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IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

MASSIVE/MICRO SENSEMAKING

Guest Editors: Mary Elizabeth Luka, Annette N Markham, Dan Harris

Issue 12-2, 2021

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MASSIVE/MICRO SENSEMAKING: TOWARDS POST-PANDEMIC FUTURES

MARY ELIZABETH LUKA

ANNETTE N MARKHAM

DAN HARRIS

In what ways have forms for engendering the interconnection and materiality required for creative production changed in the time of COVID-19? How and why have our notions of imagining and visualizing cross-cultural production and its modes of research, analysis, and representation shifted? The global pandemic and responses to it through various forms of cultural production have seen an explosion of productivity and collective social actions as well as the reinforcement of entrenched systemic racism and other forms of discrimination and imbalance. In this special issue, authors weave together a series of dialogues, methodological approaches, and materialities that reflect on the visibility of the experiences that were first developed through shared critical

En quoi la façon de produire les liens et la matérialité nécessaires à la production créative ont changé pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 ? Comment et pourquoi nos notions de l'imagination et de la visualisation de la production interculturelle et ses modes de recherche, d'analyse et de représentation ont évolué ? La pandémie mondiale et les manières d'y faire face par le biais de diverses formes de production culturelle ont donné lieu à une explosion de la productivité et à des actions sociales collectives, ainsi qu'au renforcement d'un racisme systémique enraciné et à d'autres formes de discrimination et de déséquilibre. Dans ce numéro spécial, les auteurs entrelacent une série de dialogues, d'approches méthodologiques et de matérialités qui s'interrogent sur la visibilité d'expériences qui ont d'abord été développées à travers des pratiques autoethnographiques

autoethnographic practices during and after an international Massive Micro Sensemaking experiment involving 165 people. critiques partagées pendant et après une expérience internationale de Massive Micro Sensemaking impliquant 165 personnes.

INTRODUCTION: A MASSIVE AND MICROSCOPIC LOCKDOWN

In May and June of 2020, more than 165 researchers, artists, and activists from 26 countries became involved in a co-creative research-creation practice that mobilized critical autoethnography to collectively process individual embodied, affective, political, and cognitive sensibilities that were challenged and made more visible by COVID-19 lockdowns and subsequent events (Markham, Harris and Luka 2020). The goal of the 21-day Massive Micro Sensemaking autoethnography challenge was to use self-guided prompts to build embodied sensibilities toward the material this emergent community of practice was studying. It also enabled a shared practice of autoethnographic forms of writing and making, and transformed personal experiences through the COVID-19 moment into critical understandings of scale, sense-making, and the relationality of humans, nonhumans, and the planet. As the project unfolded, it increasingly engaged with image-based vernaculars, particularly through a private Facebook group (Figure 1), but also in Google docs and on the group's email listserv. Sometimes guided but often unsolicited, this vernacular included shared images, images as responses, videos, and audio clips. In this special issue of *Imaginations*, the authors, editors, and co-editors work collectively to weave together a series of dialogues, methodological approaches, and materialities that reflect on and theorize the sensorial nature of the experiences that were first documented through the shared critical autoethnographic practices during and after the international Massive Micro Sensemaking experiment. These pieces reflect the outcomes of what we retrospectively understand as an emerging and collaborative form of critical pedagogy, as well as the formation of a Community of Practice (CoP) in response to a major global crisis.

Figure 1: Screen capture of the MMS Facebook private group landing image.

Massive Micro Sensemaking (MMS) came into being in April 2020, just weeks after many of the first national border closures and lockdowns to guard against the growing COVID-19 pandemic were announced. While the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared the virus a public health emergency on January 30 and a global pandemic on March 11,¹ border closures and lockdowns only arrived in mid-March in most places around the world. These included Australia (March 13),² Denmark (March 11),³ and the United States (March 13)⁴, with the European Union (March 17), Canada (March 20),⁵ and India (March 24)⁶ coming a week later—to name just a few of the countries where MMS participants were located. The impulse to generate a community of practice of 165 artists, scholars, and activists grounded in ethnographic visual culture came much earlier. Annette Markham reached out to several colleagues around the world starting in February and March, becoming increasingly aware that (globally) we were about to go through a collective experience that few would have experienced on this scale before. By late March, Dan Harris was involved as a co-lead on the project, and Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Luka joined shortly after, behind the scenes, to prepare

for and help organize the project. Initially, the intent was to use a call for a special issue of a journal (see <https://futuremaking.space/call-for-participation/>) to solicit a dozen or so expressions of interest and then build an autoethnographic collaboration. Instead, more than 150 people responded to the call, expressing their urgent and often poignant desires to participate with others in making sense of the radical changes happening in their everyday lives as a result of the pandemic. Markham and Harris recognized that MMS had already started to coalesce as a community of practice. MMS as a collaborative autoethnographic creative/critical research response was born. We (Markham, Harris, and Luka) developed a 21-day series of critical autoethnographic prompts (Markham and Harris 2020) in late April and early May that then rolled out over a private Facebook group and an email listserv between May 18 and June 7, 2020. These prompts always included a specific writing, thinking, drawing, mapping, or otherwise performative exercise to be completed in 24 hours if possible, along with the same ‘mantra’ about the overall goal of the 21-day autoethnography challenge (see Figure 2).

Given that there were people from 26 countries involved from time zones around the world, many of the prompts were designed to be conducted at a time that felt right to individual participants. The prompts were posted and emailed so as to be available first thing in the morning in the southern hemisphere, which meant that it looked like the prompts were circulated the night before in the northern hemisphere. And while some prompts asked group members to deepen an inquiry started in an earlier prompt, there was plenty of leeway to decide how to respond to the prompts. Several of the prompts asked people to use visual imagery and arts, sound, dance or movement, and video recordings, as well as written work, including prose, poetry, and more academic writing (as they chose). One participant responded by creating a painting over the 21 days. Others responded by constructing and assembling quilts as well as in writing (indeed, one of the quilts provides a thread of connection to the articles in this issue). Many participants experimented with the sensorial opportunities offered through the visual and performing arts prompts provided throughout the 21-day period as ways to adapt to their new

Figure 2: Screen capture of the introduction to the first prompt on the private Facebook group, including the 'mantra,' which was repeated in every subsequent prompt.

Permission of the authors.

realities in the early, frightening days of the pandemic. Prompt 1 reflects the spirit of the MMS experience, including the early and very temporary optimism just weeks after initial lockdowns in the southern hemisphere (see Figures 3 and 4).

For the participants involved in the Facebook group, there was a lot of spontaneous uploading of images or writing, with plenty of peer

Figure 3: Facebook screen capture of the first prompt, May 18, 2020. Permission of the authors.

encouragement for sharing responses, no matter how raw or revealing—so long as the person uploading the material was comfortable doing so. And while some people knew a few of the other people in the group when the 21-day prompts began, most people didn't know many others. So, this experience of sharing work-in-progress, or more accurately, work-barely-begun—particularly on a visually-oriented platform subject to American laws of social media surveillance—became quite a vulnerable and protective space for emerging and more established artists and scholars to interact in both supportive and supported ways. These works-barely-begun took many shapes and forms, some of which are represented in Figures 5-8 below.

Figure 4: Screen capture of the first prompt on Facebook, May 18, 2020. Permission of the authors.

MAKING SENSE OF CHANGE IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The COVID-19 pandemic upset massive economic, aesthetic, lifestyle, and political systems, among others. At the quotidian level, even the tiniest habits were challenged, including food accessibility or permission to hug someone. The 21-day autoethnographic challenge acted as a locus of activity around which narratives to iteratively explain, analyse, or resist the massive changes demanded locally and globally during the pandemic could be sketched out or practiced. This broader goal was reflected in our shared desires to do something useful and generative during lockdowns and beyond. While we (Luka, Markham, and Harris) have each used arts-based methods in different ways (including for MMS), it is Markham's long-time engagement with microscopic observation and analysis in combination with digital or online ethnographic

methods-as-ethics in communities of practice (e.g. Markham and Buchanan 2015), and as a form of critical pedagogy (e.g. Markham 2019) that provided a global framework for MMS. Similarly, Harris's modelling of critical and caring autoethnographic practices and Markham's engagement with bricolage and the microscopic shaped many of the details of the prompts. Luka's long experience of and research about the considerable behind-the-scenes work of design and planning required to nurture collective projects and to proliferate media-making added a time- and image-based dynamic (e.g. Luka 2018).

The MMS project is a good example of a deliberate attempt to foster a dynamic cohesive community of practice (CoP) during a global crisis. In literature about the composition, processes, and commitments of CoPs, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) note that CoPs comprise people who come together to examine similar (often complex) problems in the world, particularly emergent or pressing issues. While often mobilized in health-based research and clinical environments, in recent years, finding ways to develop CoPs in other work environments (such as in academia or in private corporations) has been one way to accelerate knowledge-sharing or solutions to problems. By working together or (through periodic interaction) in parallel with one another, a group or groups seek to share tacit and emergent knowledge to better address unexpected developments (Hadjimichael and Tsoukas 2019), to collectively generate new knowledge, or to develop a cohesive way of responding to unusual situations (Dörfler and Ackermann 2012). In addition, as Pyrko, Dörfler, and Eden (2019) note, such learning-together is bounded by ongoing discussions and relationship-building—or as Luka has put it in the context of digital media production, by making something together for use not just by the artists and makers but by the whole community (2022). And while many CoPs develop organically, it is possible to generate a CoP in response to a particular situation. This was the case, for example, for the vaccine-development community that was able to develop, test, and distribute several kinds of vaccines within months of the virus appearing, with the help of billions of dollars of research funding as well as nation-state and global mandates. More

Mahato_25.05

Figure 5: Screen capture of the Dilkes, Erdely, Fowley, and Romano Prompt 3 video, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of the video makers.

modestly, this was also the case for Massive Micro Sensemaking, a CoP of 165 people whose degrees of separation from one another was no more than two. The CoP built on Annette Markham's extensive international network of (often digital) ethnographic researchers and creative practitioners where it intersected with Dan Harris's equally extended network of critical autoethnographic researchers and artists. These existing networks were augmented by the snowball ef-

Chemi_25.05

Figure 6: Screen capture of Chemi response to Prompt 8, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Tatiana Chemi.

fect of information about this project rolling through other loosely connected networks, and through specific outreach invitations, such as Luka's involvement of 19 graduate students in MMS through a University of Toronto course. While the initial 21-day prompt experience was taken up by 165 people, what is equally remarkable is that more than half of these individuals subsequently participated

Herman_0306

Figure 7: Screen capture of the Herman posting about the radio show hosted throughout the early days of the pandemic, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Andrew Herman

in one of the other MMS publication projects described below (special issues, exhibition, etc.). Each of these smaller projects developed its own way of working together and apart—some at arms-length, some with plenty of coaching from publication editors, and some with more interest in collective ways of working.

To facilitate the richness of a CoP in practice, the 21-day challenge built a curriculum of iterative and connected prompts, and encouraged collaboration through posting and sharing, giving feedback, and working with others on certain tasks. In other words, the prompts were not randomly presented, but sequentially formulated so the later prompts would build on earlier prompts, and the prompts encouraged different types of theoretical and analytical responses. Although this was experimental, this strategy drew on the collective educational expertise of Markham, Harris, and Luka, who each have expertise in teaching analytical and critical thinking through creative practice.

We would argue both these factors aided in the emergence of a large scale CoP—not only did we bring together and build a platform for a network of people interested in a common goal to study the lived impact of a pandemic, we also designed and mindfully facilitated a

Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt_29.05

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

Founding Members · May 29 at 3:53 PM

Prompt #11 Here, There and Elsewhere.

9

Seen by 74

Like

Comment

Figure 8: Screen capture of the Pruulman-Vengerfeldt response to Prompt 11, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Pille Pruulman-Vengerfeldt.

critical pedagogical framework to guide how this collaborative and collective study of the pandemic would proceed. This is illustrated, if not discussed in various ways, by some more directly than others, in the pieces of this special issue as well as the other publications with MMS, as we describe below.

PRODUCING, THINKING, MAKING

While the intensive experience of the 21-day autoethnographic challenge built a generous intellectual and creative CoP, and bridged a significant period of uncertainty, the project also yielded scholarly and creative outcomes. Once the initial 21-day period was over, we focused on generating publications for scholarly journals and exhibition opportunities that would encourage people to find ways to deepen their engagement with the work they had started in response to the pandemic and through the MMS experience. The first of these was a special issue for *Qualitative Inquiry* (see Markham, Harris, and Luka 2020), which included 22 articles. The peer review process was accomplished in less than six weeks, with the issue released by August of 2020. Thematically, the articles focused on primarily micro-level experiences generated through the 21-day autoethnography practice in the context of an exponentially growing global pandemic. Many of the authors referred to how this generated an intense CoP, whose members felt both deeply alone and highly connected to the international cohort of artists and scholars that was still emerging during the 21-day autoethnographic challenge and through the period that they wrote these early pieces. The second project was a series of videos generated in response to two prompts requiring collaboration (Prompt 3 and Prompt 21; see figures 11 and 12 respectively). The videos were curated and introduced by Harris, Markham, and Luka for the Mark De Garmo Virtual International Arts (VIA) Festival for Social Change in the fall of 2020. As Luka notes in this issue: “Many of the videos featured at the October 27 VIA Festival event took a close look at the experience of suddenly enforced isolation, with several using similarly jarring juxtapositions of sound, image and text” (“Resilience in Pandemic Sensemaking: Thinking Through a Community of Practice,” this issue). As with the written work featured in the *Qualitative Inquiry* issue, then, these videos presented and reflected on quite raw experiences using time-based media that incorporated static and moving images, and sound design.

Figure 9: Screen capture of Prompt 3 on the Facebook group. Permission of the authors.

The third project is an anthology focused on arts education and arts-based methodologies employing critical autoethnography approaches, titled *Massive/Micro Autoethnography: Creative Learning in COVID Times* (Harris, Luka, and Markham, in press). While first drafts for this project were developed concurrently with the first and second MMS projects, at the time of this writing, they are just now

Figure 10: Screen capture of Prompt 21 on the Facebook group. Permission of the authors.

in-press. The longer lead-time has enabled the authors and editors to sift in/through more layers of reflection and development in the year that has passed since the 21-day prompt series ended. The focus on arts education methodologies means that the work presented there looks at the relationships among students, researchers, and creative practitioners in learning environments.

That brings us to this special issue of *Imaginations*. While a few artists or authors participated in more than one of the four publications/exhibitions for the MMS project, for the most part each person self-selected and then was peer-reviewed into the project(s) that best suited their work. This was accomplished through participant responses to a second MMS call for papers/exhibition materials, which Markham, Harris, and Luka sorted according to the type of publication or exhibition venue that would best showcase and enable each author's research, not just in the MMS context, but more generally around the pandemic itself, and other work underway. This special issue of *Imaginations* became the space for some of the more enigmatic or productively unresolved work that was developed in this international Community of Practice. Of all the tentacles of work that continue to emerge from the MMS experience, this one mobilizes the use of metaphor, fragmentation, pattern-building, and multidisciplinary in found poetry, time-based media, and fiction (among other forms), and the oscillation—sometimes the collisions—between scholarly, social, and collaborative work grounded in visual cultural studies and theory, as well as in the digital. Authors involved in this issue use cross-cultural image, autoethnographic, and research-creation studies to advance learnings from a range of disciplinary and socio-cultural perspectives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its impacts on scholars, artists, and activists. Collectively, they extend contemporary digital, ethnographic, creativity, and cultural studies scholarship by incorporating international reflections on global digital mediation, cultural production, colonization, Black Lives Matter, and other concurrent geo-political issues and frameworks that have marked the pandemic's trajectories and impacts. The extending of such trajectories has also resulted in several conference presentations in spaces that are part-virtual, part-in-person, sometimes highly academic and sometimes wildly exploratory, as 2021 unwinds.

STITCHING TOGETHER THE ISSUE

As the authors involved in this issue began working together, it rapidly became clear that both a metaphorical and analytical stitching together of the themes and research would be crucial for organizing and making sense of the work on offer. Creative and critical autoethnographic engagements in this issue include the use of video-making, quilting, listening modalities, photography, poetry, and other forms of image-making and cross-cultural image studies. The nine quilt blocks produced by artist/author Corinna Peterken during the 21-day autoethnographic experiment became a visual rallying form around which the three groupings presented in this issue could congregate, assemble, disassemble, and reassemble. Indeed, the sequence and focus of each of the three groupings for the issue have been rethought numerous times as the authors sought to exercise collective feedback loops involving other issue participants (co-authors, co-editors, editors, and other authors) as well as through the usual peer review process facilitated by the editors. The piecing together of the issue as a collaborative exercise was a material foundation for the issue's thematics that is echoed in the key visual metaphor of the quilt, further explored in the co-editors' collectively-written reflection (Carlson, Golovatina-Mora, Peterken, Snevangers, Soronen, Talvitie-Lamberg). The metaphor of—and actual images from—one of the participant's quilts grounds the analysis and presentation of the articles, playing “an active part” in reflection and production (Barad 2003, 803). In a material sense, the boundaries and breakdowns between the self/social, massive/micro, and more complex dynamics are explored in the three groupings of three or four metaphorical quilt blocks (articles) that map changing relations on to one another.

The first four articles are thoroughly grounded in work that emerged directly from engagement in MMS. Corinna Peterken's (USA and Australia) offering delineates not just her use of quilting as a metaphor, but also sets us down the path of using that metaphor throughout the special issue. Peterken examines the fluxes and flexible experiences of time—especially in the early days of lock-

down—that lengthen and collapse (Ingold 2013), with no attention to markings on a clock, which means that it feels like days melt together into a week, or a month. The production of her quilt acts as a sensemaking response to COVID, enabling a more visual mode of re-grounding our notions of time. Kim Snepvangers (Australia) and Mary Rose McLaren (Australia) both acknowledge and respond to some of the broken social threads to which COVID-19 contributed and various ways of coping and repairing these threads, including our responses to colonization, climate change and calamitous weather events, as well as the movement of refugees and devastating political events such as the shootings that precipitated the resurgence of Black Lives Matter protests in the USA and around the world. Such events generate sometimes debilitating and yet clarifying intensities of feelings marked by uncertainty and change. Snepvangers offers a complex piece of writing that theorizes sensemaking, colonialism, and the pandemic in Australia. She introduces the notion of involuntary neighbourhood surveillance (picked up later in this issue by Andy Fischer Wright) and longstanding colonial oppressions in Botany Bay, Australia by examining the repetition of the municipal logo imprinted on the many garbage and organics bins standing to attention in her neighbourhood throughout the lockdown days of the pandemic as a departure point for her reflections and analysis. McLaren creates visually-appelling, powerful found poetry to respond to the seemingly infinite anxiety-producing instances of crisis, from unprecedented bush fires in Australia to the global pandemic and the resurgence of social protest for Black Lives Matter. The section is closed out by a reflection on the notion of resilience—a term that reverberated throughout the pandemic—through Luka’s (Canada) analysis of the MMS videos used in the VIA Festival programming in October 2020.

The second grouping of articles traces out a seemingly more distant connection to MMS, exploring complementary (auto)ethnographic experiences. From Japan, Rebecca Carlson puzzles out a series of abstract and yet observable realities and genetic possibilities at an experimental bioscience lab during COVID-19 that took place concurrently with her involvement in MMS. As parallel ethnographic sites

of complex interactions, Carlson constantly remakes her relations in the lab with rapidly-changing data at the biological and social levels, springboarding from a consideration of the picture of one grey and white striped mouse. Andy Fischer Wright (USA) narrows the enquiry to the highly local (activating analysis of the microscopic during MMS in his neighbourhood), reiterating anti-racism and territory themes introduced in the first group of articles, above. He develops the concept of “notifictions,” based on compulsive neighbourly surveillance that continues to take place on visual and text-based social media apps such as *Nextdoor* and *Neighbors* in the USA. Donatella Della Ratta (Italy) shifts the focus to the experience of students online and in the classroom during early pandemic conditions, bringing this into dialogue with some of the underpinnings of the MMS enquiry. Her work on fragmentation theory (Markham 2005) leads us quite nicely into Annette Markham’s discussion of pattern-seeking work while homeless in Denmark, en route to Australia during a pandemic, and while co-leading MMS.

The final grouping of articles explores the digital and personal intimacies disrupted and reshaped by the pandemic. This group of authors analyses how our visceral experiences of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and distraction varied throughout the pandemic. Veronica Mitchell (South Africa) uses her time with a patchwork of imagery and thread in Cape Town, not just as a relaxing distraction separated from her world of research and knowing in the discipline of obstetrics, but also as a way to help make sense of it before, during and after COVID-19. Anne Soronen and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg (Finland) trouble a layperson’s understanding of what “listening” means during a social crisis, and examine the ways in which the severe health crisis in Finland and the frequent use of different media channels and communication technologies precipitated a deafening range of online listening experiences, and the affective ambivalence that arose from these experiences globally. Finally, Polina Golovátina-Mora (Norway and Columbia) mobilizes new materialisms through the rhizomatic framing of Deleuze and Guattari (2005) and the speculative framing of Donna Haraway (2013) in the neighbourhoods of her mind and emotional states to proffer fragments of feelings, re-

actions, analyses, and descriptions of the conditions of lockdown in Columbia. She explores the in-between spaces, leaps, ruptures, and skipplings involved in her search for an alternative continuity, for a decentralized and decentralizing order that can nonetheless operate at both the self and the social level, and that makes sense by deconstructing and disrupting the sensibilities and observations offered to us by various authorities in COVID times.

Prefacing these three core groupings is a collaborative and contextual offering from the co-editors for this issue: Rebecca Carlson, Polina Golovátina-Mora, Corinna Peterken, Kim Snejvangers, Anne Soronen, and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg.

POLLINATING THE FUTURE

The work for this journal issue ranges from research that closely analyses the MMS experience 18 months on, through parallel or complementary autoethnographic experiences that the authors went through at the same time they were engaged in MMS, and on to work that pursues tangents, fragments, and additional foci for (post-) pandemic-based research. What sets this issue apart from prior research reports and outcomes of this project are three things. First, this issue has had time to breathe, time to reflect on more than 18 months' experience with the virus and its impacts, as well as on the way in which research has been generated during that period. Second is the way that this issue represents the ongoing liveliness and potential of the collective imperatives of the MMS CoP. Indeed, this is further reinforced through several reports from MMS members about how the MMS prompts have been adopted or adapted and applied across a wide range of teaching spaces and opportunities (cf. Herman et al. 2021). Third are that the seeds of research, which germinated during the 21-day autoethnographic exercise in May and June 2020, have grown together as a dialogical research-creation and co-writing/co-editing approach that involves not just this specific group of 13 of the original participants, but also the support of the broader CoP. The visual metaphor of the quilt that threads the works together acted as an anchor for linking the separate articles

together, but the collective work and discussion that took place for a full year after the first drafts were developed reflected an ongoing commitment to thinking and feeling together. Even the writing, image-making, and analysis that did not make it to final stages for this issue helped to shape the overall sensibility of this particular collection. So, too, did the earlier works from MMS that are referenced in many of the articles included here. This matters because in the time of COVID—or indeed in this time of persistent and complex humanitarian and global crises—we need many examples of generosity and collaboration as well as critique to help us think, feel, and see our way into the future.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Screen capture of the MMS Facebook private group landing image.

