nightmares as the "difficult image" I was warned about seeing was now projected across other channels throughout the rest of the week. It made me reflect on my own doctor's appointments before COVID, when examination rooms lacked sinks and when doctors never washed their hands in the presence of their patients.

If only for just a moment during the lockdown, we forgot the news by replacing it with some jazz music played during quiet, solemn dinners. Just as we forgot about the raging outside, we counted two to three ambulances flying down our street every single hour. We would hold our breath, waiting for the vehicle to stop, the sirens to stop, the doors to open and close, and for the whirring red lights to make our living room glow. If the siren stopped, we'd look out of the window and wait to see which one of our neighbors had been tapped by the virus and whether or not they left, still able to walk. The sound of the ambulance reminded us that we were to remain inside as much as possible because the plague was before us. While boredom might've been setting in for some, for others, anxiety was elevating and monotony was the last thing we could manage.

"Earplugs work," my coworker said.

"I should wear earplugs all day and all night? Because that's how often the ambulances are on my block."

"Yes! I ordered some really good ones on Amazon."

"I have children, I can't block up my hearing," I said.

"Get them some too. They shouldn't be listening to ambulances all day either," my colleague said.

Eventually, we became so used to the sound of the sirens that when we no longer heard it, we almost thought things were getting better, but the neighborhood was never absent of sirens of other kinds. We still had other kinds of societal ills that police responded to— but the ambulances for the sick felt different. Months later, the city and its “miracle money” built a makeshift hospital at U.S.T.A. Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in a neighborhood ravaged by stark disparities in wealth. I thought of all the people that were never able to afford a tennis game ticket, but there they were, now lying in a hospital bed in the middle of a world-famous stadium. Accompanying the wailing of sirens, helicopters now flew and hovered ever so low that homes and apartments trembled, while vibrations drowned out the cop cars zipping past. We thought the helicopters were airlifting patients from overcrowded hospitals and bringing them to a place where they could get adequate treatment. It forced us to try and be empathetic. We were at home, at risk more than others with our pulmonary disorders caused by years of living in a high traffic area flanked by auto body shops; yet, we weren’t in need of hospital care just then and the ambulances and helicopters in the sky made us humble. That is, until we discovered that patients weren’t being airlifted as we had believed, but rather the helicopters belonged to news networks and stations covering the hospital’s construction and, later, the scandal of its emptiness.

In the middle of the chaos, people ran out of food. We heard the mayor’s twilight-zone-esque daily tune, in English and Spanish, reporting that food was available if people just called the hotline or headed to a local public school. If there wasn’t food in your fridge or in your cupboards, you could find it nearby, free of charge. The only challenge was that you’d have to get on a line early and needed the stamina to stand and wait, sometimes for over an hour on a line that snaked the city’s inner streets like a human python. These food lines resembled government food lines of the 1980s and some elders said they remembered the bread and soup lines of their own youths some forty, fifty years ago. In poorer neighborhoods, food pantries and soup kitchens are adjacent to people’s homes and are next to rehab centers, positioned neatly two blocks from an elementary school and down the block from a shop filled with teasing substances. The crowd of people, unable to properly physically-distance themselves from each other, brought chairs and benches to sit on while they moved closer to the entrance of the food distribution door. The cops drove by every so often to make sure people were distancing, they themselves were apprehensive about getting close. Arriving as early as seven in the morning, people’s aggravated conversations filled the atmosphere just below my living room window.

“How long will it be today?” one woman asked.

“Yesterday I got up there and by the time I did, there was no more food. I had been on the line for like an hour as it was,” another said.

“So, what you did?”

“I went to the school and got me one of the school lunches,” the first woman said.

“A school lunch? That ain’t enough. They give groceries over here,” she said.

“That’s why I came early today. So after this time, I’m gonna join the line again. They let you do it twice.”