Figure 2: Screen capture of the introduction to the first prompt on the private Facebook group, including the ‘mantra,’ which was repeated in every subsequent prompt. Permission of the authors.

Figure 3: Facebook screen capture of the first prompt, May 18, 2020. Permission of the authors.

Figure 4: Screen capture of the first prompt on Facebook, May 18, 2020. Permission of the authors.

Figure 5: Screen capture of the Dilkes, Erdely, Fowley, and Romano Prompt 3 video, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of the video makers.

Figure 6: Screen capture of Chemi response to Prompt 8, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Tatiana Chemi.

Figure 7: Screen capture of the Herman posting about the radio show hosted throughout the early days of the pandemic, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Andrew Herman.

Figure 8: Screen capture of the Pruulman-Vengerfeldt response to Prompt 11, as posted on the MMS Facebook group page. Permission of Pille Pruulman-Vengerfeldt.

Figure 9: Screen capture of Prompt 3 on the Facebook group. Permission of the authors.

Figure 10: Screen capture of Prompt 21 on the Facebook group. Permission of the authors.

NOTES

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A PATCHWORKING PROCESS: COMING TOGETHER UNDER
PANDEMIC CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE, CARING
SCHOLARSHIP

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In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, the authors in this special issue came together within the Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) writing project in the spring of 2020. Collectively grappling with the impact of the extended pandemic, each paper in this issue touches on experiences of social isolation, making do, and a technological reaching out under conditions of a public health crisis. This introduction describes the issue's 'patchwork' development which reflects an attempt to break from traditions of academic scholarship that often fail to recognize the value of emergent, and therefore

Dans le contexte de l'épidémie de COVID-19, les auteurs de ce numéro spécial se sont réunis autour du projet de rédaction Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) au printemps 2020. Les articles de ce numéro viennent collectivement se confronter aux répercussions de la pandémie prolongée. Chaque article relate des expériences d'isolement social, d'adaptation et d'ouverture technologique en temps de crise sanitaire. Cette introduction décrit le raisonnement de ce numéro à la composition « patchwork » qui illustre une tentative de rupture avec les traditions académiques qui souvent ne réussissent pas à reconnaître la valeur émergente, et par consé-

uncertain, cross-disciplinary and collective work.

quent incertaine, des travaux transdisciplinaires et collectifs.

The authors, editors, and co-editors in this special issue came together within the experimental and large-scale Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) writing project in the spring of 2020 (described in detail by Markham, Harris and Luka [2020] and by Markham and Luka, this issue). Although the exercises were fragmented and completed largely solitarily, the broader MMS project pieced together 165 participants from around the world through spaces for sharing the process and progress of their individual work. What began as a searching for and sensing of the pandemic through autoethnographic—and thereby also initially microscopic—means, lead to an encounter with others, and to the massive world through them. That emergent and community-building process, which provoked this collection of essays, resonated for us as it was an opportunity to see in others, and to share and even embrace, the many daily pandemic uncertainties we faced.

In this issue, we recognize the way emergent experiences are often hard to classify. Such moments may float precariously towards ambiguity, defy easy standards of categorization, and therefore be unrecognized; sometimes that means they are less valued by universities and institutions. As we began work on this collective publication, many of us initially echoed concerns about the ultimate outcome of the effort we were set to engage in. We met several times online throughout the development of this issue, which began as rough draft abstracts. In our first meeting, we also found it necessary to sort out who needed what kind of career building qualification, and by necessity, this concern was integrated into questions about the final shape of and venue for this collection. Yet, our creative and emergent process, which felt so valuable to us particularly at this moment in time, seemed incompatible with any sense of certainty—or with the predetermined work trajectory and typically rigid institutional approvals and requirements of career advancement. We see such structuring of labour and its certifications as a fundamental flaw in academic organization, which largely acknowledges only conventional

research and publication outcomes. Outside of these necessities, academics, we realized, may struggle to connect to others, to new ideas and methods, in precisely the kind of emergent and collaborative endeavor we had begun.

Growing from the MMS experiment, our collaboration in writing, reading, and co-editing for this issue was a different pandemic bubble that made us forget living in a very competitive academic world, for valuable moments. That was a motivating factor for many of us. Perhaps the difficulties and uncertainties we felt in these exceptional circumstances also intensified the experiences of camaraderie and collaboration during the coming together of this publication project. As a result, the papers in this special issue, which we completed in conversation with one another, developed into personal, sensitive, and thought-provoking conceptualizations of our mutual pandemic experiences as well as rigorous scholarly work. Working together quickly began to feel like a productive and caring space. We met online across vastly different (and sometimes challengingly so!) time zones, joining those who were waking before dawn and those who were preparing for bed. Discussing together individual, local, and global aspects of the pandemic happened in irregular Zoom meetings and Slack messages that were inclusive and encouraging in nature, as we shared in sickness and grief. Google documents and emails added conversations and supported our writing and thinking together. We shared experiences of living the pandemic but also a means for coping, and through these we also shared (academic) means to connect to the pandemic world in flux.

To our delight, this uncertain process transformed into an organic texture, with each thread, or individual piece, distinguishable but interconnected within a larger web. Throughout this issue, we have grouped articles and situated them within that web by interstitial quilt blocks, crafted by Corinna as part of her MMS prompt writing (see her work in this issue and below). Quilt blocks may be individual squares of fabric, yet they are interconnected parts of a whole. They work together to reveal every entangled colour or shade, exposing a beauty that might otherwise be missed. With each view, the meaning of individual blocks, and indeed, the entire quilt, is transformed

anew. Organizing our pieces thematically in groups to reveal these transforming threads then became a greater challenge. Each article, we realized, intersected in some way with all the others, just as some seemed to cluster organically, even serendipitously. In their articles, Corinna, Mary-Rose, and Veronica all deal directly with ‘making do’ in a pandemic environment through the incorporation and repurposing of objects and things (and, in Mary-Rose’s case, even words), to variously trouble absence and stasis alongside violent change. Each challenged these everyday materials to take on and embody, perhaps by necessity of isolation, an internal reflection on the broader shared experience of the pandemic, incorporating ‘matters’ at hand for sense-making in research. Anne and Karoliina, Andy and Donatella all collectively consider the outcome of social isolation in techno-mediated sociality, a coming together or moving apart within what are now ubiquitous communication technologies such as blogs, text messaging, and cellular notifications. These tenuous and shifting connections, in Andy’s case concerningly constraining, reflect the diversity of intimacies and entanglements that emerged over the past year. Kim, Polina, and Rebecca reflect on movements across diversely configured fields, boundaries that some felt ever more vital to overcome or stitch over as a result of the pandemic. These three pieces each challenge the perceived stabilities of those borders which—so often made invisible or shadowy in the everyday—still powerfully demarcate our experiences of place, knowledge, and the fragmentary, momentary thoughts of the mind, even as they rapidly unravel. Taken all together, each piece in this issue reflects these personal and theoretical threads as collectively shared questions: How do we make do and make sense with the materials and technologies available to us during the pandemic? What possibilities for intimacy emerge as a result? How are these differentially experienced as constraints or as border crossing lifelines? Integrated together here, as a collection, our multiple, even divergent perspectives—like the quilt—create a new spatial view, a possible future place situated by the cross-disciplinary tools we adapted for research and learning. We use Corinna’s quilt pieces then as colorful thematic lenses for seeing, refracting, and juxtaposing our shared pandemic concerns and our

research innovations; taken together, these also reflect our patchworked process. And as each serendipitous encounter in this issue leads onto the next, we prioritise the interstitial as a self-organizational system to offer new, yet unfinished approaches to arts-based research. Ultimately, the order proposed in this special issue is momentary, and the reader is encouraged to use their imagination, to play with suggested meanings, and to explore the resources the issue and individual essays offer independently as well as together.

The individual square blocks, which Corinna stitched into a quilt as part of her work in the project, also provide us a way to think metaphorically about the potentials of academic research collaborations and the convergence of our productive differences, just as our patchworking process revealed complex material and intercultural understandings. Like the quilt pieces, we incorporate attention to visual and sensory mediums or materials, not only as valuable cultural expressions open to analysis, but as rich tools for research themselves. Alongside historical and contemporary references to patchwork, stitching, threading, and embroidery, quilting allows us to break from traditions of academic scholarship that prioritise set canonical forms, as we seek to create a new vocabulary of research sensibilities, in an interlacing of academia and visual culture. Yet, thinking academically with and through sounds, images, and textures, as an analytical process, still remains more marginalized within some academic research fields. For this reason, we are grateful to be included as a special issue of *Imaginations*, which centers attention to diverse intercultural understandings of images, screens, and digital content in crisis conditions.

While we were writing and working on our pieces, we were all ‘making do’; assembling the materials and things we had on hand to spin out the threads of our stories, just as we were getting by in the face of personal and global challenges. In such a space of rupture, we hope to offer a sense of the collective modes of sense-making that may emerge in troubled times, and perhaps a way forward through to a patchworking process for future academic work—a collaborative, generative, always uncertain, but extremely valuable practice that reflects the indeterminacies of our time.

Mapping living with pandemic, “...focusing on what comes to be produced...” (Bodén et al., 19)

Figure 1: Mapping pandemic home. Corinna Peterken.

As I turned the fabric over I saw another mapping outline. I tied off each thread neatly and noticed this is becoming about home and spaces for living with social distancing, making, masking, planting, picking, cleaning, avoiding COVID-19 ...

A neat vegetable garden offers spring shoots in rows. Promises of nourishment to come. The quilt applique of flowers and garden show me that home is mapped in lines of stitching.

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Mapping pandemic home. Permission of Corinna Peterken.

Figure 1: Matter. Corinna Peterken.

INTERLUDE I

What matters?

What matter provokes?

Prompting blackness of mood. Lines of stitching to encase and point
out Black Lives Matter.

The petals, dried from flowers I collected are encased by black net-
ting. Fabric for a
fashionable dress is also a cage.

Matter and concern have us gathering, listening, reflecting, being-
with grass, sky, trees, air
with possibilities sinister and welcoming as bodies young and older
commune, sing. Words and
experiences are given and received. Peace is not necessarily peace-
ful.

Corinna Peterken

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Matter. Permission of Corinna Peterken.

WALKING, STAYING IN, AND MAKING SENSE: QUILTING WITH PANDEMIC MATTER

CORINNA PETERKEN

This making and making sense are in relation with pandemic matter and a quilt. Matter on hand: fabric, embroidery thread, and appliqué map and speak, sowing sense. The nine blocks sewn and joined together hold their sense making as individual and collective. The conversation from and through making a quilt with pandemic matter emerges from, and plays with, text and image. I align matter and stitching through to hold and turn process into product as I continue making and making sense for knowing about who we are and how to live with each other and the world.

Cette conception et compréhension sont à la fois en relation avec la question de la pandémie et celle d'un plaid. La matière à portée de main : le tissu, le fil à broder, la carte à coudre en application et le langage, tissant du sens. Ces neuf blocs, cousus et assemblés ensemble, sont porteurs de sens, à la fois de manière individuelle et collective. La conversation qui découle à partir et à travers la fabrication d'un plaid associée à la question de la pandémie émerge et joue avec le texte et l'image. J'aligne la matière et les coutures pour maintenir et transformer le processus en produit fini, tout en continuant de créer et de donner du sens à la connaissance de ce que nous sommes, à notre manière de vivre les uns avec les autres et notre rapport au monde.

Sensemaking with a quilt in this research is my artist/academic process for noticing important issues and possibilities in pandemic life. A quilt as visual means of connecting and understanding teaches and provides a way to think with and beyond (dis)comfort. This conversation from and through making a quilt with pandemic matter emerges from, and plays with, text and image.

The visual is vital in my work as an artist/academic, and a way that I engage with the micro and macro. As I revisited the images, quilt, and writing more than a year after lockdown I quilted further and made this paper as thinking “in the making” (Ellsworth; Ingold, “Making”; Peterken, “Knowing in the Making”) that is not over. Throughout this process of making sense with the quilt I took up openings and ruptures (Irwin and de Cosson) that stopped me and created spaces for thinking as I participated in “Massive and microscopic sensemaking during a global pandemic (MMS)” (Markham et al.).

Making a quilt with pandemic matter gave me space to think with encounters and materials. Hope and fear around herd immunity and vaccinations that were not available until recently (Loveless) are also into the quilt block analysis of responses to the MMS prompts. The quilt provoked (and made visible) thinking about fears and hopes (Kwon), self, others, and the world (Markham et al.) during the pandemic, and after vaccination gave more comfort. In the MMS project, prompts over 21 days between May 18 and June 7, 2020 (Markham and Harris) gave me some distraction with research (Markham et al.) and a focus to consider making sense of this different pandemic world with critical autoethnography.

This sensemaking allowed me to be personal while considering broader issues as I “perform meaning from and through [my body], situated daily routines, and relations with embedded, embodied, and everywhere digital technologies” (Markham et al. 2). My responses to prompts included motivated personal writing, embodied encounters, stillness and silence without ignoring but not being outwardly active, and active making: making images, poetry, and nine fabric blocks. These were brought together with quilting intra-actions (Barad, “Meeting the Universe”) where items for sewing (fabric, thread, stitches, quilt blocks, and the quilt as a whole) join forces, becoming-with my artist/researcher/teacher wanderings, wonderings, and thinking. The quilt was a way to deal with the impact of COVID on my life, the lives of those near and far, the world, and how we live during and after a pandemic.

Figure 1: Finished quilt front and back. Image of quilt provided by author.

Fearful, and closed in with pandemic advice to “stay strong” while at home, complying with executive orders and directives, on my daily neighbourhood walks I began to consider what matters with the MMS prompts. I walked taking notes and images while attending to what my body and senses noticed. My fear *and* hope in this pandemic assemblage/remix (Markham, “Remix Culture”) in the quilt render openings (Irwin and de Cosson; Springgay et al.) for listening to materials and to the quilt through piecing and piercing through with threads. The quilt also brought comfort, as is common in quilts used as coverings (Witzling), and it is a medium to give messages that can be read from “multiple directions” (Koelsch 823). Connections are across, up, down, diagonal, bound in, and altogether through the quilt, back and front (Figure 1).

PANDEMIC QUILT CONVERSATIONS AS RESEARCH

Living in the USA I am near quilting shops, but they were not open. Quilting can be considered an American crafting tradition connected to pioneering and lack of materials for warmth, as well as part of crafting and the arts in many cultures (Flannery; Fitzpatrick and Bell; Ferrarese). I used quilting for research before in Australia to bring together photographic images young children created (transferred onto fabric) for their meaning

making and belonging in an early childhood center (Peterken, “Crafting Living Inquiry”). Making a quilt can be a solo activity with many hours of sewing, part of leisure (Stalp, “Negotiating Time”), and can also give pleasure (Ferrarese) as materials are brought together to make visually appealing patterns. I wanted the quilt to be an artwork, to have visual appeal, but that was not the main purpose. It was a research product for sensemaking. Quilting has the potential to be “a powerful socially communicative practice” (Nieberding 8) as women/makers gather in ‘quilting bees’ to create a finished article, but quilting in a pandemic during lockdown is lonely. I find some comfort in working with fabrics in relation with the MMS prompts. My quilt-making as artist and researcher pulled focus and created a space to do something to think about and make sense with.

Quilting in research involves more than “the creative processes that everyday quilters face” (Stalp, “Quilting” 24), and William Nieberding proposes that as a visual medium quilting “generates socially significant visual texts” (9). The social issues and pandemic experience are in this research quilt as disparate events, and images are sewn in relation through the nine blocks in combination. The number of blocks needed to make a complete quilt varies, but I used items placed in a nine-cube storage shelf for one of the MMS prompts, which gave me the idea for a nine block quilt to engage with what matters and what I noticed. This quilt as a mystory text (Denzin and Lincoln) that collected (and holds) personal interactions with various materials teaches me as I create. Quilts are an exchange that does not always have words (Ellsworth; Peterken, “Crafting Living Inquiry”). In this research quilt the “cuts, tears, ruptures or cracks that resist predictability, comfort and safety” (Irwin and Springgay xxx) opened conversations about pandemic life. Artist/researcher/teacher inquiry and knowledge creation here was not about making quilts, but about making sense. It matters that “some knowings cannot be conveyed through language” (Ellsworth 156) and can be crafted (Ingold “Making”) through making as method, including making this nine-block quilt. My process of making with found materials and what was on hand had me thinking personally, as artist/researcher/

teacher “*through* observation [as well as] *after* it” (Ingold “Making” 11) with the quilting and writing process.

CONVERSATIONS AND SENSEMAKING IN THE QUILT

Figure 2: Completed quilt. Image provided by author.

The nine blocks connect across the whole quilt (Figure 2), and each of the blocks holds individual and collective sensemaking. Some responses in the quilt blocks were from an individual MMS prompt, such as in *Green dot* (Figure 3) seen in the still image from a video of Rock Canyon that is in relation with the idea of technology making its presence known, impacting what is seen and experienced.

Figure 3: Green dot. Image provided by author.

The little green dot shivers and shakes

a gift from the camera.

Pulling focus

away

from the mountain flowers

from the birdsong

and the freeway hum

the humdrum.

Sunlight growing brighter

rising

tipping over the mountain top

spilling

reaching beams spreading down the canyon.

The birds know-

they herald the day!

This iPhone camera uses this same light.

Photography is drawing with light I read.

The device uses this light.

It captures.

Shoots.

Creates

images (including its' added shivery green dot).

Video appears with sounds

of birds

of quiet breathing

of vehicles far off

containing a multitude of humans now out and going

about their business

below.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

Other blocks attended to the more general issues of life in the pandemic and 'what is happening here?' and opened to learning about sensemaking with the quilt as an artist/researcher/teacher (Spring-

gay et al.). Quilting through, adding embroidery, making knots as “places where many lines of becoming are drawn tightly together” (Ingold, “Making” 132) made sense. It was in these processes, and the emergent autoethnographic writing (Denzin and Lincoln; Ellis et al.), including poetic notes in my iPhone research journal (in italics in this writing), that openings to sensemaking called out through what was on hand.

As an artist I use the visual to show me what matters and, in this instance, making a quilt provided thinking with visual art processes. Images and words (including poetry) “invite attention” (Barone and Eisner 39) here in relation with my stories from the MMS prompts. The visual as well as written perspectives created this mystory text combining media and messages. Language other than words is with, and in between, words in different forms in this writing as artist/researcher/teacher to “learn in my head what my body already recognizes” (Sameshima 49). Making (sense and visual art) with the MMS prompts opened to sewing a quilt and some knowing about how to live through a pandemic and beyond as artist/researcher.

WANDERING AND STAYING IN SHIFT TO WONDERING AND MAKING

Figure 4: Pandemic bubbles. Image provided by author.

Wandering by myself and staying in to remain in my pandemic bubble shifted with the MMS prompts to wondering and making sense with art materials stashed in two nine-cube shelves and in baskets in my home. I sewed from four years of age, making clothing for dolls, and made clothing for myself and others from my mid-teens. I have supplies on hand to quilt, sew, knit, crochet, embroider, weave, spin, paint, and bead, as well as natural materials such as feathers, sticks, stones, grasses, and seed pods found and gathered from my yard and as I walk around my neighborhood for collage and adding to art pro-

jects. Thinking through making (Ingold “Making”) with these materials is part of my arts based research practice. Making (sense and art) with the MMS prompts opened to sewing and to knowings through making a quilt and sowing a garden. In this research, change occurring on a global scale had me noticing and feeling fear *and* hope. This autoethnographic w(a/o)ndering (Peterken, “Battledress”) with my sensing and the quilt opens to making and playing with some hopes/fears, and more things to ponder. My daily neighborhood walks during the pandemic lockdown in a college town in Utah, USA, shifted to considering the MMS prompts.

Attention was drawn to self during the period of pandemic lockdown. Making sense in this isolated bubble was a challenge, depicted in the *Pandemic bubbles* (Figure 4) quilt block. I wrote in my research journal iPhone notes while reading, thinking, and walking with MMS prompts:

Movement and embodied sensemaking come from attending,

“know[ing] for yourself” (Ingold “Making” 141) with the small and the large.

A feeling in silence and stillness.

The micro and macro captivates and astonishes (Ingold “Making”) as I

“live in hope” (Ingold “Making” 141), uncertain.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

I found that materials on hand offered ways of making art and meaning with what was happening. Findings from walking and thinking with MMS prompts were analyzed using fabric, thread, and other art materials. Relationships between my artist/researcher/teacher (Irwin and de Cosson; Irwin and Springgay) selves, others, and the world were called into focus with the quilt.

MAKING DO AND A PANDEMIC ASSEMBLAGE

As I moved around my neighborhood, I noticed small elements and connections with larger contexts. I gathered images of moments that captivated and matter that evoked awe. Moments of making with the quilt then gave extended time for attention to feelings and to make a difference to my knowing in the making (Ellsworth). This brought me hope and some comfort along with my concern for others and the planet. Pandemic time lengthened and collapsed (Ingold “Making”), and with no attention to markings on a clock, days melted together into a week, or it could have been a month? “How long will this go on?” I wondered ... “when will bubbles pop?” Time and space also collapsed as I spoke with friends and family (me in my time) across multiple continents and time zones, in my home, in my town and state, and others all over the world. We were in virtual bubbles. Connections online and offline helped us in knowing self, others, and the world. Lines of communication, walking lines, and lines of sewing converged in the quilt. One block, *Blank journal* (Figure 5), became a piece of crystal organza sewn through with lines. Lines with messy ends. Gaps that still sparkle and draw attention. They present unseen events and encounters, more that I can and cannot do for others and the world, if I learn and attend and act.

Figure 5: Blank journal. Image provided by author.

I was in my bubble as spring arrived and flowers bloomed after a long, bare, white, winter, bursting color and texture. Life. Making the quilt, nature is noticed, living and announcing this joyously to the world and to me. Splashes of color and knowing from bubbles and stitches. The image here of the neighborhood campus garden I walked in to gain respite from the pandemic is becoming-tapestry with pixelation (Figure 6) blurring the leaves and petals, shifting lines and making squares.

Figure 6: Flower tapestry. Image provided by author.

I was also stitching a tapestry. The stitches were made in the same way seeds are planted, “thread[ing] through and among” (Ingold, “Making” 132), laying lines, line by line in rows, or here and there, entangled. The *Flower squares* (Figure 7) block of the quilt holds this sensemaking and the way that meaning (like flowers where I walk, and in my garden) can be laid out in tiny increments before me, before us.

Figure 7: Flower squares. Image provided by author.