The people on line talked about how to map a plan for access, their tired tricks of the trade, and the fine tunings of their urban hustle, all while government officials on the television behind me repeated the same lines as the day before. After a few weeks of listening to different versions of the same conversation, among angry people who were grateful for the food and disappointed by its quality, days began to blend into each other. I began to work incessantly, first, waking as early as possible to beat the timing of their arrival in front of my place. The earlier I awoke, the more I heard birds that seemed to take a liking to the London Plane tree right down my stairs. My mood sank when the birds didn’t show up to sing and dropped even lower when I saw the disappointment grow across my children’s faces who had grown dependent on their visits. For the first time in a long time, the birds were the reason for us to look outside and not see grief, someone in fear, something that wouldn’t challenge our air quality, and became something that gave us hope. Yet, with the setting sun, we forgot those reminders and tried hard to focus our minds on something else, anything that could be pleasant in a neighborhood so traumatized by societal neglect.

In the late evenings of COVID’s first winter in New York, when I thought no one would be close to my floor window facing the street, I’d fling open the window and inhale, then exhale. The sharpness of the cold weather reminded me of the last time I saw my students. Days before the lockdown we were up in Harlem when the alerts came on our phones about a deadly virus spreading across the country. We disbanded and went home. The next time I saw them was on Zoom, in the (dis)comfort of our homes, when we tried to continue with the community we had just built a month prior. I thought about them on those nights when the streets were quiet and I could hear the rickety, above-ground, train in the distance, going back and forth past my neighborhood and into another. It wasn’t the first time, but it had been a long time since I had heard that train. In previous months, during those evening hours, I’d either be tending to my children, still at work teaching well after nine o’clock, or maybe fast asleep from my wear-out. Perhaps, my husband also would’ve been at work on the night shift, but we certainly would’ve missed the sound of the iron horse galloping across the steel rail taking people to and from the city. I wondered what sounds my students were hearing, now that they were having to tend to their learning from home. When I asked, I learned that many of them were struck by the ambulances too, for we lived in the same community.

The pockets of silence surrounding my neighborhood had been overlooked, or maybe it was never that quiet at all. The reason for the sudden hush was clear though. People were afraid that the tranquility would soon bring ill-controlled outbursts of one kind or another, but, until then, people found comfort together-apart in the terror of the invisible. I wasn’t sure how to feel after hearing the train for the first time in years. A year ago, coming from that direction, was the sound of a rave taking place at Citifield. The video-game beat of electronic music blasted into my son’s bedroom window and pulsed in my head for days after the event, until the sun came up the next

morning. At least people were out, together, gathering, enjoying each other's company, despite the residue and all the trailing garbage the partygoers left behind. Still, the sound of the pandemic train gave me cause for concern. I thought about the conductor and the cleaning staff. For as many times as the train would leave the station and another returned zipping past, I wondered how many aboard were sick, how many others would become sick, and how many of them were able to ride the train on the bravery and strength of that conductor. Soon after, the mayor and the governor decided to shut the subway system down for nights ahead. When the train stopped whizzing past, I heard other things.

Under the faint yellow streetlights, and on empty streets, skateboards rolled across the asphalt next to squeaky bicycle boys popping wheelies like it was summer and not twenty degrees outside. Masked people sped-walked up and down the block to the corner bodega, to the bus stop, and to the liquor store. I heard them as their sneakers, boots, and other footwear knocked the pavement in methodical taps and steps. As I lay awake, wondering about the daytime hours ahead when I'd be greeted by the same routine as the day before, I held my breath listening to the vulgar exchanges of drunken lovers arguing, tearing off their masks in emotional defiance, and throwing them on the concrete right outside my window. Never did an unmasked verbal fight interest me so much as I thought about bodily fluids being carelessly expunged from screaming mouths in abandoned rage.