I accept with the quilt blocks' sensemaking that life can be messy, and there is (dis)comfort in that, as in the lines and pages that were left blank in my journal. Making sense is more than an endeavor with words, as the quilt "plays an active, indeed agential role" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 826). The floral squares come into relation with the empty journal and play an active part, calling attention to times where making/research sustained me during weeks of lockdown and tentative venturing out afterwards until I was fully vaccinated. Making was a method to process and sort through changes brought on by pandemic life, and to engage with self, materials, others, and the world when isolation and fear closed in. Making blocks and the quilt did not always have any answers, but I wondered with "wonderments" (Andrews and Duff 30) that in research allow assemblages, energy, and movement that attend, within pauses, to some of what matters.

Walking is part of my creative sensemaking practice (Peterken and Potts, "Pedagogical Experiences") and in this research trees, plants, and flowers around me also made a difference to my physical and mental health. I became more attentive to my surroundings. I took time to be present. I felt less isolated with connections to the natural world. Not everyone had a place to walk, family to be with, a garden to be planted, health care, or space to safely be away from risk of infection in a bubble through the pandemic. I felt with so many others who lost loved ones. I worked from home but the connection with students and colleagues was virtual and unembodied, we were all tired using new technology and processes, and that made a difference. At times I felt empty and blue.

Figure 8: Blue. Image provided by author.

This *Blue* (Figure 8) quilt block was made in relation with the walking and images for a collaborative MMS video (Frølund et al.) that braided the dislocation of researcher lives and selves with the pandemic, noticing the stillness and messiness of that. I noticed blue for hope, loneliness, blue breath, and blue skies as not only fair weather in images I made for the video. As we wove our experiences across the world into the imagery we were “reading insights through one another” (Barad, “Meeting the Universe” 25) to notice what was happening at that moment. Being with images and others as researcher/teachers who embody the “caring diligence required” (Markham et al. 6) for learning gave openings for connections and more perspectives that were hopeful. *Blue* (Figure 8) is central in the quilt, so it touches all the blocks as COVID touched all our lives. The magical presence of a unicorn and gold patterns in it also offered glimmers of hope when all I noticed was blue. Working with others across time zones in the MMS research held some challenges but was enriching as we threaded our lives, stories, and the world, sensemaking together in the video. That mattered to us.

SEWING/SOWING FOR SENSEMAKING

Figure 9: Sewing, quilting through. Image provided by author.

Sew to know, knowing in the making

To give hope

To “live in hope” (Ingold “Making” 141) as scholars do...

To feed

hope more than fear.

For artist/researcher/teacher selves, for others, for the world.

A new normal

I hope...

with the world.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

Handmade blocks for a quilt as part of storytelling (Ingold “Making”) provided room to learn and presented “guidance without specification” (109). Openings between things that matter as held in each block were joined together as the quilt was pieced, sewn, pinned through, and quilted (Figure 9). This process provided a means to attend to matter for making sense. The quilt blocks, the quilt as a whole, and materials are telling with color, texture, juxtaposition, stitches, repetition, and rupture.

Figure 10: Mapping pandemic home. Image provided by author.

Sewing the *Mapping pandemic home* (Figure 10) quilt block, I noticed that flowers and planting featured once more. The associated MMS prompt had me mapping (Markham and Harris) my home life, the staying in with time for planting a garden, and sowing seeds in rows. The back of the block gave another perspective that maps outlines and reduces the visual to what was essential. A garden was not essential, but for me (and others) gardening was a way to escape and be outside. It was hopeful; a garden sown (and sewn) here was unsuccessful in that most plants died or were not fruitful, but it was a distraction during a pandemic. It gave something to care about and to make sense with, like the MMS prompts and research project (Markham et al.) and the quilt.

Making a quilt with micro and macro, matter, and making was a “process of correspondence” (Ingold, “Making” 31). Fabric, thread,

the quilt blocks, and my artist/researcher selves in conversation were enmeshed in this knotted, matted, patchwork of scraps taken up and put together then sewn across and through. This process of knowing and thinking used materials as “substances-in-becoming” (Ingold, “Making” 31) as I quilted with the flowers and plants as pandemic matter that made me attend to the fragility of life and connections.

LISTENING TO MATERIALS IN THE QUILT

While making this quilt I was isolated, but in relation with pandemic prompts and matter on hand including fabric, materials, dragonflies, flowers, images, neighborhood walking, reading, and virtual responses. These were my companions. There was a lot being said. Bronwyn Davies (2014) urges emergent listening, the type of listening that I use as teacher/artist in my work in early childhood education. I urge my teacher education students to attend to children. To listen to and with and take cues from children (Rinaldi), materials, and the world as it presents encounters. This style of listening has no anticipation or prediction, accepts surprises, and bids us work with what occurs, exploring openly what it might mean as we “meet in spaces of difference” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 30). This type of listening as an artist/researcher/teacher is necessary for making sense of things. The quilt tells stories of and from artifacts bound together; collaged, appliquéd, quilted in a pleated text (Richardson) that holds stories and encounters of learning/teaching with art and making as thinking.

The fabric pieces were selected as they stood out in relation with thinking as researcher while making with the prompts as artist. I was making and making do (Markham, “Bricolage”) with what was on hand, thinking through making in what Tim Ingold describes as the “art of inquiry” (“Making” 6). As an early childhood teacher/teacher educator I am used to using matter on hand and in hand. The matter and my artist/researcher/teacher selves exist before, now, and in the future with what Barad considers as having “historicity” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 82), always already becoming. I listened and

heard/noticed some intra-actions (Barad) with the fabric and quilt, and I am sure I missed many others. Nevertheless, matter brought what mattered and needed to matter then/in the future to me. It is a gift. Present. Presented and here/now/then as “substances-in-becoming” (Ingold, “Making” 31) for quilting with these blocks.

Figure 11: Dragonflies dancing. Image provided by author.

An encounter with dragonflies dancing around on a mountain trail was also a gift. It prompted the *Dragonflies dancing* (Figure 11) quilt block as an analysis of an MMS prompt to create a dance/movement piece (Markham & Harris, 2020). Care for nature and the world now and for the future is also in this block. Dragonflies here drew my focus and admitted me to the dance without a ticket or any practice.

The buzzing and swirling bodies with vibrating wings surprised me, and I jerked my head side to side with their flybys and turned to see then head off, darting and returning. Dragonflies showed me there was no need to make a dance, the dance was there and it included me, and mountain and trail with vegetation were audience.

QUILTING AS ANALYSIS: REMIX WITH BRICOLAGE FOR KNOWING IN THE MAKING

Figure 12: Matter. Image provided by author.

I attended community gatherings in support of Black Lives Matter while inquiring with the MMS prompts. Making the *Matter* quilt

block (Figure 12), I wanted to make sense of the challenges and inequity where I live, and I wrote in my research notes:

*Dried rose and geranium petals, crowns,
floral emblems,
green embroidery encroaching,
creeping in
folds in tulle,
sewn cages
stitching that cuts across and hems in
Blackness
crosses and flat straight stitches of matter
what matters?
Black matter
Black Lives Matter!
The assemblage of this matter
stopping at a point lost in the middle
no (easy) answer.
(Research journal iPhone notes)*

I experienced community coming together in compliance with safety, restrictions binding us like the black tulle pockets in *Matter*. We were outdoors, wearing masks, spaced for physical distancing, while Black voices gave their perspectives. We listened with ears, hearts, bodies for what we might do and how to make a difference, “communicating

in new ways with neighbors” (Markham et al. 2). We cared as a community of self and others, we saw some sparks of hope like the gold pattern through the tulle. Families and children came, were attentive and cared. This was a small opening and threads of green grow across this section of the quilt, hopeful for growth in understanding and kindness, that Black Lives will matter in our community where more empathy, care, acceptance, equity, and support are needed. It is complicated, messy and I notice that we are all entangled, part of this community.

Figure 13: Tangles make sense. Image provided by author.

As encounters, text, artist/researcher/teacher and quilt matter intra-act (Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity”) there is no last thread to be knotted (Markham, “Remix”; “Bricolage”) and I leave tangles underneath to keep the instability alive (Figure 13). Research observations emerged in relation with making and writing as the pieced-together quilt was finished off. Crafting “the aesthetic and material” (Denzin and Lincoln 4) in a synthesis of methods, theory, and perspectives allowed me to research in personal ways through creative processes with the quilt as product *and* data (Ellis et al.; St. Pierre). The “textual performance” (Denzin and Lincoln 6) of the fabric with autoethnographic encounters (Holman Jones; Ellis et al.) and the micro and macro are entangled, stitched together, and embedded in the quilt.

Making sense using material I have-

Stash

Iron. Steam. Breathe.

Pacing.

Placing.

Appliqué first

Piecing

Embroidery later

Threads smooth and knotting,

tangled,

Matter making some sense of the world for/with me.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

Making sense with an assemblage/remix

Figure 14: Walking, iPhone steps graph. Image provided by author.

Find the thread to pull through.

Caught and flowing.

Knotting and cutting.

Laying out the blocks.

What do they say to each other and to me??

(Research journal iPhone notes)

Materials in the quilt were placed in juxtaposition, alignment, and relation; familiar work for an artist who creates with found materials and textiles/fiber. I cut and stitched and followed threads, placing blocks, arranging them to speak together, to make sense of pandemic

life and research. The quilt and this matter was/is vibrant, as I allowed “matter it’s due as an active participant of the [quilt’s] and the world’s becoming” (Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity” 803). *Walking, iPhone steps graph* quilt block (seen in process in Figure 14) brought together iPhone, walks, my body, Health App graphing, fabric, and threads to present the importance of wellness. Wellness became more of a focus in the pandemic, but walking meant possible contact with others, others who might pass on the virus. As I walked for this research I “reflexively explore[d my life] and limits” (Markham et al. 3) as well as making and making sense. I was sure to cross the street if others were coming, or choose my path depending on if I could see anyone. I could not see the virus, only possible hosts. This quilt block shows days when I walked for the allocated time outside for recreation and also days of less, and almost no, movement. I sewed these strips of orange fabric in relation with the orange graph in my iPhone App. Sewing also gave stillness in the middle of chaos where movement and making taught, and “visual and textual understandings and experiences... [were more than] representations” (Irwin in Springgay 185). Spaces for openings created with making the quilt, such as this, were generative. I looked beyond myself, my fears, and recognized there were others not as privileged as this who could not get out or who lived in in high density housing or were homeless. I wondered about lives, the world, and living with a virus. Wellness (and sickness) for self, others, and the world are in this orange fabric graph.

SEW THIS, KNOW THIS

The quilt developed my understandings with fabric, thread, knots, and loose ends. Over a year later, fully vaccinated and feeling somewhat safe, I am here (still) in relation with time, my garden as I write in it, fabric, and connections in quilted lines of communication. Knowing in the making and with making (Ellsworth; Peterken, “Knowing in the Making”) as artist/researcher/teacher produced a pandemic quilt. Words are not the only way to make sense. The visual and making matters for me (and for others). I continue to align matter and stitching through to hold and turn

process into product with this writing for more wondering and more stitching/making.

The quilt reveals.

Led by materials. What I have.

Tying off

and leaving loose ends

It takes time.

Pulling threads through, tying careful small knots to not be seen.

The finishing

The unseen neatness

And the mess hidden

(Research journal iPhone notes)

Figure 15. Pieced blocks laid out. Image provided by author.

I return visually with this image (Figure 15) to laying out the blocks to assemble the quilt with all the various combinations that could

have been and I wonder if remix and bricolage as tools for thinking/making might be the same *and* different (Markham “Remix”; “Bricolage”). The quilt blocks and I are in relation with making do and making tentative sense. The quilt is (un)finished, product and process, as is the sensemaking. I continue walking, making and wondering in personal ways as artist/researcher/teacher/mother/sister about who I am in those subjectivities, how I and others can research in visual ways, and how research with visual art informs how we might live with each other and the world.

...AND FURTHER LINES ARE ‘DRAWN’: ONGOING LEARNING WITH THE QUILT

I find out from my daughter in Germany that I have made a mistake. You don't cut the backing until the quilting is done. I pin and pin with bent quilting safety pins to hold the layers and Machine sews lines to hold it all together. I hope it comes out smooth. Polished. An art work. Then I realise that it doesn't really matter. It's the making to make sense that is my focus.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

I can ‘make do’ (Markham, “Bricolage”) when sensemaking with matter on hand is the matter in hand. Mistakes are part of the process, and part of life. The act of making/research sustains me during pandemic seclusion. I am excited, alive in a call to engage the MMS prompts, to process, to be with, to sort through what is happening, for making with matter and sensemaking with what is. Research and sewing came together and made lines for listening and communicating.

Making lines of stitches. Lines with machine. My body as machine and the sewing machine. Machine snaps cotton. Bobbin ends part way through a row of stitching. I have no control over this. I work with it. I let machine dictate my progress. There is no other way. I do hold and adjust. I sneak a look at the back. Seems straight. Many years of sewing coming back to me. Muscle memory. Familiarity with materials.

(Research journal iPhone notes)

I am sewing, sensemaking in relation with questions, prompts, the people, materials, my selves, micro and macro, academia and all its' challenges and joys and potentialities. Through making I feel "when" (Markham and Harris 933) it is, "where" (Markham and Harris 933) I am, what is important or of "concern" (Markham and Harris 937). Making art is making sense for me. I feel connected to peers and processes, to ideas and products of research we create.

THREADS FOR MOVING ON

Again, I thought I was finished...

threads beckon.

We walk across the quilt, making more connections.

Always in the middle

(Research journal iPhone notes)

I add more hand stitching with embroidery thread. It takes me for a walk. A wander to wonder more...

Figure 16: Quilting connecting lines. Image provided by author.

Encircling ‘so what?’ and some flowers for hope, I begin to connect across blocks. On the other side of the quilt, a wandering line cuts across bubbles and out to the border (Figure 16). Visual thinking wanders across and through this a/r/tographic research (Springgay et al.; Lazo and Smith) where renderings of a/r/tography and my artist *and* researcher *and* teacher selves were brought into combination and worked with, across, and in between to notice what demands attention with openings in cuts, tears, and ruptures in the evolving process of this living inquiry. Making and writing are in relation with fabric, embroidery thread, and appliqué. Encounters were mapped in the quilt and it spoke, sowing sense where “meaning un/create[d] itself” (Irwin and Springgay xxx) and played with what was happening. This pandemic assemblage becoming-quilt (Deleuze and Guattari; Flannery) notices that what mattered is inquiry, care, and connection.

Making the quilt is sensible. The visual nature of this analysis in between material and pandemic matter, sandwiched in a quilt, is making sense. Tiny stitches connected across ideas and fabrics in the nine blocks, my encounters in nature with dragonflies, mountain, and others, and a need for inclusion and change from a Black Lives Matter gathering, wellness with blue, my blank journal, and steps walked and graphed in the orange of my iPhone App, pandemic red bubbles for safety, virtual dots of green, flowers and gardening, home, neighborhood and beyond out into the world were placed in relation with personal stories and lines of thought. We sensed, and we came to knowings together in the making.

It was through making bricolage and remix (Markham, “Fragmented Narrative”; “Remix”; “Bricolage”) in the quilt that sensemaking moved into collaboration and analysis with this place, time, others, the world, my selves, and thinking through the making process (Ingold, “Making”). The micro and the macro emerged as an entangled quilt assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari) to make some sense of global trauma, albeit from a privileged position (Markham et al.). As artist/researcher/early childhood teacher on this research ‘hunt,’ the quilt gave comfort and opened to moving forward or sideways, over, around, and through (Rosen and Oxenbury; Ingold, “Footprints”)

what was troublesome and what was joyous and hopeful. The visual took precedence here. Pandemic research encounters in relation with this material on hand are quilted sensemaking that teaches with the micro and macro. Sensemaking with materials and making art matter.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Finished quilt front and back. Image of quilt provided by author.

Figure 2: Completed quilt. Image provided by author.

Figure 3: Green dot. Image provided by author.

Figure 4: Pandemic bubbles. Image provided by author.

Figure 5: Blank journal. Image provided by author.

Figure 6: Flower tapestry. Image provided by author.

Figure 7: Flower squares. Image provided by author.

Figure 8: Blue. Image provided by author.

Figure 9: Sewing, quilting through. Image provided by author.

Figure 10: Mapping pandemic home. Image provided by author.

Figure 11: Dragonflies dancing. Image provided by author.

Figure 12: Matter. Image provided by author.

Figure 13: Tangles make sense. Image provided by author.

Figure 14: Walking, iPhone steps graph. Image provided by author.

Figure 15: Pieced blocks laid out. Image provided by author.

Figure 16: Quilting connecting lines. Image provided by author.

RENDERING SELF AND MICROAGRESSIONS VISIBLE THROUGH THE SHADOW IMAGE

KIM SNEPVANGERS

This project, starting with Prompt 2 from the Massive Micro Sensemaking (MMS) led by Annette Markham and Anne Harris in May through June 2020, assisted me to move through the anxiety of COVID-19 lockdown. I set up four visual renderings—a series of photographs that, through a process of unfolding, make links to broader issues in my archival research in the context of settler colonial Sydney, Australia. Exploring lived experience through photography anticipates a creative a/r/tographic lens, focusing on rendering objects so that they take on a more-than-representational aspect, touching the materiality of objects as data. Adaptively layering the renderings moves beyond one dimensionality as a strict capturing of an observed phenomena. Here, an initial photograph has a latent, additional layer of shadow to build volume and re-cast semblances of the representational world through reflection.

Ce projet, qui a débuté avec Prompt #2 du Massive Micro Sensemaking (MMS) dirigé par Annette Markham et Anne Harris de mai à juin 2020, m'a aidé à faire face à l'anxiété causée par le confinement de la COVID-19. J'ai mis en place quatre représentations visuelles - une série de photographies qui, à travers un processus de déploiement, établissent des liens avec des questionnements plus larges au cours de mes recherches d'archives dans le contexte de la colonisation de Sydney, en Australie. Explorer l'expérience vécue à travers la photographie prévoit un objectif a/r/tographique créatif, axé sur la représentation des objets afin qu'ils prennent un aspect plus que représentatif, touchant la matérialité des objets en tant que données. Adapter la superposition des rendus va au-delà de l'aspect dimensionnel en tant que simple capture d'un phénomène observé. Cette première photographie a ici une couche d'ombre supplémentaire pour créer du volume et recréer des semblants du monde figuratif à travers le reflet.

I acknowledge the Bidjigal and Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which I work. I acknowledge the Gamayngal people of Kamay (Botany Bay) as the traditional custodians of the land on which I live. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Sovereignty never ceded.

THE MASSIVE MICRO SENSEMAKING PROJECT AND POSITIONING

In creating photos to capture habituated yet non-interrogated routines, I engage transformative encounters with seductive photographic moments that are about objects, yet they maintain invisible micro-aggressions hidden in plain sight. By examining ways of understanding locutionary positionality within a geographic council area, static, pre-determined notions of community/collectivity can be challenged. Using conceptions of the local that encompass personal, community, and council boundaries, due to the pandemic lockdown, I seek nuanced understandings of Australian identity through new spatial perspectives that I had not previously considered. This unsettling work provokes audiences to interrogate their own origins and question belonging in a nation built on genocide and lies. Through visual images that move towards contemporary possibilities of reclamation, this project creates new entanglements of Self, the Other, and the World with a provocative gaze that focuses on the system itself.

The Massive Micro Sensemaking Project (MMS) led by Annette Markham and Anne Harris in May through June 2020 was a self-guided series of prompts conducted over 21 days. The autoethnographic challenge was to “build embodied sensibilities towards the material we study, practice autoethnographic forms of writing and analysis, and transform personal experiences through this COVID-19 moment into critical understanding of scale, sensemaking, and relationality of humans, nonhumans, and the planet” (Markham and Harris 2020, 1). Engaging with the MMS project through embodied relationality set the stage for an engagement with post discourses

and prioritizing the materialist critique of representation through “movement, change and the emergence of the new” (MacLure 2013, 659). In this case a “more than representational” (Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2008; Thrift & Dewsbury 2000; Connell 2013) sense of the significance of alternative educative spaces, informs this article. Rather than purporting a sedentary social progress narrative, the role of artmaking practices in promoting encounters of care is discussed. A “more-than-representational” approach has been devised to show how visually layered or rendered images provide a powerful ‘voice’ in working with settler colonial relations and environmental sensibilities. Rendering (Levoy 1990) is a commonly used graphical technique typically utilized in computer graphics, which I have appropriated for its focus on photographic layering of pixels through the casting of rays to generate image volume and dimensionality. In my case, though, rendering involves the sensemaking of casting and recasting shadow.

Rendering images in this way links to cultural identity and spatial concepts such as entanglement, specifically through the lens of potentialities for internal transformation (Papastergiadis 2003). Rather than cultural identity being sedentary, fixed to a place, or universalised analytically, Papastergiadis employs Michel de Certeau’s (1988) distinction between place and space. The constitution of self in the world, positionality, and ties to the “constitutive force of space in identity formation” (Papastergiadis 165) are linked to forming dynamic narratives rather than seeing place as a stable entity. Papastergiadis notes that “Place is the way in which we inhabit and arrange our activity to intensify our attachment to a particular territory” (165). Providing a contrasting view of space, de Certeau suggests that “space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables ... Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it ... Space is a practised place” (1988, 96). To enhance the spatial intensity, force, and qualities of temporality in my work, I engage processual walking through arts-based inquiry (Snepvangers et al., 2019), through a/r/tographic methodology (Irwin 2013; Cutcher 2015; Lazszik-Cutcher and Irwin 2017; Lazszik-Cutcher 2018). To add the vectors of ren-

dering directionality, velocity, and time during lockdown, I woke and observed the same objects and considered the potentiality of shadows each day. The question became: how to include and layer shadow imagery to create temporality with both contemporary objects and issues with historical import? Gradually adding a short walking routine, I started with the shadows in my mirror, then I walked to fill my garbage bin (each day) to empty it (each week on a Monday), and finally as a practice of everyday life I walked around the streetscape block each day. The garbage bins from the unit blocks appear on my walk every Thursday in their serial splendour, only to be absent again by about 10:30 am.

The kinds of everyday place making activities undertaken during the pandemic are not simply then about intensifying my attachment to place. In a way, I am already attached, and my sensing observations are rather spatial meanderings about self and microaggression to form a circuitous route towards making visible the tensions and microaggressions extant in Australian society. How previously invisible thoughts and tensions have been brought forth through shadow rendering is shown with deliberate directionality, a velocity that brings the past into the present, playing with temporality.

In arts-based inquiry, such post-qualitative methodologies manifest as “creative assemblages, articulated through modes of arts-based, practice-based, artistic, research-creation, and in this case, a/r/tographic inquiry” (Sinner 2021, 2). Here I am then, situated in Sydney, near Kamay (Botany Bay), New South Wales, Australia with a key focus on shadow imagery as a way of sensemaking in the pandemic. As Irwin (2013) argues, energizing continuous movement with new spaces of exchange, relationality, intensity, and becoming are key features of an a/r/tographic approach. What MMS allowed me to do was to add to a/r/tographic sensemaking by exploring “object itineraries as encounters, rather than more common approaches of object representations or object biographies, which retain qualities of human centeredness” (Sinner 2021, 2). This focus on the perspective of the object has been developed largely from Prompt 2 in the MMS challenge.

PROMPT 2—RENDERING SELF THROUGH OBJECT ITINERARIES

My focus in this article is on Prompt 2/21 in the MMS project, which provided a rich source of material data from the purview of the object. Prompt 2 asked participants to:

“Take photos of the three most intimate/familiar objects in your lockdown. What have you spent the most time with? Write a couple of paragraphs each from the perspective of each object (hint: you do NOT have to be the subject of their attention!). Write in the first person.” (Markham and Harris 2020, 4).

This focus greatly assisted me on moving from my human frailty and anxiety in thinking through pandemic experiences by providing a strong catalyst to make a start on the project at the micro level, at home. This is where the shadows first appeared. Prompt 2 allowed me the time and space to visually focus on intimate and familiar objects. In this case, following Barad, my mirror became ‘live,’ emergent, and actionable through a photographic sensorial phenomenon of lockdown, as in Figure 1, where:

“A phenomenon is a specific intra-action of an ‘object’; and the ‘measuring agencies’; the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them.” (Barad 2007, 128).

Writing from the perspective of the object caused me to interrogate previously unthought about, overlooked ideas, feelings, and affective image making within my locutionary gaze. This change in my usual proceedings started visually, photographically, with space for contemplating the diffraction of a temporal light phenomenon and for developing new starting points for creative artworks and intra-action (Barad 2007, 2003).

Alongside this time-in-place creation, a new emergent contemplative space was evolving around my unknown paternal ancestry and cultural identity. Previous exhibition and performative work about troubling my paternal Indigenous ancestry in Australia with the artistic collective SISTAS Holding Space (2020, 2019, 2018) and my artworks

(Snepvangers 2020, 2019, 2018a, 2018b, and 2018c) began to coalesce. A new mode of inquiry began to emerge from the MMS project, focused on rendering ‘visible’ the various forms of shadow imagery to actively interrogate becoming. The modes were generated using unprecedented pandemic thinking during social distancing, lockdowns, and quarantine: all terms with historical class- and race-based precedents in the Australian settler colonial context. Concerns with identity, ancestry, and belonging as well as an ethics of care have been the subject of my earlier photographic artworks, films, and performative pieces (Snepvangers 2020, 2019, 2018a, 2018b, and 2018c). Typically, in non-COVID-19 times, I conduct my work with SISTAS Holding Space an artistic collective of Australian women academic artist researchers, with Aboriginal, convict, settler, and migrant ancestries. MMS, however, gave me permission as an individual to slow down and build new embodied sensibilities by considering new ways to explore understandings of dissent within Australian identity formation. Rather than just focusing on new observational foci or making previously invisible histories visible, I am interested in troubling ancestries and exposing daily misrepresentations that have until now been sitting, searing in the background of tensions surrounding my unknown cultural identity.

What is of interest is finding a visual sense-based approach to welcome Indigenous Australian Sovereignty alongside environmental alignment, especially when your own paternal family history is not available through western archives, ancestries, and family tree research. This series of four visual renderings show how attention to sensemaking through local “microscopic practices of everyday life and inquiry connects it with the massive scales and macroscopic aspects of this moment in time” (Markham, Harris, and Luka 2020, 1). In this granular case, layers of materiality have been adaptively refined over time to evoke larger tensions in the construction of belonging in the Australian nation state. Visual rendering as a research sensibility has been built in two ways: through individual adaptations in each of the photographs in Figures 1, 2, 4, and 5; and through the transitions in the article itself via mirror>shadow, logo>shadow, row of bins>shadow, and row of bins/filmic cuts>shadow. It is

my contention that visual rendering of self and microaggressions through an array of objects layered with diverse cast shadows gradually builds the volume and intensity of meaning in each photograph through attention to personal, cultural, and environmental sensibilities.

RENDERING MICROAGGRESSION

This a/r/tographic inquiry concerns the rendering of self and microaggression through shadow images. Situated in the settler colonial nation of Australia, the concept of racial microaggression (Wong et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2007) is important to write about. Because it is often an invisible aspect of microaggression, often resulting from a lack of awareness, the seeming overlap with overt racism forms part of the settler colonial present on this continent. Settler colonialism is a specific form of colonialism where an imperial non-native metropole—in Australia’s case, the United Kingdom—invades Indigenous lands and establishes permanent settlements. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), Patrick Wolfe (2006), and Lorenzo Veracini (2015) have described some ongoing effects of settler colonialism on ownership of conquered lands, extraction of natural resources, exploitation of conquered workforces, and intergenerational trauma.

Nesting within everyday experience, racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative (racial) slights and insults towards people of colour” (Sue et al. 2007, 271). After initially contemplating self/object relations through the MMS Prompt 2 as in Figure 1: *The Mirror in My Room*, these beginning observations were not under the purview of thinking about racialised microaggression. However, after my ambling text/photo work over the first few days of the MMS prompts, racialised microaggression emerged to address worrisome local observations such as the council logo on my garbage bin, then how that logo filled nearby streets in the rows of bins on garbage collection day, as in Figure 2. I gradually came to see how these ideas

nested within some of the main ideas in my exhibition/research regarding the troubling of my personal ancestry and the invisibilities of historical colonial microaggression.

The local council logo on my garbage bin enabled my thinking about the tensions inherent in 'discovery' narratives which abound in Australia. In First Nation/settler relations the term is a key point of tension in colonial timeline histories, for example, where Australia was purportedly 'discovered' by Captain James Cook. Tension surrounds the passive acceptance of this event in the historical record, described merely as an 'encounter' between First Nation peoples and British invaders. Such tensions are evident today even as we fill and empty our garbage bins. Specifically, the logo on my garbage bin (Figure 2) came further into focus during lockdown, as I was reminded each and every-day of the pandemic in a focused way, not possible before the MMS project.

The garbage bin in my personal localised micro space was then logically extended for me into an investigation of other community members' local garbage bins in the larger street space. The street space during lockdown was the limit of my reference for the MMS project, and Figure 3 was taken at a later point to illustrate the pervasiveness of the discovery narrative in Australian parks through geographic naming conventions, such as "Cook Park" on Kamay-Botany Bay. The environmental indignity and microaggression of putting so many individual bins out on a Thursday morning, from one unit block in a community streetscape as in Figures 4 and 5, points to further indignities, through the repetition of the logo again and again. The myriad of bins lined up, and seemingly all the same, reveal a kind of environmental microaggression: an attack on the very concept of sustainability, revealed through the shadows of the street and my cast shadow. The next section commences with a discussion of how shadow theorising provides a point of creative insight about how my photographic renderings emerged.

In all of the shadow images I am there, albeit only partially.

WHY MIRRORS AND SHADOWS?

Many theorists and artists have entertained conceptions of shadows, and the concomitant concept of shades of darkness, in their writing and practice. An example of the emerging significance of shadow work can be seen in the installation of a contemporary First Nation artist, Daniel Boyd's "Pediment: Impediment" (2021) (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/news/2020/11/18/reframing-the-enlightenment.html>) in the exhibition "Reframing the Enlightenment." Signaling the efficacy of questioning received museum objects through shadow, Boyd's work has an affinity with Edouard Glissant. Specifically, how ideas of darkness can be utilised as an opposing force to light, and in this case as a form of resistance to Enlightenment and Western civilisation in the art museum context.

A few examples of theorists with relevance to my broader research include: rendering thought patterns through cast shadow vocabularies in painting (Gombrich 1995); questioning the moral and educationally hidden aspects of the economy through the concept of shadow work (Illich 1981); and raising consciousness of the interplay of cultural oppression and resistance through concepts such as the "shadow beast" (Anzaldúa 1987). Rather than providing an explanatory text regarding each theorist, for the purposes of this (MMS) project I have focused on the mechanics of production of ideas as they relate to Gloria Anzaldúa's mirror work. Entry to the article through conceptualizing mirror and shadow in this way seemed the most appropriate course of action.

Anzaldúa comments on three aspects of the mirror in the context of setting forth what she calls the "*Coatlicue*" state. First, she describes her mother putting blankets over the mirrors when her father died, as she thought her mother "knew that the mirror was a door through which the soul may 'pass' to the other side" (42). Her mother did not want the children to follow. Next, Anzaldúa notes that the mirror is "an ambivalent symbol – [it] reproduces images (the twins that stand for thesis and antithesis); it contains and absorbs them" (42). Finally, the aspect that informs my text/image work is where the mirror is

the very act of seeing itself: “Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I, and she. The eye pins down the object of its gaze, scrutinizes it, judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can ‘possess’ us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge. These seemingly contradictory aspects—the act of being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and ‘seeing through’ an experience [...] cluster in what I call the *Coatlicue* state” (Anzaldúa 1987, 42). Anzaldúa’s work questions oppression and resistance of systems-based thinking, through observations of self from the perspective of the unsaid. I link mirrors to shadows and shadows to visibility as a form of resistance to the unsaid.

RENDERING #1 MIRROR>SHADOW: THE MIRROR IN MY ROOM.

This visual rendering started in the intimacy of my thoughts as I awoke inside my home, through the completion of Prompt 2. This reflective piece focused on the first thing I see each day, a mirror, a heritage piece of furniture made of Australian red cedar. My response to the prompt, focused on the perspective of one object, is visual (see *Figure 1: The Mirror in My Room, 2020*) as well as textual:

“These three photos are of the one object, my mirror in my room; the first thing I see each day and I am the first thing this mirror sees each day. Yet, it was not until this moment that we became knowledgeable about each other’s knowing. Firstly, my angle of view is situated in a downcast light with amazing shadowy patterning on my face now seeing and being seen in a new light. My lighting is darkly fascinating as it mobilises from the slivers of morning light to awaken with each other in the same space. I have been present for many traditional milestones in your life, your wedding, gracing your parent’s room and being an authentic wooden antique, as opposed to shitboard (Australian slang for cheap wood). I have travelled each day with you although the everyday nuances of my being have until today, escaped you. Today, we have come into being, into a relation with each other, one that we can never unsee. I/we could not get past this one object of reflection which became fascinating to the point of reminiscing about each oth-

er and artists who use shadowy tones and patterned lighting to evoke temporality and to capture moments in time. Each moment to moment is diverse in its passing and intimacy, with light the driving life force of wakefulness and physicality, revealed through laconic waking as a mutation of pandemic living. Thank you for the 3 familiar objects prompt, maybe we can move on the other two soon ...” (Snepvangers, May 23, 2020)

Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue state of using the mirror and the morning shadows, light, and seeing through an experience is taken up quite literally in my work in Figure 1. The addition of shadows to mirror work

Figure 1: The Mirror in My Room, 2020. Image by the author.

brings forth Anzaldúa's concept of the shadow beast. Whilst not having enough time or space here to delve into the work of the shadow beast, the concept implies further research, as it is a 'rebel' state that "refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership" (Anzaldúa 1987, 16).

From the quiet contemplation of my room, I am present yet transparent, seemingly lost in the willowy reflections and darkness of the early morning light. From this place of power, cocooned in my bed, I realized the potentiality for an object-led itinerary, fueled by a type of 'shadow beast.' I felt energized and decided to tackle with intensity some systems-based objects (the garbage bin logo and the rows of garbage bins) in my immediate purview using visual rendering as an artistic exchange.

RENDERING #2 LOGO>SHADOW: IMAGE OF SELF IN THE RECOVERY BIN LOGO FROM KAMAY – (BOTANY BAY).

This second scenario presents a review of relationships beyond binaries, and takes literally my local council logo and its naming convention. Each logo has been earnestly tattooed onto garbage bins to last through geological time. In this case, time is a mundane and secular thing though, as only some, not all bins in the local government area have this specific logo, as the councils amalgamated some years ago. The point is that the mundane, the secular, and the everyday materiality of logos and text do last a long, long time, so it is important to see what the logo is and what is not. The seriality of use—daily, weekly, and bi-weekly trips to and with the bins, as well as emptying rituals—breeds a familiarity that masks the meaning and significance of what is on the bin. The pandemic has allowed a focus on what is typically overlooked.

Just outside my house, within the front yard, my review of situatedness unearthed the following. On my bin, and no doubt more outdated council ephemera such as land rate notices, the text is as follows (see image detail in *Figure 2: Image of Self in the Recovery Bin Logo from Kamay-(Botany Bay), 2020*):

"Garbage & Organics Recovery Bin

Rockdale City Council

On Historic Botany Bay"

Figure 2: Image of Self in the Recovery Bin Logo from Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020.

Image by the author.

I live in Kamay (Botany Bay) in the micro-context, yet the broader context extends in multifarious ways. The ways this image can be unpacked are myriad and manifest. Until recently, the perspective of First Nation Australians and the Gamayngal people of this area of Kamay (Botany Bay)¹ have not been prioritised and have indeed been overlooked. A recent National Museum of Australia exhibition details the missing perspective of First Nations Australians through documentation about the landing of James Cook in Australia on 29 April, 1770 when at 34°00'16" South 151°13'04" East:

"It was at Kamay (Botany Bay) that James Cook first set foot on the Australian continent. His landing was challenged by two men from the Gweagal clan of the Dharawal nation, standing on the beach." (Kamay - Botany Bay Exhibition, National Museum of Australia, 2020).

The significance of the exhibition is that the remit for the Australian National Museum mission and values addresses key debates and issues across all Australian States and Territories. The micro location and significance of place therefore transcends localised concerns, and spatially inserts a cultural and macro-conceptual debate about national imagery, contestation, and nationhood into the practice of everyday visits to the seaside. This ecologically locates my work in the practice of space as a temporal present-day phenomenon with unfinished historical renderings still present in everyday life.

In Figure 3 you can see the emphasis of claiming of territory through council signage and through the erection of monuments of James Cook's ship, the Endeavour, which you can see on the right-hand side of the image. One construal is about tensions surrounding the 250 years since the HMB Endeavour's Voyage, and the celebrations,² planned for 2020, of the so-called 'discovery' of Australia. The specific micro context of where I live is a constant, potent point of irritation regarding the macro context of contested national imagery involved with Cook's 'discovery' narrative. For example, in 2017, a prominent Australian journalist stated that the inscription on a statue of the British explorer Captain James Cook located in Sydney's Hyde Park was a "damaging myth" (Grant 2017). In an opinion piece,

Figure 3: Looking towards the Heads of Botany Bay (Kamay) from Cook Park, Bayside Council, Sans Souci, 2020. Image by the author.

journalist Stan Grant, a Wiradjuri man, argued for historical accuracy. He contested the inscription on the statue, which states that Australia was discovered by Cook in 1770, a description that for him aligns with the national narrative of Australia's discovery by the British, and omits recognition of the country's Indigenous inhabitants. Intense debate followed this article, with some politicians sounding the alarm over the rewriting of history. Meanwhile, this example highlights how national imagery in Australia is undergoing a phase of contestation and enquiry about the meaning and connectiveness of national narratives (Giovanangeli and Snepvangers 2016).

In Figure 2, you can see the logo, as well as the slightly scratched and erased patina on the wording, the content of which has been a source of amazement and tension for me for a long, long time. It is only now, during a period of somewhat forced reflection and non-hierarchical thinking beyond the workplace, that I can bring forth

this concentration. For example, the seemingly closed binary of the two males on the logo on either side of a traditional heraldic shield is inset with an Endeavour-type ship. The commemorative aspects of this so called 'First Encounter' set out an agenda of colonial seafaring supremacy and a strong maritime-esque maleness on the left, alongside an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander figure on the right. The tension is palpable in the context of Australia as a settler-colonial nation. For a start, each figure has a weapon at hand, yet the local council, through the lens of the logo, seems oblivious to any contested practice. In other words, the duality of the visual logo sets up an interplay of text and image that mirrors the outmodedness of the wording "garbage and recovery" in many nuanced ways. By placing myself in the image as a blurred figure, indistinct yet mutable, in lockdown, I float in and out of the enmeshment, at once at home and away. This visual rendering is speaking back to the half-said. Awayness is felt and palpable, as the conventions of logos and text often become unquestioned histories, especially in places of contested historical significance, such as 'On Historic Botany Bay.' Placing myself outside as the photographer and within as the photographed brings an interplay into being, becoming, and creating. As a person working with Aboriginal Cultural Mentors to make visible my hidden ancestry, the significance of uncovering microaggression in plain sight in everyday life is of paramount importance. My 25-year history of working in visual arts education across diverse sites has maintained a focus on working with Aboriginal mentors, and this remains a key concentration in my exhibition and performative work.

RENDERING #3 ROW OF BINS>SHADOW: IMAGE OF SELF IN ROW OF RECYCLING BINS FROM KAMAY – (BOTANY BAY).

My focus on binaries and layering relationships through visual rendering continued on my daily walk around the block from my house (see *Figure 4: Image of Self in Row of Recycling Bins from Kamay-(Botany Bay), 2020*).

The MMS project and the excess time at home during the pandemic spatially forced my focus on garbage bins. Staying at home sharp-

Figure 4: Image of Self in Row of Recycling Bins from Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020.
Image by the author.

ened my observations of daily procedures and historical tensions, especially stemming from the initial focus on my own garbage and recovery bin in my front yard. This grew to a communal interest. This is because the logo on my bin is repeated all over the suburb, and indeed the whole council area, thus reinforcing historical events from

the perspective of the dominant victor. Such indignities are hidden in plain sight, yet it took this project for me to be able to render a creative response. In Figure 4, I am present, witnessing this accumulation, as a solid shadow, casting a light on the events and activities, yet spatially separated from the system that sustains and supports these shadowy renderings.

The visual elements of the bins are overwhelming and intriguing at the same time; exactly how do you logistically service such an enterprise? Providing a full-time job for a person who took the bins in and out—this Thursday morning affair has social effects, particularly around the demeaning of the streetscape as a pleasant place to live, and logistically as a garbage transportation nightmare. The street becomes blocked when the garbage truck arrives, and the mechanical actions required to empty the bins continue for quite some time. The placement of the garbage bins affects the social relationships among neighbors, as there are just so many clustering along the walkway. The older part of the suburb and streetscape, where I live, does not have the same visual and structural impediments, yet this newer garbage and service arrangement just seems to create a focus on the unsustainable nature of garbage recovery. Perhaps the visual elements of accumulation also served to create an impression of unsustainability, which I had previously overlooked; yet unsustainability, like the logo on each bin, is seemingly overlooked by a range of individuals and collectives.

RENDERING #4 ROW OF BINS/FILMIC CUTS>SHADOW: FILMIC CUTS OF RECYCLING BINS FROM NUMBER 95, STREETSCAPE IN KAMAY – (BOTANY BAY).

The reason for the close ups is that the logos are different on each of the seemingly similar garbage bins. The logo which was the subject of Figure 2 is found on some, with two newer versions (minus the Aboriginal person) on several of the other bins. Some bins have the lids raised, some are completely open, some closed, a couple fallen over... as the aftermath of the bin emptying procedure is laid bare. The filmic cut (Figure 5) and cast shadow image (Figure 4) provide a

Figure 5: Filmic Cuts of Recycling Bins from Number 95, Streetscape in Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020. Images by the author.

challenge to seriality as sameness, limiting the actions of individual bins, for example, as they are not generic and have social constructs that open the possibility of resistance and non-compliance. These are some of my initial thoughts on the sustainability of bin collection at the system-level, especially about the possibility of garbage recovery and what this might mean. Yet, I am grounded in the thought that these are garbage bins with little or no street appeal. Secondary to the bin itself is the logo, with its historical binaries and Captain Cook, so I am placing hope in questioning and even contradicting the original usage and intention of each object in this article.

SHADOWY FINAL THOUGHTS

Rendering self and making microaggressions visible through the mirror shadow image, the half shadow and the half-said (jagodzinski 2002) is a way of making lived experiences visible during the pandemic. Making feelings visible through intimate/familiar objects (such as the mirror in my room, my garbage bin, and garbage bins in the next street of my local community) takes a close look at the power of tangible artefacts of time and place. These objects from a very small perimeter around my home at the micro level have been on a type of object itinerary themselves. Yet each rendered object is linked through an intangible, personal, yet fleeting shadow image to previously invisible, yet deeply felt sensibilities at the massive level in settler colonial Australia.

Through an investigation of micro existence from my everyday life, living near Kamay (Botany Bay), I seek to visually generate new renderings of material data. This work is necessary when your personal ancestry is also invisible. The modes have been generated using unprecedented pandemic thinking to challenge received histories. These new modes concentrate on slow velocities, walkable distances, and tension driven directionality to create layers of meaning through different shadow work mobilities. Through the quasi-darkness of mirroring, blurring effects, casting shadows on seriality, and creating filmic cuts, some darkly focused research sensibilities have now been rendered. However, the objects are nested within a potentiality for traversing tensions from the perspective of shining a light on everyday objects.

Recognizing the personal within the larger darkness implied by shadow has been rendered in the following ways:

- (mirror>shadow in Figure 1)—Individual to environmental interface: to explain person to environment interactions;
- (logo>shadow in Figure 2)—Individual to relationships: to dialogically increase people-environment transactions;

- (row of bins>shadow in Figure 4)—Individual to localised knowledge/community: to nurture change within particular environments;
- (row of bins/filmic cuts>shadow in Figure 5)—Individual to system: to expand environments so they support expression of an individual's system dispositions.

While connected through my movement, these renderings also highlight serendipity through the mirror gaze, with me literally being represented in the work in Figure 1; through reflective rendering of self in a vague shadow in a culturally reflective gaze in Figure 2; then through an actual cast shadow of myself highlighting the significance of repetition in cementing invisible tensions in Figure 4; then, finally, through an abstracted dislocation of shadows to create a filmic cut. Here the apparent continuity is the result of hidden cuts—a metaphor for the way seamlessness and unremarkability operate and become complicit in everyday life and experiences. Hence the importance of more than representational thinking when I was unable to go about typical day to day activities.

My artworks create capture some habituated routines that maintain invisible micro-aggressions hidden in plain sight. By examining ways of understanding locutionary positionality within the scope of a single geographic council area, static and pre-determined notions of historical superiority and the power of collectivity can be challenged. The challenge for me is to theorize the misguided assumptions of individual freedom that have been revealed during this project. In terms of my personal ancestry, MMS provided an opportunity to revisit creative, artographic ways of being, as well as expose my previous lack of macroscopic implications of the self in terms of capacities for autonomous action. Focusing on the system and the mechanics of production that maintain and support microaggressions in plain site/sight has emerged from the rendering shadow imagery in my daily walks and observations. Through visual images that move towards contemporary possibilities of reclamation, this project creates entanglements of Self, the Other, and the World with a provocative gaze that focuses on the system itself.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: The Mirror in My Room, 2020. Image by the author.

Figure 2: Image of Self in the Recovery Bin Logo from Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020. Image by the author.

Figure 3: Looking towards the Heads of Botany Bay (Kamay) from Cook Park, Bayside Council, Sans Souci, 2020. Image by the author.

Figure 4: Image of Self in Row of Recycling Bins from Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020. Image by the author.