As the city warmed up, so did the social butterflies. I laid in my melancholy, thick with memories of months just before when I was in the midst of a previous grief that went untended—the death of my father. People cramped in their small houses, smaller apartments, and illegally-over-crowded basements and rented rooms, emerged in front of their buildings. They disputed the benefits of wearing a mask and whether Fauci was right about this or that. Everyone became a local scientist and doctor, if not a downright expert on the virus itself. Outside my window, various musical genres competed in volume as I tried to teach my classes. Sometimes, I looked into my screen and saw thirty-five faceless black tiles because people were not in the mood to share their living spaces with each other. Now and again, I had to pause and ask them to repeat themselves because the laughter and partying from someone's terrace would block them out.

Waiting for my class to be over, my sister called me and told me she was desperate for some quiet. "Where is everyone finding the money to move suddenly? Did they save up for this rainy day? Did they know it was gonna happen? I can't hear myself think!" Sheltering-in-place, above her apartment, was a family with loads of people who moved in together to weather the storm. They never took their shoes off and, at night, dragged furniture around to accommodate everyone. In the morning, they dragged the furniture back into its original place to make a living room again. Across from her building, at seven o'clock every evening, those who participated in the "call of courtesy," banged pots and pans and blew whistles for essential workers, but the essential workers were still working and didn't hear the gratitude. No one on my block banged pots or pans. Most were essential workers and were never home when the thanks was being performed. Others on my block were angry and laid off or hospitalized with COVID. We had enough noise. Public-facing workers

wanted a raise, personal protective gear, and a guarantee of some kind of safety precautions. They got none of these. Those who were home and in better condition, played their music loudly for all of us to hear, regardless of whether we could sing along. As the summer rushed in to erase the spring from our memories, things remained the same, as did the sounds of the city. Only, the cries of protest now drowned out the music and people felt less festive than they did outraged.

We never would have believed that, after last summer, we would have entered the fall with continued grief; still very much indoors, still lulled to sleep by helicopters, ambulances, and police car sirens, as well as fire trucks putting out winter fires. I wonder if anyone found peace and quiet this past year—my Zoom yoga and mindfulness workshops proved ineffective. My grief for my father weighed heavily on the grief of our humanity and for the loss of loved ones all over the world. Noises too loud alongside people definitively non-compliant with orders of required precautions kept my desire to rebirth in limbo. This thing, this plague, woke up our selfishness and our kindness—the two were at war in the worst way. I wonder if matters from the before times, that seemed so pertinent and pressing, had now been resolved. Or, did they fade into the background, where things that matter less than survival seem to be filed away; my concerns are still ever present. It seems that in many ways, the sounds of grief have forced some of us to try and rebirth ourselves. We have begun to understand life's limitations and have been confronted with things we pretended didn't exist. For many, the opportunity to deny inequities has run out and the stop motion we fell into has awakened our sense of existence. Things too difficult to imagine before are real now. For many others, those very things were always in our faces, above our heads, and flying down our streets, demanding our attention; instead of addressing them, we coped like they were our accessories.

To consider our futurity and survival is to consider ourselves in a kind of rebirth, perhaps, with accord. We have adapted to loneliness, as some even embrace seclusion and, perhaps, met themselves for the first time. We were given a forced opportunity to decide whether or not we could contend with ourselves in the ways that we were, the ways we are forced to be now in this quiet space, and the manner in which we shift ahead. Many will be impacted by the confrontation of their own understanding of inequality and privilege. The wounds some bare will only be in passing for others as the chants for change ring loudly...ring deafly. Some will walk a fine line, a tightrope way too high above reality for the rest of us to contend with and they will have to consider a kind of accountability of the self. We all will have to reassess who we were and who we have become and whether we will make allowances to hear the birds that will soon be drowned out by a careless, amnesic humanity. In this moment of continued pause, some of us will desire and hope not just for the future, but for the instance in which we find ourselves born anew.

In memory of all the souls that time forgot.