Figure 5: Filmic Cuts of Recycling Bins from Number 95, Streetscape in Kamay – (Botany Bay), 2020. Images by the author.

NOTES

1. (<https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/endeavour-voyage/kamay-botany-bay>) and <https://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-people-and-place/>
2. (<https://www.endeavour250.gov.au/>),

MAKING SENSE OF NOISE – A SYMPHONY FOR VOICES

MARY-ROSE MCLAREN

This paper uses original and found poetry to shape the soundscape of 2020 into meaning. A critical auto-ethnographic study, it uses poetic strategies of arts-based methodology to weave stories, experiences and impressions together, to create a literary fabric of the year. So doing, it creates a choral piece for the spoken voice, which explores ideas of conspiracy, community, racism, oppression and justice, drawing on the author's experience in Australia, and connection with the wider world via the internet. Its focus on listening as meaning is formed from competing and contesting voices.

Cet article utilise une poésie originale et trouvée pour façonner le paysage sonore de 2020. Une étude auto-ethnographique critique, il utilise des stratégies poétiques de méthodologie basée sur les arts pour tisser des histoires, des expériences et des impressions ensemble, pour créer un tissu littéraire de l'année. Ce faisant, il crée une pièce de chorale pour la voix parlée, qui explore les idées de complot, de communauté, de racisme, d'oppression et de justice, en s'appuyant sur l'expérience de l'auteur en Australie et sur la connexion avec le monde entier via Internet. Son accent est mis sur l'écoute car le sens se forme à partir de voix concurrentes et contestataires.

INTRODUCTION¹

The year 2020 began in Australia (where I live) with what Professor John Shine, President of the Australian Academy of Science, called “unprecedented” bush fires.² From fires, Australia lurched into pandemic (not quite unprecedented, because humanity had experienced the Spanish flu of 1918-20). From there, many Australians protested in support of Black Lives Matter—pre-

cipitated by the murder of George Floyd, but in response to generations of racism, oppression, and brutality the world over. Severe economic downturn, the emboldening of white supremacy, and more “unprecedented” wild fires in California (this time identified as such by Frank Lake, a U.S. Forest Service research ecologist³), bring me to September 2020, when this paper is written. This year taught me to listen differently. Previously, I would have filtered out so much of this information and opinion; I would have dismissed it as the noise of daily life. But in 2020 this ‘noise’ connected me across the ether with family and friends around the world through a shared sense of trauma and anxiety, and shared fixations on numbers and daily reports. In amongst the bombardment of news, when listening differently, I heard things I had previously ignored. The slowing and stilling of my daily life was counter-balanced by my increasing engagement with the world via the internet. The following is my attempt to make sense of the cacophony of sound, the competing voices and ideas that are the noisescapes of 2020. This critical autoethnographic study uses poetic strategies of arts-based methodology to weave stories, experiences, and impressions together to create a literary fabric of the year. Poetry as research method, and as qualitative analysis and representation, is explored by Sandra L Faulkner (2017). She observes that poetry “shows, rather than tells, our human mysteries, triumphs, and foibles” (209). In choosing this form, I have sought to give the reader an embodied experience, taking them inside the moment of expression through the physical formation of sounds, the articulating of the words of others. This is consistent with William Faulkner’s understanding that:

“Poetry can help us see a relationship bleeding out, haemorrhaging from the inside, spilling outside the neat axioms of theory. Poetry can have us experience the social structures and ruptures *in situ* as we read, as we listen, as we hold our breath waiting for the next line.” (222)

Consequently, poetry as inquiry and research can offer transformative experiences to the reader (and writer), “by providing new insight, giving perspective, and/or advocating for social change” (227).

Consistent with this viewpoint, Hodge (2017) suggests that the nature of the critical reflection made possible through poetry offers “space to voice-silenced traumas” (11), that through poetry, one might enter vicariously into the lived experience of another person.

The following poetry is constructed in two different forms. The first is free verse, in my own words, appearing in the left-hand column. The second is found poetry, appearing in the right-hand column. Found poetry is constructed by selecting words and phrases from longer, often prose texts, such as interview transcripts or narrative accounts. Lisa D. Patrick (2016) distinguishes between these two forms of poetry in her own research poem about poetry as methodology:

“Research poets
refashion and reorder data,
presenting it as a poem . . .
crafting original poetry
in the voice of the researcher,
crafting found poetry
in the voice of the participant.” (Patrick 386)

The found poetry in the work below is drawn from transcripts of interviews, newspaper articles, opinion pieces, speeches by public figures and by activists at rallies, websites, songs, banners, and advertising material. The references for these, and where necessary the explanations, can be found in the endnotes. Although at times these words have been repeated or constructed into poetic form, they have not been altered from the original. Patrick goes on to discuss the “transaction” (387) between reader and text, and the ways in which found poetry facilitates this. One of the significant impacts of using found poetry in a project such as this one is the explicit way it identifies my interpretative role in the process of inquiry. By placing my own poetry alongside found poetry, each reflects on, and informs,

the other. At times these two forms intersect and become interwoven. In order to keep the distinction between my own words and the found poetry clear, my own words always appear in italics. Occasionally there are italicised words in amongst the found poetry in the right-hand column. These are my words, added in order to move the found poetry along, make connections, or develop the aesthetics.

A significant challenge in writing this piece has been identifying my own standpoint. My aim in the found poetry has been to amplify voices, not to take them or control them. I am a white, middle-aged woman. While I can feel shocked, diminished, and enraged by the stories of marginalised, silenced, and oppressed people, I can never know their lived experiences. I hope this work honours those voices and adds to the calls for justice in our world. Amongst the found poetry you will also find the competing voices of the privileged. I place them there to contextualise the voices they silence, and to implicitly offer critique of them. Doing so creates contested space on the page, and is a reminder of the clash of values being played out in the choices people make. You may wonder how I selected the voices I did. I used the open architecture of the internet to guide me: I started with word searches on Google and You Tube and simply followed links. I found myself delving further and further into sites I would never normally have accessed, and hearing the ideas and opinions of people whose world perceptions are very different from my own. Following links on YouTube takes the viewer to varied places, where words shift meaning according to context. At the time this poem was written, “flattening the curve” took me from coronavirus to body image, which reminded me, in turn, of Donald Trump’s perceptions of, and desire to control, the female body. Some months later, as I review this paper, “flattening the curve” takes the viewer straight to conspiracy theories. I also followed links through newspaper sites; sometimes I saw images or heard or read words that resonated, and which I then specifically sought out. George Floyd’s last words—“I can’t breathe”—are an example of this. I knew they were also the last words of Aboriginal Australian David Dungay Jr, who died in police custody in 2015. The intersection of breath across the experience of

COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the experience of Indigenous peoples in Australia, was one route through my 2020.

One last point about the writing: the success of any work lies in its reader or listener being able to move in, out, and through it; to engage in emotional intensity and pull back and view objectively. For this reason, not all elements of the work are deeply serious. However, all reflect on the bombardment by social and political noise that has occurred during lockdown and pandemic; and on my personal growing awareness of the pain that some of us inflict, wittingly or not, on others. The Melbourne lockdown was one of the strictest and longest in the world.⁴ Initial restrictions were introduced on March 16. Stage four restrictions, which included an 8:00 pm curfew, masks, and limiting time outside the house to one hour a day, commenced on August 2 and continued into late October. During this time the noise of aeroplanes overhead, and cars on the road, almost disappeared. But the noise of the internet, the main communication outside the home, became louder and louder. I have tried to capture that sense of loud, competing, noise outside of my own experience. In this work it is my intention to amplify the voices of oppressed people, never to trivialise them. I sincerely hope this work is read in that way.

The creation of this piece has been an exercise in embodied writing. I selected words because they generated a visceral response. I have sought to communicate this viscosity in the use of rhythms and repetition. Because music is meaning made from noise, I have taken a musical motif—the symphony—and redesigned it for the spoken word. It is designed to be read aloud by numerous voices—sometimes in unison, sometimes overlapping or echoing each other, at other times challenging each other. There are several ways you can read this work: down one column and then the other; across the page; or moving between columns by stanza or movement. Each of these ways will give a different sense to the work. I encourage you to read it aloud and to experiment with the process of reading that speaks best to you. My own preference is to read across the page.

First Movement

Sonata: Exposition

I am making sense

Made sense sense made

Sense in the Making

I am trying

To make Sense.

To Sense:

To feel, touch, hold, smell

to breathe in the rancid

and the scented

to taste in the air

and on the tongue

to know the passage of Time

to hear the cries of abandonment

to listen for Hope

to be deaf.

To see

to envisage, imagine, dream,

to make art

to find

the current that tumbles tidelike

into and out of the Mind.

To use senses to make Sense.

We must remember to protect
ourselves

from people

who choose to not engage

in the critical act of

thinking.⁵

Thinking

Thinking

I don't like how my chances of

survival

are linked to

the common sense of

others⁶

My sense

Our sense

Common sense

And yet....

The fire the smoke

the blast of taser

the car horns

the missiles, rocks

the calling of names

the hiding in bunkers

the blaming and cursing

the crying out

the penting up

*the years of sin that lie on the
land*

the blood seeping into soil

and bitumen

lying in red coagulating puddles

under our feet

Breaking things, breaking down

Cracking crashing crushing

But

This is how people are actually
feeling.

This is temporary shit.

This is our **future** we stand up
for

We will cause a **scene**⁷

Donald Trump spent
only a “tiny” amount of time
only a tiny amount

tiny, tiny amount
in a reinforced bunker -
while protesters **rage**

Donald inspects
(but not for his safety)
just
to inspect⁸

We tried peaceful protesting
and this was our last resort
actions speak louder than
words

Is this breaking or building?

Breaking capitalism?

Building fairness?

Breaking wealth?

Building Justice?

Breaking privilege?

Building solidarity?

*Who controls the paradigm of
understanding?*

the failure to listen

actions speak louder

It sucks to see our city

burning burning burning

but they're finally listening to
us.

We will be heard.

Fuck those media outlets

They're going to

portray us in a bad light

Only showing what's going

on over here

at the end of the day⁹A bad
light

Bad

Shit got out of control.

Shit

Got

Out of control¹⁰

Fuck all that talking¹¹

the failure to hear
the failure to see
the failure to touch lives
the failure to taste the bitterness
the failure to smell dissent

the failure.

I need you to see me
You don't see colour?
You don't see **me**.¹²

Some people can't walk round
without
being scared
that some cop
is going to come to them
with a
Death sentence.¹³

The nonSense
the SenseLess

Sonata: Development

When no cents doesn't mean
No Sense

You are on mute
muted
neutered
powerless

We want the person with no
cents to their
name to have enough word
in this world
to change it¹⁴
We're out here
living through hundreds of
years

*we're all on mute
silenced by Capitalism
by politicians with agendas
that don't include me
or you
or us
but someone else.*

*It is the great silence
and the great silencing
put on a mask,
muffle the voice
set the incomers to mute
who has the controls?*

Australia is a fucking crime scene²² America is a crime
scene²³ *Every colonised country is a crime scene*

*They tell us to flatten the curve
they've been telling women that
for years:
have you ever been cat-called*

of discrimination and a
bunch of stigma
that we face every single day.
This is the only way we are
heard¹⁵
It really doesn't make sense to
me, to be
honest¹⁶

It begins
with an act of recogni-
tion¹⁷ Australia is not inno-
cent.¹⁸ De-colonise this
place.¹⁹ There's a right way to
protest
and that's peacefully
We saw that many times with
Martin Luther King²⁰
They still assassinated
him...²¹

You're so fat

fat-called
body shamed
body framed
body blamed?
lose weight
girdle the rolls of fat
make the curves that men want
flatten the natural curve
through denial and sacrifice.
This is no different then
women know how to do this
young teenage girls
who bind their breasts in the
hope of
controlling menstruation
of never becoming women
because who would want to be?
Who would actively choose to
be oppressed simply by being
who they are
to be muted, flattened
held on the ground by the knee
of
oppression
Who would choose to be black
to be yellow

Boys call me fat all the
 time²⁴The thigh gap
 Slimthick
 slim and thick
 thick and slim
 everything has to be
 proportional²⁵*Put a gap here*
put a lump there
a plump
little lump
right there
*where I can grab it*²⁶I wear black
 leggings
 because they make me look
 small²⁷I just
 don't look in the mirror²⁸Hon-
 estly - I just
 really
 I just
 don't feel comfortable
 in my own skin²⁹
 I like my skin colour because
 it's different³⁰I am pretty
 I am empowered
 I am who I am³¹

*to be anything other than male
and white*

with a private school education

*And an inheritance as big as a
mountain?*

*Who would choose anything
else?*

Sonata: Recapitulation

Is stupidity a choice?

or a curse?

Perhaps a blessing to live

*the unexamined life³² when
everything is conspiracy because*

that is easier

than responsibility.

*And when stupid and nasty
stand*

hand in hand

stupid and racist

stupid and misogynistic

*how much power do the stupid
have?*

The power to think.

You have given away that power

to people who will use it

to **manipulate** you,

to control how you live,

whether it be in poverty

or subjugation.

When you fail to consider

the messages your world sends
to you,

you have made a choice,

conscious or not,

to be

stupid.³³

How is there sense in that?

Stop 5G; Look up event 201;

Newsom Gates Soros Global
Psychopaths

The W.H.O. is Poo!

Impeach Bill Gates³⁴ Every con-
spiracy you ever heard

was pretty much true³⁵ We're
looking at a seasonal flu

and a bunch of fake death num-
bers³⁶ Fake death

fake news fake bombs³⁷ Lock-
down is slavery³⁸

You can be stupid in any num-
ber of ways:

You can be **blinded** by your
religion.

You can be **blinded** by your
dependence

on social media.

You can be **stupidly parti-**
san

and unable to listen

to people who don't share

your ways of life.

You can be stupidly biased

against minorities or

against a social group or

culture you haven't made an
effort

to understand.³⁹

What if I had my knee in their
neck.

for 11 minutes...⁴⁰If you can
talk you can breathe.⁴¹

*Is it the fear of fear
that propels us
like circus clowns from the can-
non?
The fear of looking weak,
feeling weak, being weakened?
Weak to accept difference
Weak to take precautions
Weak to be female
or black
Weak to wear a mask
Weak to seek justice
Weak to share power
Weak to share wealth
Weak to be Human*

We are teaching fear, not
courage⁴²

Strength is
hatred of weakness.⁴³Fear
strengthens tribalistic instincts,
tribalistic instincts amplify
fear.

Nothing bonds a group more
tightly

than a common enemy
a mortal threat^{44a} mortal
threat:

It's nothing more than a com-
mon cold⁴⁵Sadistic

passionate

hatred,

and that's what proves they're
strong,

*We are all Less
all without Sense
when we fail to sense
the fall of Humanity.*

*The fall
The first sin
the absence of Love*

*Make sense of this then
Make sense of change
Make sense.*

Sense.

their passionate hatred
for weakness.⁴⁶

If you can talk you can
breathe

A Fair Australia⁴⁷ Make Amer-
ica Great Again⁴⁸

Failed in their duty of care⁴⁹

We took the traditional lands
and

smashed the traditional way of
life.

We brought the diseases. The
alcohol.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from
their mothers.

We practised discrimination
and exclusion

It was our ignorance and our
prejudice.

And our failure

to imagine these things being
done to us.⁵⁰

I can't do anything to help.⁵¹

I can't breathe.⁵²

I can't.
Breathe.

Second Movement

*The whole only exists as the
replication*

*trillions and zillions of times,
of the microscopic.*

*Made as we are of billions of
cells;*

each cell made of atoms.

There is stardust in each of us

– and dinosaur wee.

*The replication of the world
over and over and over again:
walnuts that look like brains;
flowers that look like vaginas;*

*birds that mimic human indus-
try*

*(or human industry that mimics
birds)*

*leaves that show in their trac-
ings*

the shape of the tree.

All around us

The problem starts with us –
the non

Aboriginal Australians⁵³

Injustice anywhere is a threat
to justice

everywhere⁵⁴

White silence

Equals white violence⁵⁵

Rest in peace George
Floyd.⁵⁶ Justice Now for David
Dungay Jr.⁵⁷

If you can talk you can breathe

I don't support the looting

and the fires. I'm just

supporting the cause⁵⁸ I just

think what people are doing
here

*microscopic images of the mas-
sive,
and each of them,
built one on another,
shapes the whole.*

*Pieces topple, people crumble,
systems fail,
voices call into the chaos, de-
spair dwells,
destruction ensues.*

*We are all intimately interwo-
ven.*

*And yet there are those who
would tear*

the fabric to make cloths of gold

For themselves.

is just

ruining the whole point of
this⁵⁹

It is Just

our mere existence

bothering them⁶⁰ Stolen lives on
stolen land⁶¹

The centre cannot hold⁶²

*Rest in peace Joyce Clarke, Rebecca Maher, DK, Tanya
Louise Day, SDC and Mr Ward⁶³ Rest in Peace.*

*Rest in peace, you more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples who have died in custody since the
end of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in
custody in 1991.⁶⁴ Rest in peace Rayshard Brooks and
Daniel Prude, Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson,
and the many many, many more Black people killed by
police in the US⁶⁵ Rest in peace all those who have been
silenced, who could not breathe, all those held down and
shot up, the oppressed killed by the oppressor.*

Remember their names.⁶⁶

What next?

We struggle on.

Can change happen?

Is this the

beginning

of the end?

*Is this the end we need in order
to have a*

beginning?

*Is it a pandemic that brings us to
our knees,*

cursing and wielding knives?

Or does it open our eyes

to the flaws,

the crevasses,

the failings?

*Is COVID the critical friend we
have longed*

for?

*It is always hard to embrace the
devil's*

advocate. And yet....

what next?

what next?

Everything's inevitable.⁶⁷

I want to give back to you the
ownership of this land⁶⁸

Where do we go from here?⁶⁹

We shouldn't be importing
things that are

happening overseas

We don't need to draw

equivalence here⁷⁰

What message are we sending

by destroying what is ours?⁷¹

what next?

Third Movement

Stay home

shut the doors

close the curtains

turn on Netflix

sit it out.

28 weeks in lockdown

196 days

4,704 hours

282,240 seconds

and counting....

Stay home

Keep our Hospitals safe

1.5 metres

Wash your hands

Don't touch your face

Wear a **mask**

Stay home.

Staying apart

staying apart

staying apart

keeps us together⁷²

34.1 million COVID 19 cases
worldwide

1,015,815 deaths

7,245,228 cases in the US

6,312,584 in India

4,810,935 in Brazil

1,179,634 in Russia⁷³In Colom-
bia, Iran, the Philippines,

Indonesia

In Romania, Morocco,

Ghana and Nigeria,

*The Spanish flu was
36,500 days ago.
876,000 hours
52 million 560,000 seconds
and counting....*

*Time immemorial
unimaginable
before my time
your time
our time.
before*

*No Zoom
no Netflix
no washing machine
no dishwasher
no phone*

In Iceland, Yemen, West Bank
and Gaza,

In China, in Japan,

In Ethiopia, Madagascar,
Myanmar and

Korea

In Fiji, Cambodia, Oman, and
Sweden⁷⁴.

500 million people infected

50 million deaths

worldwide⁷⁵

How long?

Not long,

because the arc of the moral
universe is

long,

but it bends toward justice.⁷⁶

The tools to deal

with the global emergency

were limited⁷⁷ Despite improve-
ments since 1918,

governments and health care
systems

remain inadequately prepared
for

no television

no laptop

no iTunes

no podcast

the impact of a 1918-like
severe influenza
pandemic.⁷⁸

27 July, 1919.

Homes and buildings
burned to the ground.

When one falls

We all fall

*It is hard to breathe when you're
hanging*

*it is hard to breathe with a knee
in your neck*

Burning burning burning

*it is hard to breath with liquified
lungs*

Hard to speak

When the powerful and ignorant

have their knees on the necks

of all the Lost

And Losing

White mobs lynched
forty-three African Americans,
sixteen hanged, others shot,
eight men burned at the stake.⁷⁹

*Did they even have ventilators
then?*

Silences

stillnesses

walking the footpaths

of a fantasy land

chalked rainbows

teddy bears in windows

cities of spoons⁸⁰ Every day the same:

walk the dog, pad, pad, pad,

sniff, meander, wee,

whoosh whoosh goes the tail,

pant, pant;

home again

computer on,

ding, ding, ding,

*zooooooooom innnn zooooooooom
innnnn*

Sit.....

*long slow notes of movement as
the day progresses.*

*the long sonorous sounds of
silent disruption.*

Sleepless nights

are dark tunnels to the future

He's a real **nO**where man

making all his **nO**where plans

for **nO**body⁸¹

We've had people

trying to groom their own dogs

cutting and gashes -

It's just

Going on and on⁸²

Going on and on

Going on and on

Going on and on

I'll give ya a dose

but it'll never come close

to the rage built up inside of me

fist in the air, in the land of

hypocrisy⁸³

Listen:
bat in the tree
cars intermittently.....
night fades to day.....
zzzzzzzz
dingalingalingaling.
WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP.

Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!
Wake up! Wake up!
Wake up! **Wake up!**
Wake up!⁸⁴

We all just
Need to wake up

Fourth Movement

The body is the site of our being.
Despite the intellectual pursuit
the existential desire,
we live and die in the body.
We are the body
destroyed by virus or violence.

Violence enforced on our bod-
ies since **invasion**
built on the **genocide** of my
people⁸⁵
The rampant and deliberate vi-
olence inflicted on us by the
state⁸⁶

Say it aloud, and slowly:
Virus
Violence.
These lead to destruction,
the entanglements, of virus and
violence.
their intricate inter-relations.

*Does virus make us more
violent?*

*Does violence make us more prone to
virus?*

*How do we measure decay –
can we distinguish between the decay
of the body
and the decay of the soul,
of the moral core?*

*My body is a temple.
That's what They say,
those who would control my use
of it,
my life within it,
my agency to act.
My body is more a tent or a de-
caying
warehouse
That's what I say,
where illnesses come to rave.
It is the site of virus and is vul-
nerable to
violence.
Let us 'fight' an illness
let us 'kick cancer's butt';*

Kick cancer's butt
Etsy, Pinterest, Zazzle, face-
book
Kick
Fight

let vaccinations be our 'weapon' **Kick**
let us internalise the violence
normalise the violence
make the violence part of us

We use the body
to shape the world.

There is a sickness in our minds that takes us
to violence,
infects us with Violence.

Racism is a pandemic
too⁸⁷

Virus and violence:

one feeds the other;
one informs the other. We are

Please make it right⁸⁸

victims

We failed to ask –
to both.

How would I feel
if this
were done to
Me?⁸⁹

Let's be Just
Just

be Just.

I appreciate you listening.⁹⁰

The only sense

is Justice.