Swimming Sonnet

Steve Mentz

Intoxicated by the moon's warm light*
I swim on the morning's rising green flood.
Neptune's tentacled body's suckers bite,
Sting, caress, enwrap flesh, warm as my blood.
Saltwater holds summer's last memory,
Nostalgia's lure, flashing silver like fish-
Bellies. I'm sea-swimming, salt sensory
Surrounds me, holds me, echo-feeds my wish
To be and not to be, no more questions.
Moon moves the ocean and the sea moves me.
To who else should I turn for suggestions?
Splashing above an immensity. Sea
Sees in me what I can't find in myself.
Other worlds. Not those trapped on the bookshelf.

*Editor's Note: This poem is a part of a sonnet corona project, where the first lines are by other poets. The first line of "Swimming Sonnet" is by Sean Tribe.

When the Bookshelf Becomes the World

Maureen Daniels

Other worlds, not those trapped on the bookshelf,*
chime over the trellises in the rose
garden at four o'clock inside smoke shells
tossed by toddlers across the espressos
in their nanny's hands. Cobweb cylinders
tremble over the path toward the shrine
where a newlywed couple disappears under
the shade of the Japanese maple. Fine
things birthdays are. It's mine again. My son
sits six feet away from me now beneath
a cherry tree and I think anyone
would swoon in his glow, sunlight unleashed
in his unfamiliar beard, those anthems
all mothers learn to sing when manhood comes.

*Editor's Note: This poem is a part of a sonnet corona project, where the first lines are by other poets. The first line of "When the Bookshelf Becomes the World" is from Dr. Steve Mentz's "Swimming Sonnet."

Contributor Biographies (in order of appearance):

Christina Montalti is a Bachelor of Science student at The College of Staten Island, City University of New York, expecting to graduate in Spring 2022. She is studying Communications, Design, and Digital Media. She is a multi-medium artist who experiments with digital design as well as sketching and painting.

Faten Hafez is an adjunct professor at Kean University and St John's University. She is a Ph.D. student at St John's University with expected graduation in September 2021. Her dissertation topic is Representations of Nature and Ecological Collapse in the Novels of Jane Austen, Lydia Maria Child, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick. Central to this topic is Jane Austen's novels, which are rarely analyzed from this perspective. She has a special interest in representations of the environment in the early Anglo- American literature and her research is driven by this interest. She teaches Shakespeare Survey, World Literature, Global Literature, and College Composition. She was awarded the Graduate Student Paper Award, 2020 by Seton Hall University, the McDonnell-Millard Teaching Excellence Award, 2018 by Kean University, and the Egyptian American Medical Association Award, 2017 by EAMS Association. Her paper "Jane Austen: from Androcentrism to Anthropocentrism." is published in *The Watchung Review*. She is also a poet and writes prose, lyrics, and non-fiction creative writing. Instagram poetry account: [thoughts_in_rhymes](#).

Carmel McMahon graduated from the Graduate Center (CUNY) in the Fall of 2020 with an MA in Liberal Studies (Biography/Memoir track). Her writing has appeared in the *Irish Times*, *Longreads*, *The Hennessy Book of Irish Fiction*, *A Woman's Thing* and other places. She is currently editing an anthology of Irish Immigrant Women Writers and finishing a book project that grew out of her MA thesis, on the subject of trauma and time.

During the New York lockdown for Covid-19 in the Spring of 2020, she found herself experiencing a kind of paralysis. She sat at her desk and stared out the window unable to take any kind of action. She became interested in this state because it was not new to her. It echoed what she experienced in the wake of her brother's death in Ireland, on the summer solstice—the longest day—of 1998. She wanted to explore the link between personal and collective trauma and the ways our perceptions of time are altered by grief.

Dr. Arsevi Seyran recently finished her PhD at Stony Brook University, where she completed a dissertation on Elizabeth Bishop's poetry and negative capability. Prior to that, she earned an MFA at the University of Oregon and taught there, as well as at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. She has made Manhattan her home for the last five years, and wrote "2 Sticker max" after a visit she made to a clinic that is designed for survivors of terminal illness.