Now, we transform.⁹¹

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NOTES

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2. <https://www.science.org.au/news-and-events/news-and-media-releases/australian-bushfires-why-they-are-unprecedented#:~:text=In%20a%20statement%20on%20the,unprecedented%20anywhere%20in%20the%20world'.>↵
3. [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/12/california-oregon-washington-fires-explained-climate-change.](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/12/california-oregon-washington-fires-explained-climate-change)↵
4. Details of the Melbourne lockdown and how it compared to lockdowns in other countries can be found here: [https://www.sbs.com.au/news/is-melbourne-s-coronavirus-lockdown-really-the-longest-in-the-world-here-s-how-other-countries-stack-up.](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/is-melbourne-s-coronavirus-lockdown-really-the-longest-in-the-world-here-s-how-other-countries-stack-up)↵
5. Thaddeus Howze, 2017, *The Four Ds – Surviving the Social Media Apocalypse* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/four-ds-surviving-social-media-apocalypse-thaddeus-howze/>↵
6. L.S.Pig, as a comment on All Gas No Brakes (independent media) video reporting of anti-lockdown demonstrations, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>↵
7. The preceding four lines are quotes from black men present at the Minneapolis riots following the death of George Floyd (May, 2020). They are recorded by All Gas No Brakes and can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
8. [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/trump-bunker-george-floyd-protests.](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/trump-bunker-george-floyd-protests)↵
9. Quotes from Black men present at the Minneapolis riots following the death of George Floyd (May, 2020). They are recorded by All Gas No Brakes and can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
10. Quote from Black man present at the Minneapolis riots following the death of George Floyd (May, 2020). It is recorded by All Gas No Brakes and can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
11. Quote from Black man present at the Minneapolis riots following the death of George Floyd (May, 2020). It is recorded by All Gas No Brakes and can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵

12. Makan, Vidya, September 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99WPIneNxGo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2GLG3i9XtjMkVx5QCqnWegVxOn9EHvkXjBosfcWKUi-YrHmH8w5odD2Ec> In this original song, a number of BIPOC people come together to challenge the idea of colour blindness, demanding that their identities be acknowledged as other than white.↵
13. Brady Bussman, white man, interviewed during protests in Minneapolis, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99WPIneNxGo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2GLG3i9XtjMkVx5QCqnWegVxOn9EHvkXjBosfcWKUi-YrHmH8w5odD2Ec>↵
14. Man during Minneapolis riots, recorded by All Gas No Brakes and found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
15. Black man during Minneapolis riots, recorded by All Gas No Brakes and found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
16. White woman during Minneapolis riots, recorded by All Gas No Brakes and found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>↵
17. Paul Keating, then Prime Minister of Australia, Redfern Speech (Year for the World's Indigenous People) delivered December 10, 1992. The transcript can be found here: https://antar.org.au/sites/default/files/paul_keating_speech_transcript.pdf The authorship of the speech is disputed. Keating's speech writer, Don Watson, and Keating both lay claim to its core ideas. See Tom Clark's article for *The Conversation* here: <https://theconversation.com/keatings-redfern-speech-is-still-worth-fighting-over-21118>↵
18. Banner at Black Lives Matter rally in Melbourne. https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/video/australia-not-innocent-thousands-at-tend-110122138.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANZX1fxYYueVE-wHISoVX46KowXxLDTtPdh64rW6eX_TtBXO593pje9Tjm-Wyxjr-NaTPSNKUfVA8Dpuv88SqzCo6rpmzwS9-YHeN-1QENnAR-wzSK7P_ij8z9T_hxrMgRH4Hnf8hVCbmplzMIyhpSLhzMchgJInAn-bCocM59hbu3FB↵
19. Banner at Black Lives Matter rally, Melbourne, June 2 2020, as reported by *The Project* on Channel 10 Melbourne, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MirDPh6I88> . The call to 'decolonise this place' as a catch-

- phrase to open conversations and actions about the oppression of colonization originates in the USA (<https://decolonizethisplace.org>).↵
20. White man at Minneapolis riots, recorded by All Gas No Brakes and found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8>.↵
 21. Black man, interviewed separately from the white man quoted above, at the Minneapolis riots, recorded by All Gas No Brakes and found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZPeD2miyF8> Both the white man in the previous quote, and this Black man, referenced Martin Luther King, though with different understandings of his impact and the consequences of his actions. Martin Luther King was also referenced by Australia's Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, when he commented on the Black Lives Matter rallies in Australia and the rioting in the USA, recorded by the Australian Broadcasting Commission <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXmREhYbiSk>.↵
 22. Tameeka Tighe at the Black Lives Matter ally in Newcastle, Australia, on July 5, 2020. Tighe contextualized her assertion by stating, "In 1831 Lachlan Macquarie declared martial law on our people and we became prisoners of war in our own country." <https://www.canberra-times.com.au/story/6819966/australia-is-a-f-ing-crime-scene-law-student-tells-blm-rally/>↵
 23. In 2014 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz published *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press) in which she states, "North America is a crime scene." An extract can be found at: https://www.salon.com/2014/10/13/north_america_is_a_crime_scene_the_untold_history_of_america/.↵
 24. Ella, aged 13, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk This video was made by Allure. Allure describe their YouTube channel as "focused on bringing beauty to life with unparalleled expertise, smart storytelling, and racial inclusivity." (<https://www.youtube.com/c/Allure/about>)↵
 25. Claudia, aged 15 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk.↵
 26. This is a purposeful allusion to Donald Trump's "Grab 'em by the pussy" comment, made in 2005 and published by the New York Times on October 8, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>.↵

27. Izzi, aged 10, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk
28. Mia, aged 11, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk
29. Mia, aged 11, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk
30. Megan, aged 11, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk
31. Mia, aged 11, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mP5RveA_tk
32. Plato attributes these words to Socrates in *Apology*, set in the year 339BCE (the date of writing is unknown), section 38a. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0170%3Atext%3DApol.%3Asection%3D38a> The idea is critiqued in “Dancing Through Life”, a song from *Wicked* by Stephen Lawrence Schwartz, 2003.
33. Thaddeus Howze, 2017, *The Four Ds – Surviving the Social Media Apocalypse* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/four-ds-surviving-social-media-apocalypse-thaddeus-howze/>.
34. Banners at the anti-lockdown rally, California, 26 April, 2020. Recorded by All Gas No Brakes, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>. Event 201 was a table top exercise undertaken on October 18, 2019, by the Centre for Health Security. It simulated global responses to a zoonotic novel coronavirus pandemic in order to build readiness for such an event. As conspiracy theories link Event 201 with COVID-19, the Centre for Health Security made the following statement: “Although our tabletop exercise included a mock novel coronavirus, the inputs we used for modeling the potential impact of that fictional virus are not similar to nCoV-2019.” More information can be found here: <https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/news/center-news/2020-01-24-Statement-of-Clarification-Event201.html>.
35. White male protester, at the anti-lockdown rally, California, 26 April, 2020. Recorded by All Gas No Brakes, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>
36. White male protestor at the anti-lockdown rally, California, 26 April, 2020. Recorded by All Gas No Brakes, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>

37. Banner at anti-lockdown rally, California, 26 April, 2020. Recorded by All Gas No Brakes, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>
38. White female protestor at the anti-lockdown rally, California, 26 April, 2020. Recorded by All Gas No Brakes, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kkBseVTUow>
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RESILIENCE IN PANDEMIC SENSEMAKING: THINKING THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

MARY ELIZABETH LUKA

In the fall of 2020, a series of videos created for the exploratory shared experience called Massive Micro Sensemaking were presented at the Virtual International Arts (VIA) Festival for Social Change in New York. In this article, Luka considers these works as caring, reflective and expressive practices of resilience during a global crisis, while questioning who benefits from promoting ideas about social resilience in such circumstances.

À l'automne 2020, une série de vidéos créées pour une expérience partagée exploratoire, appelée Massive Micro Sensemaking, a été présentée au Virtual International Arts (VIA) Festival for Social Change à New York. Dans cet article, Luka considère ces vidéos comme des pratiques de résilience bienveillantes, réflexives et expressives dans un contexte de crise mondiale, tout en se demandant à qui profite la promotion d'idées sur la résilience sociale dans de telles circonstances.

INTRODUCTION

On October 27, 2020, 40 people from around the English-speaking world met on the COVID-19 pandemic's ubiquitous gathering platform, Zoom, to screen and discuss a collection of 14 videos. It was the first night of a three-day international salon-gathering-slash-virtual-performance-festival, the Virtual International Arts (VIA) Festival for Social Change, hosted by the Mark De Garmo Dance Company. The latter is a non-profit organization that supports interdisciplinary programming in New York City, targeted to under-served school-age students (

modance.org/). De Garmo choreographs and performs dance-theatre as well as hosting performance art and time-based media salons, such as the VIA festival where the MMS videos were exhibited. The nominal revenues generated by donations to the organization help cover the costs of exhibitions, discussion forums, dance-theatre performances, and educational programs.

The first night of the October 2020 VIA Festival featured videos generated by a 21-day autoethnographic prompts initiative, Massive Micro Sensemaking, (Markham and Harris 2020) that had ended just four months earlier, on June 7. Curated into batches of five to eight minutes of viewing (four batches of three videos; one of two videos), the presentation honoured the messy production values required by the rapid response and multiple file transfers used in these short-term time-based responses. Interspersed with five-minute discussion interludes with the three curators and several of the makers, the hour-long event created a bubble of visceral, intense reminders about what it had been like in the first weeks of the lockdowns, within which to watch, revisit, react, feel, and reflect on COVID-19 times, so far. Months later, it is evident (as with other articles in this special issue) that the layers of observation, reaction, and early analysis generated within these early “bubbles” (see Peterken, this issue) by MMS participants allowed the scholars, artists, and activists a way to feel connected to others through startling shifts in awareness of unfolding life experiences, to actively pause their own research agendas, and to explore a shared autoethnographic experience. More than this, however, in this article, I explore how sometimes seemingly superficial notions of resilience embedded in the video productions are deeply, if tentatively, felt, and can be unpacked as expressions not just of the tantalizing promise of MMS (making sense of the world collectively through ‘sensemaking’), but also how it might connect to long-standing considerations of cultural trauma developed by Indigenous scholars and artists such as Thomas King and Cheryl L’Hirondelle. As the world (at the macro level) and the participants (at the micro level) emerge from that first year of extreme flux due to COVID-19, to what extent will shifts in research and creative practice and the kind of collegiality engendered by MMS with its 165 par-

ticipants take hold in the longer term, and why does this matter? I examine the curatorial threads drawn through the VIA Festival programming sequence and peer through the lenses of the videos of that evening—and a few other artworks—to better understand what the process offered beyond immediate catharsis and preliminary sense-making about the situation evolving—or sometimes unraveling—before us.

MASSIVE MICRO SENSEMAKING

The MMS project came calling in April 2020, just a couple of weeks after the initial national lockdown in Canada in response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. Annette Markham, one of the organizers (then based in Denmark), asked if I would be interested in collaborating on an autoethnographic creative/critical research response to the pandemic. Like so many others, I was intent on making sense of what was happening, as well as alternately resisting and accepting the changes to daily life that it was obvious had arrived. So, I said yes. On the work front, my preparation for summer research involving visits to creative hubs across the country had come to a screeching halt. I had flipped my winter courses to online delivery over the weekend. We officially transitioned from winter to spring and had delivered the last three weeks of the course in a shockingly different way than anticipated. And I was preparing to teach an intensive, multi-disciplinary methods course for 20 graduate students online at the largest university in the country. The students I work with come from different disciplines and degrees as well as diverse scholarly and professional backgrounds and exhibit various levels of comfort with being online for coursework. While some were registered in digital design programs, most were in education, management, or arts-based courses. As for me, the multi-disciplinary course was the seventh new-to-me course in a row. I was exhausted and felt unmoored in life and work, coming into the lockdown. The unfolding MMS preparation and processes helped to ground me.

While there have been several early outpourings of scholarly, professional, pragmatic, and creative reflections on the impact of the pandemic, this paper takes a step back to examine the way in which COVID-inflected productions set the stage to help shape acceptance of disruption and emergent visual culture presentation practices online. One of the outcomes of MMS was a series of videos programmed for viewing at the Mark De Garmo Virtual International Arts (VIA) Festival for Social Change on October 27, 2020, an event that provided the non-profit educational and performance company, Mark De Garmo Dance, with an engaging online event management experience. The first video presented that night was “Run Bunny Run” (Bastick et al., 2020, 0:51 mins).

Figure 1: Still from “Run Bunny Run” (Bastick et al., 2020, 0:51 mins).

“Run Bunny Run” (Bastick et al., 2020, 0:51 mins)

Stills of the gold-foil-wrapped chocolate ‘bunny’ in the ‘outside world,’ coupled with the threatening, pounding music in the soundtrack video pathetically and hilariously represent the vulnerability that many people felt in the early days of the pandemic lockdowns and the urge to somehow escape the situation, even if that meant self-injury or destruction. Its gentle but decisively fatal optimism results in the dissolution of itself as an object—every location it visits results in further melting, in

just 51 seconds—even while suggesting that there is a way ahead, which is fully unknown and yet to be shaped.

In the heart-pounding early days of shelter-in-place/stay-at-home orders, in late April and early May, I worked behind the scenes with Markham and her co-lead in the MMS project, Dan Harris, to prepare a series of 21 prompts for use between May 18 and June 7 (Markham and Harris). These exercises were designed to activate classic critical autoethnography as method by: “(1) *disrupting norms of research practice and representation*; (2) *working from insider knowledge*; (3) *maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty and making life better*; (4) *breaking silence/(re) claiming voice and writing to right*; and (5) *making work accessible*” (Holman Jones et al., 32, emphasis in original). These qualities make critical autoethnography a uniquely suitable method for exploring complex understandings of resilience and survivance. As I explore below, “resilience” (McRobbie) was one of the terms that was frequently used in reference to the changing social conditions exacerbated or caused by the unfurling of the COVID-19 global pandemic, though the way in which it was deployed has more in common with how creative workers in the arts develop professional capacity in precarious work conditions compared to how the related term, “survivorship” (Vizenor), is used by Indigenous scholars and artists in regard to traumatic social changes or conditions.

In Markham and Harris’s initial call for papers for a potential special issue on the autoethnographic experiences of COVID-19 to a variety of Listservs, more than 150 people responded with abstracts (including the 20 graduate students I was teaching). The 21 days of autoethnographic prompts was a way to build a community of connection and conduct research about sudden mandatory forms of social isolation at a time when the sensation of isolation was more unfamiliar and thereby intense (Markham, Harris, and Luka 2020). One recurrent theme that has since become a trope of the times, “being together, alone,” was promoted by governments globally as a way to behave for the foreseeable and unknown future. In contrast, the initial challenge posed in the MMS call began with questions to observe what impacts such exhortations were having on people (as individu-

als or in a social context): “How is the experience of COVID-19 transforming everyday life? How are we making sense of this moment on both a global and granular scale?” Later, every single daily prompt would begin with this directive:

“You have 24 hours to complete this task. The goal, as we will repeat daily like a mantra, is to build our embodied sensibilities toward the material we study, practice autoethnographic forms of analysis, and transform our personal experiences through this COVID-19 moment into critical understanding of scale, sensemaking, and relationality of humans, nonhumans, and the planet.” (Markham and Harris, 2020)

One of the prompts that I was deeply invested in was Prompt 3, which was a variation on another COVID-19 research-creation project, EXC-19 (<https://exc-19.com/>, Luka 2020). This preceding creative project had invited artists, students, researchers, and other interested people to work together in a team of four to produce an “exquisite corpse” video, without knowing who the other three people were. Midi Onodera, the creator and producer of the project, noted:

“[EXC-19 was] based on the Surrealist drawing game, ‘The Exquisite Corpse’, modified for the moving image. Each video would begin with a written piece of 19 words [because...COVID-19]. This text was then randomly and anonymously given to someone else to shoot video, photos or source found footage that somehow spoke to the written word. The footage would then be forwarded to another person for editing and finally a fourth person would create the soundtrack. The ‘collaborators’ for each video would only be revealed once the video had been completed.” (EXC-19 website)

I used the EXC-19 experience as inspiration for the MMS version of a media-based Exquisite Corpse game. A sign-up sheet in the shared Google folder allowed for up to four people to come together for MMS-EXC. People who did not yet know each other could commit to undertaking this process together, acting as an ice-breaker to get to know one another as well as a creative exercise and prompt re-

sponse. Many managed to complete their own step of the exercise within 24-48 hours (as directed by the prompt and notwithstanding multiple time zones), which resulted in several videos being completed within a week.

The two videos that I was involved in met the criteria of Prompt 3. The Group 6 video, “Land Here” (Gallaway-Mitchell et al., 2020, 1:11 mins), used progressively stark still images from a research site in the north, each featuring local birds and wildlife, except for one collage of four images of heavy-duty equipment in the middle of the sequence. While the first image of a bird showed it flying in a wide open sky, the next images of birds were shown moving around harbour waters and the rest moved through stages of death and decomposition. The soundtrack was composed from wind, bird sounds and machine sounds, waves floating in and out of hearing. The group that had created this video loved it, though it was not shared with the rest of the MMS project because the images came from a research site and were not meant to be revealed, a condition shared after the video had been completed. Nonetheless, the objectives of the exercise were achieved, as all the participants came to know each other’s work a bit better and to feel more involved as part of the larger group. The other Prompt 3 video I was involved in, “Zoom Haiku,” (Holford, Markham, Luka, and Harris, 2020, 1:15 mins) incorporated a cacophony of images typical of the early days of the lockdowns (social media screen grabs from ‘doomscrolling,’ lonely though often contemplative walks by the shore, puzzles, marks on a paper from unfinished or only briefly glimpsed drawings, headlines from politicians falsely claiming to have contained the virus, and, increasingly, screen captures of glitches) with glitzy, tacky titles revealing the 19-word ‘haiku’, overlaid with a beautifully calming piano soundtrack combined with the sound of waves and wind. Many of the videos featured at the October 27 VIA Festival event took a close look at the experience of suddenly enforced isolation, with several using similarly jarring juxtapositions of sound, image, and text, including the second and third ones screened at the VIA Festival, “Braiding Dislocated Lives” (Frølund, Peterken, Phillips, and Chemi, 2020, 2:25 mins) and “The Threshold of Sound” (Carlson, Markham, Stirling, and Zheng, 2020, 1:50 mins).

Figure 2: Still from “Braiding Dislocated Lives” (Frølund et al; 2020, 2:25 mins).

“Braiding Dislocated Lives” (Frølund et al; 2020, 2:25 mins)

In the first half, a delicate soundtrack of rain is overlaid on stills of the sky, a vaguely figurative (blue) painting and a short video of a snail moving along the ground. The text exhorts viewers to “watch slowness/feel slowness/be slowness.” In the second half, stills from protests over Indigenous lands and a white person wearing a white mask are paired with a video clip of the destruction of white masking materials, while the text critiques “white privilege.” The only sound in the second half is ambient sound from the mask material destruction. The title suggests that the videomakers are attempting to “braid” together different life experiences to jar viewers out of complacency, using the “dislocate[ion]” of the pandemic experience to compel us towards a call to action to ameliorate embedded inequities. All this, while working closely and fast with strangers-becoming-colleagues, at a time when the Black Lives Matter movement was regaining strength.

What was evident at the screening of these videos was the degree to which they could evoke the sensations of the first few months of lockdown, when so much change seemed both impossible (lockdown behaviours) and impossibly hopeful (social change). Less than a year after the earliest lockdowns in Australia, Asia, and then Europe and

North America, the hush that fell while watching these raw reactions to the circumstances of the moment illustrated how those chaotic, determined, sometimes frantic reactions were still with us. As I write this, more than a year after those first lockdowns, the research documenting longer term mental health, social and cultural effects is just starting to emerge.

“The Threshold of Sound” (Carlson et al., 2020, 1:50 mins)

A mix of sounds drawn from protests, birdsong, piano music, and mechanical computer-generated or modulated audio, (e.g. “Hello, my name is Karen,” “do you take care of yourself?, I want you to,” “hashtag what I learned today,” “link/image/analysis,” “June 3, 2020,” “even the sharp punctures of bird calls in the early morning future...I’m sure it’s just a phase” were among the decipherable phrases) were combined with black and purple screens featuring countdowns. This form of sampling was clearly ‘ripped from the headlines’ of social events, particularly those presented and re-presented thousands and tens of thousands of times on social media, such as the growth of #BLM, or COVID precautions.

The “Braiding” video deliberately set the micro/macro views side by side (first half compared to second half), while the “Threshold of Sound” video aimed to integrate these lenses. The latter may be because “Threshold” was generated out of Prompt 21, the second deliberately collaborative prompt, meant to take up to a week or more to complete after the rest of the prompts were done. As a final critical autoethnographic (Holman Jones et al., 2014) exercise, this one aimed to compel some more enriched reflection and analysis but in a small group. Again, participants were encouraged to reach out to each other, on shared Google docs, the group Facebook page, or the Listserv, to build teams, but this time after having learned something about each other from the sharing of responses to previous prompts, including visual and time-based media. Prompt 21 asked:

“Find at least two other people in the group to address the question: “What is going on here?” This is a classic ethnographic question. It is a question that seems simple but relies on immersion and “thick” understanding of the cultural situ-

ation to answer. It is a question that asks the researcher to move past simply describing what's presently happening, to consider what these particularities of the situation mean, at a more abstract, cultural level. In this activity, you should make a final performance with your group, in whatever way you choose. Post for the whole group on the mailing list. Please use the mailing list for sharing your team's product(ion), since this is the only place where all the participants have access." (Markham and Harris, 2020, p.13)

While some of the videos featured in the VIA Festival were drawn from the Prompt 3 videos, a substantial number were drawn from Prompt 21, 18 days later. Between Prompt 3 and Prompt 21, much had happened in the broader world, including the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police action, and a surge of protests in support of the anti-black-racism social movement Black Lives Matter around the world. Not surprisingly, the responses to Prompt 21 tended to oscillate between the micro (e.g. close observations of one person's experience) and the macro (e.g. world events, stance in the world, etc.), much more than the primarily micro-focused responses to earlier prompts (including Prompt 3) had done. But the Prompt 3 responses generated more raw, exploratory, or interestingly unresolved pieces. I have been thinking a lot about why this was the case, and turn to a recently published manifesto on research-creation grounded in psychoanalysis to think this through analytically and in more affective and visceral ways.

THE END OF THE WORLD OR JUST ANOTHER SHIFT?

During the first few months of the pandemic in North America, through my involvement in EXC-19 and then with MMS, I revisited research-creation commitments and practices that had been important in earlier work (e.g. Luka 2020, 2018), building on my own practice as a video artist and then as a digital media producer and policy-maker. Through video and audio editing, I observed that I could achieve a level of defamiliarization with what I was examining, including at the affective level. Defamiliarization

was preferable to seeking distance, which was patently impossible in the dramatically developing changes of the times, even while simultaneously creating something watchable or listenable. Similarly, in Natalie Loveless's recent book on research-creation as a mode of scholarly production and analysis, *How to make art at the end of the world* (2019), she discusses the metaphor and story-telling implications of Donna Haraway's examination of her relationships with her dogs in Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). This consideration of the affective work required to examine inter-species relations as a kind of defamiliarizing storytelling process is a model not just for understanding how to investigate a complex problematic, but particularly to examine a circumstance within which the person doing the investigation is deeply implicated. In Loveless's discussion of Haraway's book, as undertaken by a group of students, the figure of the dog playfully comes into its metaphorical use as shorthand. Students became accustomed to asking each other "So what is your dog?" (p.25), which is to say, what are you examining that you need to separate out from yourself, even as you recognize how closely entwined you are with what you are looking at? In the context of my experience of EXC-19 and of the critical autoethnographic experience at MMS, identifying the dog is similar to asking how to denaturalize the situation, the conditions, the people and other-than-people that are intersecting at the specific moment of the global pandemic, and how this was being experienced locally, or at micro levels. Questions that can support the kind of curiosity Loveless aims to engender through research-creation include autoethnographic ones posed at MMS, such as "why is this important?," "who cares?," "why?" and "what next?"

Such questions also prompt crucial ways of generating observation at different registers (visceral, analytical, narrative, descriptive, etc.), often explicitly grounded in visual or oral culture practices. For example, in the manifesto, Loveless pairs this kind of curiosity with Thomas King's (2003) commitment to retelling various iterations of "stories of creation" as the articulation of emergent ethics and values situated in time and place (Loveless, 19-21, 23, 24-25). Consequently, stories (the ability to put together a narrative line, or the desire

to string together images, words, and sounds in a time-based project) become flexible methods to reflect on what can be understood as steadfast forms of resilience in a social context. As I suggest below, the MMS videos demonstrate efforts towards the latter; a looser and less resolved form of trying to understand shifts in social behaviour and interpretations of the world-as-it-is-now as these are recounted in King's teachings about creation stories, and enjoined in Loveless's "provocation...[that] *the crafting of a research question is the crafting of a story that is also the crafting of an ethics*" (pp. 24-25, emphasis in the original). The sincere and attentive reworking of such stories, between the time of MMS Prompts 3 and 21, and as research-creation communities of practice in evolving environments, enabled the scholars/artists involved to become more practiced observers and analysts of those situations, however raw and incomplete (i.e. without conclusion) those experiences may have been.

Making use of the idea of emergent knowledge in this context insists it is not possible or even desirable to pre-know what is under observation or being experienced. While some parameters can be set out around "the dog" in question, these need to allow for new information to come through. Autoethnographic practices, deepened through the sometimes visually awkward or unresolved MMS videos, simply aim to build steps towards illustrating one or more person's relationship to the world in a constantly shifting space, time, and set of registers. By assembling these videos into one hour of shared experience, the VIA Festival event began to point towards broader discomforting and more unresolved social issues. As the months passed following the Festival and early days of the pandemic, the discomfort would only grow, as if the global pause enacted by the situation compelled privileged and marginalized groups alike to look around and see how devastating the impacts of colonialism and systemic inequities were being felt in the circumstances. Efforts to connect seemingly disconnected experiences, such as in the second set of videos curated for the VIA Festival, reflected shifts from frantic or chaotic reactions to more measured—through still emergent—sensorial responses and social commitments. So, for example, "Marsh Wings Faded" (Dunlop, Wolf, Hutchinson, and DeGarmo,

2020), moved from hectic 1950s black and white commercial footage of white people consuming media to contemplative colour video clips of a lush green forest. Similarly, “Out, Empty, Away” (Seddighi, Murray, Dorsey, and Sarwatay, 2020) pulled on a narrative thread that led from close-up images of micro spaces inside the home to a subtle exhortation to become involved in protests to support Black Lives Matter, and to a critique of white supremacy in the details of the stereotypical, seemingly safe middle-class home. The final short video in this sequence, “Ice melting on artwork” (Cooper, 2020), acted as an interstice between these two videos and the next set of videos, comprised of a moment-in-time-lapse without sound, and completely without resolution.

Figure 3: Still from “Marsh Wings Faded” (Dunlop, Wolf, Hutchinson, and DeGarmo, 2020, 1:07 mins).

“Marsh Wings Faded” (Dunlop, Wolf, Hutchinson, and DeGarmo, 2020, 1:07 mins)

Starts with found black and white footage and noisy promotional verbiage about the launch of televisions in homes in the 1950s, as well as a scene outside a commuter train space. In the last half of the video, the footage is intercut with the 19-word text and video images of a de-

liciously lush green forest, accompanied by a quiet piano sonata, “On a Summer’s Day”.

Figure 4: Still from “Out, Empty, Away” (Seddighi, Murray, Dorsey, and Sarwatay, 2020, 3:29 mins).

“Out, Empty, Away” (Seddighi, Murray, Dorsey, and Sarwatay, 2020, 3:29 mins)

Several low-resolution stills are cut together, with images ranging from beige indoor spaces to colourful flowers and cups, keys on the counter, artwork, an open dog collar, research books, a laundry hamper, i.e., everyday indoor micro scenes. One central image features an exhortation to be (an) activist alongside an art poster with a similar theme. The 19-word text is typed as if they were file folder labels stuck on top of images, with the penultimate words: breath, breathless, BREATHE, followed by kitchen-based images (a bleach called “White King”, salt [to rub in the wounds of racism?], vitamin pill box, timer, etc.). The sound is a simple, synthesized, quiet, contemplative refrain.

“Ice melting on artwork” (Cooper, 2020, 0:23 mins, no sound)

This rough time-elapse sketch was a response to the potent nature of Prompt 7, which asked participants to hold an ice cube in their hands until it melted, and curated into the VIA collection as an indicator of some of the raw responses to the prompts. For many, Prompt 7 was among the most powerfully evocative prompts, and marked a turning point in depth of observation and analysis during MMS. For an expanded response to this prompt, see Wei Li’s poetic-dance-photographic essay (Li 2020).

What I appreciated most about the collaboration between MMS and Mark De Garmo Dance was the opportunity for both professional and aspiring artists and scholarly or creative autoethnographers to productively reflect on their exploration of research-creation as a mode and method for engaging in the everyday world in front of them/us: both those who were involved in the process, and those who witnessed these outcomes. To be able to share the stage with new peers and to flex muscles as they were being acquired was a gift that a burgeoning practitioner could only hope for in the heart of the pandemic. Viewers were rewarded with some gems of expression that captured aspirations, emotions, and analyses but were also almost entirely unresolved, much like the situation within which they found themselves. So what? Why does this matter? For one thing, the two VIA Festival events and several monthly Salon events (over the last three years) experiment with how performance and visual arts can be experientially presented in context and in discussion. In

COVID-19 times, the VIA Festival and monthly Salon events were part of a much broader social experiment in the arts that tackled the challenges of conveying visceral creative and social engagements online. For example, subsequent VIA Festival and Salon presentations featured more live dance performance streaming than the first VIA Festival, as well as the ability to watch these after the fact for a modest pay-what-you-will fee. This emergent practice is an exemplar of how quickly and effectively some arts organizations (particularly those with an educational as well as aesthetic mandate) adapted to the new world (dis)order. As the United States continues its move back into 'real world' performances, the VIA Festival producers are able to continue to program internationally for online presentation while simultaneously considering the future of live in-person events in New York.

SEEING SOMETHING ANEW, AGAIN

The legibility or opaqueness of the MMS videos after the fact of their production tells us something about the intensely specific nature of the time in which these videos were produced. In Thomas King's terms, each of these videos aspired to present a micro-element of the pandemic story, the creation of new (or the doubling-down on not-so-new) social conditions, and various stances that humans involved took in relation to social justice, health, and culture in May and June 2020. Of course, the other activities that were generated by the 21-day MMS project also puzzled over this question, but were not shared in a public forum with the intent to digest and analyse how various conditions had changed (if they had), or what the reverberations of the early experience of the pandemic would or could be. By presenting and reflecting on the videos in an exhibition and discussion setting, the participants began to turn to questions that had arisen or been acted upon since their initial autoethnographic responses, such as how to incorporate and move beyond the experience of the pandemic in a healthy generative way, in professional or personal or social lives. These included whether there were lessons to be learned about what was useful or desirable about pandemic conditions (minimal travel, a decrease in

consumerism, time to write, etc.), or recovery strategies to be developed to ameliorate damage that was done during this time, or to what degree participation in social justice protests and efforts to change nation-state regulations, legislation, and budget processes could affect policing practices, policy development, and funding.

Figure 5: Still from “The Warrior” (Torres, Peterken, Jones, and Chen, 2020, 0:51 mins).

“The Warrior” (Torres, Peterken, Jones, and Chen, 2020, 0:51 mins)

This response to Prompt 3 was typical of the early group videos, it is particularly contemplative and hopeful. The Ken Burns effect (a slight push in to a tighter version of the image) was applied to several still images, most of them featuring blue skies or the colour blue. Only one image disrupted that even slightly: a blue sign with the word “Emergency” on it. A light, calm, melodic line repeated throughout, and the 19-word equally calming text appeared at the end briefly.

“Paces” (Shelton, Cooke, and Wong, 2020, 2:28 mins)

This response to Prompt 21 was typical of the later—more directive and narratively smoothed-out—group videos. As contemplative as the one that preceded it in the lineup, “Paces” used a calming soundtrack of someone walking on concrete (a sidewalk? a road?), a slight breeze and

birdsong vaguely in the air as a through-line. But this time, the sound was combined with a series of 26 still images, mostly screen captures of headlines and photographs published in news outlets in May and June 2020 about protests against growing political oppression and racism in Australia, Hong Kong, and the USA, as well as reports of the increasing levels of infection and death tolls from the virus. None of these images remained still, with a combination of pushes, pans, and tilts over the two to five seconds each image was onscreen. Along with the sounds of walking, this created a sense of movement and solidarity but also a sense of the intransigent and increasingly visible nature of the problems being highlighted. The stills were interspersed with a screen capture of a video of typing out the lines from “a Chinese ancient poem/Written while taking seven paces/By: Cao Zhi.” The poem reinforced the anger, grief and confusion arising from the pandemic, bemoaning the cooking of peas in a pot (“why boil us so hot?”), using the very husks that had nurtured the peas to stoke the fire, while connecting the present-day situation to much older oppressions and resistances. This was the only video in the exhibition that used a language other than English.

“Team 2 EXC” (Shelton, Shields, Cooke, and Wong, 2020; 1:26 mins)

This Prompt 3 video (from May) used a drawing of a typical Zoom meeting of the time, with faculty at a university as the visual foundation, and several textual quotations in English superimposed on the images, rolled across, spun or tumbled into view. These included “you’re on mute,” “can you mute yourself? I hear a blender in the background”, phone calls interrupting the meeting, and then questions about the dangers of returning to work in person or the precarity of jobs that may have been asked in the chat or out loud, and a final commitment by the meeting lead to send a poll around “for next week’s meeting” when they “might have some answers.” The camera was always moving; it ‘pushed in’ to various people depending on the text presented on screen, or ‘pulled back’ when the question became more general. Martial, rhythmic music (heavy on bass and drum) played in the background. A single two-line headline was repeated at the beginning and end of the video: “BREAKING NEWS: ‘Trampling our rights’/Terrorists pretending to be protestors, screaming spittle about shelter-in-place ‘trampling our

rights.” The violence of the language in the headline, the anonymizing of the specific meeting(s), the relentlessness of the interruptions and the background music, the inability to read emotion or make connection to anyone on the screen, and the constantly moving text across the screen replicated the sense of agitation and anxiety that many of the responses to the prompts shared in the MMS21 group documented about early shelter-at-home lockdowns. There was nothing resolved about the situation, even while there were evident efforts to communicate and support the participants.

As the devastating nature of the ways in which the pandemic exacerbated inequitable social conditions became clearer (between Prompts 3 and 21, and then between the end of the 21-day experience and the October event), the videos began to present images and text that expressed conflicting notions of resilience and collective action. What makes someone “resilient” in circumstances such as pandemics, or during broad-based protests about collective versus individual rights across social groups or about anti-racism? What is meant by “resilience”? Why do some governments attempt to ameliorate a severe economic crash as part of a resilience strategy and others do not? The question of who benefits is key.

Resilience is one of the terms often used to describe the ability to move past/put behind us/cover over past traumas, big and small. Under extreme conditions, surviving severe social trauma experienced across whole cultures for generations, such as by Indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere, has previously been described as “survivance” (Vizenor, 2008). Here, I turn to the work of Cheryl L’Hirondelle to illustrate survivance as a form of resilience. Drawing on the idea of “speaking the world,” performance artist Cheryl L’Hirondelle talks about Cree “sounding[s] of the worldview” (L’Hirondelle, Alvarez, and Zointz, 290) as deeply connected to language. Similarly, Thomas King’s (2003) variations in the telling of creation stories are a way of accommodating and speaking the world out loud, complementing the concept of survivance as a positive attribute emerging from traumatic experiences, often mobilized in research about the survival and evolutions of Indigenous cultures. These are not just ways to defamiliarize and challenge the seeming implacability

of the surrounding conditions, but also to activate the importance and strength of language in the maintenance and adaptability (survivance) of cultures, particularly Indigenous cultures.

Similarly, S. Rose O’Leary (2020) applies the lens of survivance to focus on diasporic impacts on identity through creative storytelling and image-making. O’Leary’s account tackles the macro implications of survivance as both strategy and inexorable condition from the perspective of large ethno-cultural groups of people compelled to migrate globally and thereby to make radical cultural, emotional, and intellectual changes or commitments because of inequitable, shifting social conditions. This bears a resemblance to Cheryl L’Hirondelle and Thomas King’s work, but also to the micro-level work of MMS over its 21 days of prompts.

While some forms of resilience acknowledge challenges to and survival of discrete forms of identity, cultural production, and social experiences, even as these are being transformed by deteriorating social or work conditions, the term is also used in the creative economy as a primarily laudatory and desired characteristic for workers in the sector, who experience precarity and often damaging work conditions. Meant to express less about trauma and more about adaptability, the notion of resilience in the culture sector is often mobilized to help explain the process or method of integrating emergent and competing forms of identity or social mores, including through cultural production and expression. Unpacking the elision of meanings in the term resilience through the fourth trio of videos programmed at the October 2020 VIA Festival event is helpful for understanding how the creators of these works were beginning to integrate and make sense of the pandemic, using visual metaphors. This set of videos was the quietest of the groupings, which produced a contemplative mood among the salon participants.

“Homesteading Across Time” (Bolander, Smith, and Stirling, 2020, 2:08 mins)

The first half of the video begins with two still images of networked threads or bacteria, with a round robin of the reading of a quote from Harold Rheingold’s 1993 Virtual Community: Homesteading on the

Electronic Frontier repeated by the three participants, exhorting us (in part) to “think of cyberspace as a social petri dish...and virtual communities, in all their diversity, as the colonies of micro-organisms that grow in petri dishes,” while the camera tilts up across the colour image of linked bacterial threads in purple and green and black and white. The second half of the video shows the camera continuing to tilt up through the “sky” of the threaded bacteria, with no other sound.

“Braided work visual art” (Brode-Roger, Erdely, and Murray, 2020, 2:00 mins, no sound)

The video is a visual essay that incorporates many still images, including drawings and photographs, with a series of fragments of dense quotations and excerpted comments in text in English from May and June 2020 threaded among the stills. The text (more than the images) raise questions about the relationship of human to more-than-human, about the (macro) threats posed by the virus, by protests, by contested politics, and the (micro) comforts from a privileged position of researcher.

Figure 8: Still from “Birdsong” (Snepvangers, Murray, Pronzato, and Waysdorf, 2020, 2:30 mins)

“Birdsong” (Snepvangers, Murray, Pronzato, and Waysdorf, 2020, 2:30 mins)

The video is a series of stills, starting with 30 seconds of several quotations typed in or photographed that address obscenity, art, and social unrest. The next ten seconds feature four screen captures from phones viewing news items from around the world, and then a video clip with a slow 40-second pan from the balcony of a six-story building in Europe across an empty-seeming neighbourhood, followed by additional text and image stills that repeat the earlier themes, and ending with a still of

flowers and a 50-second video clip of walking through trees. Recordings of birdsong throughout are perhaps a reference to the early days of the pandemic when people took note of quiet streets, nature sounds, and the idiosyncratic appearances of animals and other creatures in city streets.

STILL FEELING OUR WAY: MOVING TOWARD SOME CONCLUSIONS

The details offered in the latter group of videos speak to a desire to express resilience: to integrate emergent micro experience with drastically changing macro conditions. Earlier, I talked about Natalie Loveless’s manifesto for research-creation (2019). In that text, the idea of resilience also surfaced, this time as the affective work required to rethink the world in emergent, culturally expressive ways on an ongoing basis. Why? Loveless notes: “An approach to research-creation modeled on emergence insists on the complexity of lived histories and worlds, and on the difficulty of accounting for and responding to such complexity” (26). Jeannette Winterson also talks about resilience in complexly affective terms: as a mode of surviving and moving past traumatic life events related to family violence and sexuality (2012). But, as in Vizenor’s and O’Leary’s notions of survivance, Winterson does not reject those events outright, given how formative they were. Instead, Winterson thinks carefully about what had happened and what is still happening (emotionally, intellectually, in language; to herself and to others around her), using an elastic form of resilience (like King) as a lever to “change the story” (Winterson 2001, 5) in the present and for the future or to change the social pressures that aim to have people conform in ways that are oppressive.

Three of L’Hirondelle’s artworks illustrate this approach well. “Nika-mon ohci askiy: songs because of the land (Vancouver songlines)” (2008) features L’Hirondelle exploring, learning about, and singing her way through the unfamiliar territory of Vancouver, Canada, as a mode of acknowledging the traditional territory and the people who steward it, as well as to learn about the city (see also Jacobson-Konefall, Chew and Warren, for example). People were welcome to accom-

pany her, although not necessary for her purposes. “The NDN Storytelling Bus” (2011-2014 in Regina, Canada) was a periodic, ongoing (often understood as anarchist or disruptive) exploration of territory as well, but, as L’Hirondelle notes, “our trickster who goes wandering out of curiosity and to visit relatives” (L’Hirondelle, Alvarez, and Zointz, 296), notwithstanding that the colonial and settler structures and social strictures have (in turn) previously (attempted to) disrupt(ed) or destroy(ed) the languages and cultures from which the figure of the trickster emerges. In this time and space, Western space and time gets thrown out the window of the bus. Finally, “Why the Caged Bird Sings” (2008-2020, various locations) presents low resolution videos of incarcerated Indigenous women singing over prison landlines, trying to connect with other people through the details of their relayed experience even when no one is on the other end of the line. The poignant performances gathered together in L’Hirondelle’s presentation of these works point to how Indigenous women are disproportionately incarcerated, and also recall the strength gained from gathering virtually and spiritually while being unable to physically gather, retelling and recontextualizing stories through song and image, words, laughter, and tears. Here, the promise of future connection enables the women to feel their way into future gatherings. The final set of videos presented during the VIA Festival reflected similar ambitions in the COVID-19 context for this group of artists, activists and scholars.

“Feeling Our Way” (Fahey, Dunlop, and Whitney, 2020, 2:21 mins)

A filtered heartbeat sound starts with a still of a feminine shadow followed by stills of two abstract images. The sound changes to a song about abandonment and death sung by a solo female artist with guitar, combined with still images of an apartment courtyard and other urban settings, abstract paintings and drawings, and followed by a final statement: “to reconfirm that human thing/that matters most/we hold each other/in feeling ways/feeling our ways” combined with the sound of people gathering in an urban setting.

“A Moment” (Fitzpatrick, Sreberny, Clark, and Dilkes, 2020, 2:58 mins)

A group of four people, sometimes shown individually, sometimes shown in the four quadrants of the screen, one per person. A conversation about how to be safe in the waning days of MMS 21. The seeming ‘passing along’ of a mask from one quadrant to another, in a video where the territory (parts of the video/parts of the world) is represented by these quadrants. A toast. Curated to wrap up the presentation, the video simply featured the four participants coming together to learn something about each other and then connecting on zoom to share some of the lessons they’d learned in early Covid times.

Given the specifically feminine nature of many of the videos in the Festival, and to add a cautionary critical note to this final section, I take up the way in which Angela McRobbie converts the notion of resilience into a critical tool. Through the notion of “Perfect Imperfect Resilience (PIR)” (42-45), McRobbie thinks about feminine resilience as it is currently promoted and practiced in the Western world (e.g. McRobbie explores Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg’s “lean-in” approach) and how this “protects the status quo” (46). PIR becomes a mechanism to control people (compared to survivance as an aspirational or redeeming social quality in the world as-it-is-today), particularly through cultural production (both the work required and the outputs). It is classically impossible for non-dominant figures (those other than white, cis-gender males) to attain ‘perfection,’ or to be fully successful, in this context. McRobbie discusses PIR as a way to analyse the “dispositif” (52) in action in the field of cultural production, as the condition or tendency towards the replication or creation of conditions that reinforce pre-existing ideological commitments (to capitalism, to specific forms of equity, to radicalism) that do not upset the status quo. McRobbie uses PIR to examine how magazine or craft production (for example) is practiced and circulated to replicate systemic inequities and the devaluing of female labour or perspectives. This becomes a way to examine the inequitable and imperfect ways in which the culture sector/creative industries are actually generated and supported. Why is this important? PIR draws our attention to the way in which artists, craftspeople, womxn, and

marginalized or outlier groups are compelled to practice or learn or demonstrate resilience in imperfect ways in order to be allowed to participate in cultural production. The MMS videos as a whole point to similar contradictions and exhortations that surfaced in more obvious ways in COVID-induced conditions.

Why did so many of the MMS video-makers (and curators, and participants) find that collaborative video-making might help signify a kind of hope to gather people together in ways that weren't physically gathering together? In the making of the videos, were people feeling more (or less) able to cope with the shocking changes experienced? Given the experiential nature of both the MMS prompts and the curated video programs, it is unclear whether this is even the right question. What is clear, however, is a palpable desire to make sense of the world outside the MMS space and time while situated within it, in a contingent way: to be resilient and to show resilience at specific sites of storytelling. Many of the MMS videos hint at or directly refer to devastating personal and social experiences during the first half-year of the COVID-19 pandemic. These representations do not compare in scale or depth to the systemic suppression of cultures and identities expressed by L'Hirondelle, King, O'Leary, or Winter-son, and the resulting affirmation of survivance. Nor do they have the impact of social justice protests involving tens of thousands of people around the world, such as those supporting Black Lives Matter, during COVID-19. However, they do offer fleeting impressions of related efforts to become resilient allies and neighbours in healthy and affirming ways during the early days of the pandemic. Some aim to look even more deeply into ways to resist those deeper and more long-standing oppressions. Troubling elisions between specific applications of the terms resilience and survivance are thereby made usefully visible by the kind of situated research conducted during MMS. A decade or even a century from now, who will be looking at how the time available to researchers, artists, activists, and citizens was mobilized during our respective experience of COVID-19? What will researchers, artists, and policy-makers be reflecting on, and will it have import other than in tandem with social justice movements of the moment? Time may or may not tell.