Maureen Daniels This is not the poet's name. This is not a sentence describing the poet's use of she/her | they/them pronouns. This is not the name of the university where the poet received her | their M.F.A. This is not a list of the poet's previous publications. This is also not a list of awards received by the poet. This is not a witty explanation of the poet's current areas of interest, nor is it a gratuitous mention of the poet's two cats, Dragon and Ocean Vuong, who often appear in the poet's work. This text confirms with amusement: This is not a bio. Nowhere is there a bio. This is not a bio but a sentence stating that this is not a bio. The poet is not Maureen Daniels. There is no Maureen Daniels.

Pragati Gupta is currently an offer holder for a postgraduate degree in Social Anthropology at SOAS, London. She completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology from Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi. Her broad research interests are in the field of Sociology of knowledge, religion, gender, and collective memory. Her research endeavors are auto-ethnographic, reflexive, post-colonial, post-modern, and feminist in orientation.

This essay is an attempt to understand hierarchies, identities, and differences of experiences in the state of unprecedented global risk, and how it shapes remembrances and production of binaries. It has been written in an attempt to theorize the acceptance of binaries in daily life and imagination of surroundings in terms of these binaries, and, finally, how all of this manifests itself into shaping the popular perception of time.

Dr. Natalie M. Dorfeld is an Associate Professor of English in the School of Arts and Communication at Florida Institute of Technology, where she teaches freshman composition and literature. Her work has been featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *CEO MAGazine: Journal of the College English Association Middle Atlantic Group*. Additionally, she currently serves as a co-editor for *Forum: Issues About Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, which focuses on adjunct professors working in the humanities.

She wrote this piece because she thinks professors need practical advice in the classroom vs. theories. The COVID-19 pandemic hit everyone hard. Students and professors are human, and we all need a healthy scoop of grace during this time. A warped sense of humor helps, too. In her spare time, she enjoys open water ocean swims, photography, and taking in very ugly stray cats and dogs.

Grant David Crawford a PhD candidate at St. John's University and an adjunct professor at several higher education institutions throughout New York City. His research interests include the digital humanities, ecocriticism and travel writing. This paper was conceived during endless quarantine time to consider what the unspeaking world (nature) was saying in response to a pandemic that the speaking world (us) could not stop talking about. The initial rumblings of this paper coincided with his reading of Stacey Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality, which made it all click: *like other natural disasters, the pandemic is so disturbing because it renders the boundaries we've set between ourselves and the natural world useless*. Unique in this disaster, though, is a lack of

geographical containment and a drawn out duration that demands an ongoing response. Unlike a tsunami or hurricane, which serve as quick reminders of nature's destructive capacity, the pandemic does not discriminate in its "landfall," nor does it quickly recede. In an epoch that rests on the precipice of climate disaster, the omnipotence of COVID-19 has revealed intrinsic bonds between you, me and the natural world. He hopes this paper helps us all heed this eerie warning.

Dr. Regina A. Bernard was born and raised in Hell's Kitchen, NYC. She holds graduate degrees in African American Studies and Urban Education. Dr. Bernard is currently an Associate Professor of Black and Latino/a Studies at the City University of New York. She has written three books on feminism, Black Studies, and radical education. Alongside broadly publishing, she has made a film on Guyanese feminism and food. Currently, she can be quietly found working on multiple creative projects.

Dr. Steve Mentz teaches Shakespeare, the blue humanities, and literary theory at St. John's University. He wrote this sonnet in August 2020 as part of the Sonnet Corona Project, a collaborative poetics group that assembled on Facebook during the pandemic to create shared forms in the face of global disturbances. Other recent publications include poems in *Blood & Bourbon*, the book *Ocean*, and the edited collection *The Cultural History of the Sea in the Early Modern Period*. He tweets @stevermentz.

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”

-T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”