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IMAGE NOTES

- Figure 1: Still from "Run Bunny Run." Bastick et al., 2020, 0:51 mins.
- Figure 2: Still from "Braiding Dislocated Lives" (Frølund et al; 2020, 2:25 mins).
- Figure 3: Still from "Marsh Wings Faded." Dunlop, Wolf, Hutchinson, and DeGarmo, 2020, 1:07 mins.
- Figure 4: Still from "Out, Empty, Away." Seddighi, Murray, Dorsey, and Sarwatay, 2020, 3:29 mins.
- Figure 5: Still from "The Warrior." Torres, Peterken, Jones, and Chen, 2020, 0:51 mins.
- Figures 6 and 7: Stills from "Braided work visual art." Brode-Roger, Erdely, and Murray, 2020, 2:00 mins.
- Figure 8: Still from "Birdsong." Snepvangers, Murray, Pronzato, and Waysdorf, 2020, 2:30 mins.

Figure 1: Pandemic bubbles. Corinna Peterken.

INTERLUDE II

A bubble to protect me. Bubbles like those I have used so many
times with young children
who want to be home and not at school or preschool.

Fabric, crystal organza left over from my youngest daughters' debutante ball dress, becomes bubbles.
I cut circles to merge and emerge with the red fabric background.
The fabric moves me.
I cut gently, pin the bubbles to the vibrant red, red for danger, and
notice that soap comforts and
bubbles protect.
Corinna Peterken

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Pandemic bubbles. Permission of Corinna Peterken.

(IMAGINING) SCIENCE FOR TROUBLED TIMES: A MOUSE, A BIRD, AND A THRESHOLD FOR COLLABORATION

REBECCA CARLSON

Although biological life and human social complexity are fundamentally interdependent, biological and social researchers continue to perceive each other from across divides of theoretical, methodological, and institutional skepticism. This paper considers conversational boundary work between qualitative and quantitative scientists as an institutionalized rhetorical performance which throttles their cooperation, even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic when it is most urgently needed. As an example, I look at the way familiar epistemological conflicts emerged out of collaboration between myself and a bioscientist during the spring of 2020, when co-participating in the Massive Microscopic Sensemaking Project, a 21-day international auto-ethnographic writing experiment.

Bien que la vie biologique et la complexité sociale humaine soient fondamentalement interdépendantes, les chercheurs en biologie et en sciences sociales continuent de se percevoir à travers les clivages du scepticisme théorique, méthodologique et institutionnel. Cet article considère le travail de frontière conversationnel entre les scientifiques qualitatifs et quantitatifs comme une performance rhétorique institutionnalisée qui limite leur coopération, même face à la pandémie de COVID-19 lorsque cela est le plus urgent. À titre d'exemple, j'examine la manière dont des conflits épistémologiques familiers ont émergé de la collaboration entre moi-même et un bioscientifique au printemps 2020, lorsque j'ai participé au Massive Microscopic Sensemaking Project, un projet internationale d'écriture auto-ethnographique de 21 jours.

A MOUSE AT THE THRESHOLD OF CIRCULATION, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS A PROLOGUE

Figure 1: Mice with various coats, including piebald (top left), from the 1787 Japanese book Chingan Sodategusa, public domain. (Modified by author.)

The first bioscience presentation I attended at the institute where my research has been located began with an aside about a Japanese mouse. The presenting scientist, the head of a European lab visiting Japan for a virology conference, introduced his lab to the audience with a photo of the “JF1/Ms,” or Japanese Fancy Mouse 1. The scientist explained that this Japanese mouse, marked grey and white due to its piebald allele, is an important part of his lab’s research, and he laughed a bit as he held the remote for the projector in his hand. By way of introduction, I imagined the scientist hoped that the JF1/Ms would work like a bridge to link him to the mostly Japanese postdocs

and lab heads in attendance. After he moved on to the purpose of his talk, I was left wondering about mice who travel across oceans, just like we do.

As scientific material in global circulation, I later found that calling the JF1/Ms a ‘Japanese’ mouse was rather misleading, a flattening of its more convoluted history. Although the JF1/Ms is said to have derived from “wild mice that inhabit Japan widely” (*nihon ni hiroku seisoku suru yasei hatsukanezumi*),¹ and appears in the 1787 book *Chingan Sodategusa* (pictured above), or *How to Raise Rare Mice* (see Ruben 2005, and also Tanave and Koide 2020), the Japanese National Institute of Genetics (re)discovered the JF1/Ms in Denmark where it had been available as a pet mouse and brought it back to Japan for breeding and research. (The institute even made a map to depict the JF1/Ms’s complicated geographic and genetic travels.²) Today, researchers anywhere (with a sufficient budget) can purchase this inbred strain from institutes in Japan or from the Jackson Laboratory in Maine, who provide mice models as material for genomic research. I was collecting this background information in order to use the JF1/Ms analytically for my larger research project about the globalization of Japanese bioscience and the circulation of bioscientific materials. But this presentation—just as my research was really getting started in full—was both the first and the last I was to attend, in person, at the institute.

In my very first interview with the lab supervisor where I am conducting my ethnographic research, he complained about how hard it was for him to get scientific materials from outside Japan. An American MD-PhD, the lab supervisor had been heading his own laboratory for about six months at the institute by the time I began my research there, and the administrative frustrations he’d experienced in setting up his laboratory and securing the materials he needed were still a recent memory. At that time, our interests coincided: he was a foreign researcher in Japan and I had been studying forms of Japanese globalization, including the immigration of Americans, just like him, to Tokyo. He was an ideal informant because his experiences spoke directly to my research question, and he knew how to direct

his observations to what he thought would be useful for me. What mattered more was that he was interested in what I was doing and wanted to support my research.

As part of my weekly visits to the laboratory for participant observation, the lab supervisor agreed to let me interview him for fifteen minutes. I'd join him in his glass office, a small space enclosed inside the larger office that was separated from the research labs across the hall where the lab members did their wet experiments. In that first interview, he told me about the expectation he'd encountered in the institute that all the lab's scientific materials, such as reagents, would be secured within Japan. Whenever he'd asked through administrative channels for approval of materials from the United States or the United Kingdom, he described the reaction of the Japanese staff as, "Do you really need this?" Then he read to me an email from a scientist he knew in the United States who wanted to access materials from a Japanese laboratory and was having the same trouble in reverse, complaining in the email of how slow the process was. This other American scientist wanted to know if the holdup had something to do with peculiarities of Japanese scientific practice. For the lab supervisor, let's call him Tom, this limit on access was a clear barrier to doing good science. In talking together later about how personal connections between scientists can impact access to materials, Tom told me that these networks are, "important [...] to get reagents [...] to get emails replied to [...] to get papers published. They're important in all the ways it is important to do science."³ In adapting to the logics of scientific circulation in Japan, Tom was finding it necessary to build new local networks to access materials and practices.

When the first COVID-19 emergency declaration started in Tokyo in April 2020 and the research institute asked scientists who could to work from home, I began to join the laboratory members online for their weekly meetings. Tom soon wrote to me suggesting that I should find a way to share my "academic perspective on the global spread of an emerging virus." At first, I hesitated, and in response he joked through email about ambulance chasers and virtue-signaling in Twitter feeds, but then reminded me: "[Y]ou have spent a

year studying globalization of virology research, visiting and even doing experiments in a ‘global’ lab [...] It would be valuable to put it in writing, that’s all I’m saying.” Around the same time, I saw the call for the Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) project and proposed to Tom that we participate collaboratively. I suggested he could generate his own field notes about working from home (the wet experiments in his laboratory were largely on hold and his post-docs shifted to planning in the slow down), and I would use them as ethnographic material in the final paper which we would co-author. He replied immediately that the project seemed interesting to him since it was “a venue that prevents treating the communication/result as too precious, which I really like.” But he clarified he wouldn’t be able to do much *de novo*. Tom started a Google document the same day, titling it *Field notes on starting COVID-19 research while working from home*, and forwarded me the link with his first entries already completed. They were dated like a diary and settled mostly on the somewhat frustrating transition he was making to working online. His first posts from the shared document state:

“4.27.20 - Discussion in the animal room with a colleague at my institute who is already working on COVID-19. This only happened because we are both physically present in this same space. Collaborative science often grows out of informal communications about existing work, and we will need to think of how to create new spaces to bump into one other in the increasingly teleworked future.

4.28.20 - Brainstorm with Toshi [pseudonym] about how to represent this collaboration in an intuitive and concrete figure. This was an in-person interaction using a whiteboard, which I cannot do virtually very easily, yet. Need to find a way.”

Tom’s transitional concerns along with my research focus on scientific globalization and general fixation with boundary crossing inspired me to write our abstract in application to the MMS project about the impact COVID-19 was having on scientific circulations. After reading my abstract draft, Tom reminded me:

“In addition to building new borders, [telework, COVID...] removes some. E.g. we started a journal club with colleagues in Kyoto, and I participated in one international journal club. But these don’t get the work done when it comes to starting work requiring new biological materials, etc.”

Starting with these observations, I made a table in our shared document to help track the slowing down and speeding up of the various scientific materials and interactions that Tom directed my attention to in his notes. But before we were even accepted to the project, Tom and I began what would develop into a months-long conversational interview, inside the document and through email.

In the end, we wrote very little (productively) for the MMS project, Tom even less as he was busy with his work, and very little about scientific circulations. Instead, we veered more into staking out our different disciplinary perspectives on topics such as objectivity and scientific truth-making. We evaluated each other’s broad conceptual tools, at times skeptically, and drew boundaries around our ideas to see where they overlapped. For a time, we hovered liminally (and for me, hopefully⁴) between our assigned subject positions as ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ scientific researchers, and our rhetorical differences, subjecting our ideas and concepts to classification and reclassification; and, I think for both of us, wanting to cross over those disciplinary-informed borders. Somewhere in the middle of our conversation, Tom asked me if I had ever read the book *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884). He told me: “I read that book in middle school, and I really want to read it again. I want to have the humility of a flatlander who is made aware of another dimension.” In the end, the genealogy of our discussions shows our attempt to come together across this dichotomous gap between our knowledges and techniques, and to see these other dimensions. It was perhaps in part because of our divergent priorities for how to communicate our shared views through language, and the question of their value, that Tom chose to withdraw from our collaboration in this text (although he continued to read and comment on the many drafts and tangents that followed).

SUBJECT/OBJECT INDISPENSABILITY, OR WHAT SHOULD BE AN INTRODUCTION

Figure 2: Objects crossing borders, becoming subjects. Images from British Library Collection, public domain. (Collage by author.)

Circulations always trouble seemingly ready-made, common-sense categories. Things and people on the move cross over practical and symbolic boundaries, often rattling them or making them come undone. Objects in circulation, Christopher B. Steiner explains, get removed from their “original cultural contexts,” reinterpreted under new institutional logics and stripped of their charisma (1996, 208). Although Steiner is focused specifically on the legal practices which

act on transnational artwork to assess their value and right of entry, his observations on the reclassification of goods as they pass through national “border zones” apply equally productively to people and ideas, to the JF1/Ms and even Tom. Steiner’s analysis is a reminder that things don’t travel unconstrained—mice don’t get to Europe and come back to Japan without passing through various transformative practices—just as their circulation is always subject to, and participating in, “boundary work” (Gieryn 1999, Moats & Seaver 2019). In my own research in the laboratory, I was specifically attuned to, or looking for, these border zones; for example, the moments when scientific materials and practices might become, for example, culturally re-signified—marked as Japanese or American, subject to revaluation under this label and then inserted into predetermined channels of movement, like getting earmarked for distribution along prioritized (national) networks. When the pandemic began and I transitioned to remote research, I began to think of Steiner’s border zones, which I have drawn on in my previous research, as equivalent to Victor Turner’s threshold stage of liminality, that moment of extended ambiguity as people-things cross over or defy categorization and hover for a time in between (1969).

But what does any of this have to do with thresholds and boundary work, or scientific materials in circulation like the Japanese Fancy Mouse 1, and even Tom himself? I think this is typically where I am expected, if I am a competent academic, to bring the threads of this beginning together, to insert a few sentences to explain what this article is really about. Here, I should address the significance of the collaborative conversation Tom and I engaged in during the emergency declaration, and why it might be valuable for others to read about. After all, this is paragraph eight already and you, reader, may reasonably be wondering where all this is going. In an earlier draft of this article, I attempted to use our discussions as a call for bioscientists and anthropologists to work together more on topics related to human health,⁵ and to find better ways to talk to each other; but it felt too naive and overrun by a growth of too many topics and ideas (thank you to anonymous reviewers for stressing particularly this last part). Although below I attempt to give a clearer

framework for what precedes and follows, truthfully, I feel all my attempts at analysis are continually unraveling, and maybe worse, potentially misleading. Neat, complete answers, ethnographic ribbons which tie up all the messy threads of data, as if suddenly, easily crystallized (out of what are really other people's complex lived realities, with me tangled in them), feel like too much artifice right now. But I remain motivated by the desire to find a shared space for cultural anthropologists and biologists to work more collaboratively on issues of public health than I think they tend to. This feels vitally important to me in the face of a viral pandemic that is, like all human disease, shaped powerfully by global social inequalities (see for example, Wise 2020). In reading an early draft, Tom suggested to me that this paper could be valuable for other bioscientists, who "might feel similarly compelled to try to see if there is a shared framework about truth with postmodern thinkers/critical theorists. Which is I think one of the things this paper is about." (I always objected to the fact that Tom classified me as postmodern, particularly as I worried he wielded it sarcastically, but eventually I accepted, writing to him with a degree of hyperbole, "If you consider po-mo to be the breakdown of the 'grand (universalizing) narrative' and a turn to reflexivity, then that is me, to a T".) Tom often pushed me to think more about and analyze the difficulties bioscientists face today in reaching others and in communicating their research, despite the growth of prefabricated publication announcements on Twitter. He once told me in his glass office something like, "science not communicated isn't science,"⁶ and his insistence is influencing me and the direction of this work more than anything else. Still, I imagine biologists—in finding little direct depiction of, or connection to, their daily practices in the lab—will have little patience to read this; or, more likely due to disciplinary skepticism, will be less likely to appreciate it as science.

For the rest of this article, then, I examine our conversations as an act of cross-disciplinary boundary work that reflects the ways categorical, conceptual, and institutionalized borders are always being negotiated, reworked, and reaffirmed in everyday conversation. This is similar to the observation made by David Moats and Nick Seaver

in their study of the apparent divide between “data scientists” and qualitative researchers:

“When we speak of a “divide,” we are not arguing that it is desirable, natural, or inevitable, but are rather pointing to an empirical phenomenon which manifests in practice as conversational tension, miscommunication, and, sometimes, disputes.”
(2019, 3)

When Tom called me “postmodern” in the flow of our conversation, it felt like an accusation. At one point, he wrote something similar back to me: “Your tone here is a little different, maybe implying what you assume about me.” At times, we didn’t approach each other as people, but as cut-outs of our disciplines. These everyday practices described by Moats and Seaver are important to analyze because they are the rhetorical performances which scientists on either side of the divide use to make sense of, and often dismiss, the other. Perhaps they are not ‘natural,’ yet these divisions do become naturalized, and reinforced by institutional separations; and as commonsense, they close off opportunities for speaking, thinking, and working together.

Despite writing to each other on the cusp of a threshold, in the introspective intersection of a public health crisis and a period of forced isolation, our goal to eventually write this paper together for the MMS project came undone. Just like (the meaning of) a mouse or a reagent shifts and transforms as it crosses national borders, I found the possibilities for our collaboration channeled and constrained by institutional processes and assumptions of meaning and value that I had barely recognized previously—and which we were enacting, perhaps even unconsciously, in text. Those structural barriers were present in the way we spoke to each other, the questions we asked of each other, and the way we did or did not listen to our answers. Liminality, I realized, is not the free-form site of transformative possibility I had idealized; instead, it is weighed down by codified and institutionalized rituals which define the purpose, and necessary outcome, of time spent “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969, 95). I argue in conclusion then that to achieve any meaningful change requires a rescripting of these structural codes.

WHEN A BIRD IS NOT A BIRD, OR WHAT BECOMES A PERFORMANCE OF EXPERTISE

“Or should we rather bring the sword of criticism to criticism itself and do a bit of soul-searching here: what were we really after when we were so intent on showing the social construction of scientific facts?” (Latour 2004, 248)

Figure 3: The cassowary, public domain. <https://pixabay.com/vectors/cassowary-bird-feathers-neck-48000/>.

In the beginning of 2020, after I had been visiting the lab in person for data collection for over six months, I approached Tom through

email with a request to start learning how to do some wet experiments. I titled the email “crazy idea?” He responded:

“It isn’t crazy, it could be helpful.

But to be honest I don’t feel entirely comfortable with it right now, but only because I wonder if I fully understand your motivation. I hope that doesn’t come across as too cynical...”

When we met in his office later in the week for our usual fifteen minutes, he explained his hesitation in more detail, describing his concern over the disjuncture that might come from me working at the bench alongside the postdocs who are “science realists” when my perspective is very different. He stressed that scientists are motivated by the importance of the process, to be a “capable doer,” and that reliability in experimental results was the mark of a good scientist. Was I trying to use it as an opportunity to find work in the future as a laboratory scientist, he wondered? How could he evaluate me if he couldn’t understand my motivation? In the end, Tom insinuated that in contrast to the other scientists in the lab, I believed bioscience has no meaning. I tried to clarify by explaining that I think bioscience, in fact, is overcome with meaning which was why it was so interesting to me as a research topic. At that point, I had been teaching medical anthropology and global health to Japanese medical and dental students for seven years. I was acutely concerned with the way the ‘facts’ of human nature (coming out of bioscience research) were often turned inside out to justify, in public health for example, why some populations were naturally more at risk or more protected than others (see for example, Fullwiley 2011).⁷ I was concerned then with the “social life” of bioscientific facts (Appadurai, 1986).

Worried I still wasn’t communicating my perspective clearly, I emailed Tom the day after our meeting, addressing the multiple concerns he’d mentioned in turn (listed as subheadings that I enumerated), in the hopes of clarifying:

3. On the meaning of science and the dissonance of my presence in the lab as a (possible) non-believer:

Science is bursting with, frequently unacknowledged, meaning as I said. And precisely because it is often unacknowledged, makes it all the more fascinating for me. But that doesn't mean I don't believe in the value of what you all are doing and don't genuinely want to contribute. My goal is not to tear down or 'deconstruct' your work, but to build up a patina of textures and descriptions of the deep ways of thinking and acting and deciding that are already taking place in the lab.

Science and technology studies (STS) researchers, from at least as early as Bruno Latour, have described the limitations of mere observation of "laboratory life" (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Moats and Seaver similarly describe the frustration of ethnographers who, when working with quantitative scientists, remain observers "from the sidelines" despite their best efforts to collaborate (2019, 3). In fact, what I wanted was a more holistic understanding of the research they were doing in the lab, which I, as an anthropologist, understood could only come from "getting my hands dirty," as Tom often described his own experimental work. Because the importance of participant observation is so central to my thinking about good research (and not reliability of experimental outcomes), I was surprised by Tom's skepticism and questions about my true motivation. In this exchange, I began to see that although Tom was interested in and supported my research, he had concerns over my role as a "critical theorist" in the laboratory and also harbored his own assumptions about the nature and limitations of qualitative research, as well as my status as a "non-believer."

When we began writing together, this general skepticism, or the sense of our overriding assumptions, became a central frame for our dialogue. Tom would send me articles to read or post snippets of COVID news in our shared document that he wanted to draw my attention to or talk about. In preparation for the MMS project, I started writing field notes directly into his shared file and began wrestling with my own criticisms and understanding of concepts I had been encountering in the lab, which he in turn often replied to with the document's comment function. We went through in turns mulling

together over paradigms and challenging each other, starting with topics related to genomic science and genome wide association studies (GWAS). From the beginning, we often used terms like “baiting” or “fishing” to describe the introduction of topics or questions we anticipated might result in controversy and disagreement. When we debated objectivity and metrics, discussing IQ tests as an example, at one point I teased him, “But those ‘metrics’ aren’t objective...right?” Tom highlighted this phase and replied in a comment box: “Maybe we are back to our fundamental difference in how we interpret the world. I think the metrics themselves are potentially ‘objective,’ at least as I define that word.”

As part of our broader conversation on the nature of objectivity and reality as a measurable quantity, Tom shared an article about using autosomes for sex in GWAS studies⁸ and asked me: “Do you think their case and control populations are more cultural ideas or more genetic ideas?” He was echoing something I had written in the document about my concern, and even confusion, over taking national populations as units of analysis in GWAS.⁹ When I hesitated to answer him, writing instead that I needed some time to think over everything we had been discussing up to that point, he started a comment by writing, “Thanks and sorry.” He continued:

“I need to admit that this was a bit of a dishonest question from me. I think this paper/study makes a nice point about limits of GWAS, the assumptions of GWAS (Do you assume that GWAS makes more assumptions than I do?), and what GWAS overlooks. [...] But I think this is because I am testing you in some way, fishing. When I look deeply, I am doing this because I value “the scientific method” hegemony as a way of interacting with the world more highly than what I assume to be the hegemonic modern anthropology-approved viewpoint/context, and I want to justify this to myself in some way. I wonder if this poisons the well of your anthropology, and apologize if so.

Also, now you know that in my imagined secret place or “hidden” context I reject both of these hegemonies in some ways, so no need to treat science with kid gloves...”

I replied by email:

“[Y]eah, when you ask me about whether I think case/control is cultural or genetic, of course I know it’s partly in jest, a tease. And honestly, and because it entertains me, it makes me want to be, a little bit unproductively, polemic.”

I found then that I was often exaggerating my opposition to him, getting stuck—and maybe wanting to poke a bit at him for his insistence—on objectivity, and perhaps overlooking his relative nuances; just as he seemed similarly unable to move away from his assumptions about our “fundamentally different” ways of seeing the world.

At one point, I emailed him the following block quote without explanation from Stuart Hall’s lecture, *Representation and the Media* (1997). In the video recording, Hall says:

“The statement, “Nothing exists outside of discourse,” is a sort of claim that, as it were, there is no material existence, no material world form, no objects out there, and that is patently not the case. But to say that “Nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse” is a way of summing up what I think I’ve been trying to say to you.” (Hall 1997)

Although Tom asked for clarification at the time about why I thought it was important to share this quote, now, it seems to summarize the key difference we imagined between us, or at least a recurring sticking point. I told him then that I was worried it might seem to him, in my tendency for hyperbole, that I was the one saying that “nothing exists outside of discourse.” (Once I even added, “Maybe I am always just pushing the relativist side too much for the sake of discussion; that’s a habit of mine.”) He joked in reply, “Now I understand this quote’s context, at least as a statement from you to me that you are not a material-world-form-denier.” In our discussion about GWAS, after qualifying my tendency to be polarizing, I stressed again that

for me, since scientific classification schemes like cases and controls are heuristics—“manufactured tools to ‘think’ with”—they have, like any tool, “a limited area of effect.” I added that:

“[It] shows us one thing, really what we ask it to, but it shuts down other ways of seeing; and we have to imagine what we want to see in the first place, before we can design a way to measure it. And we use cultural ideals and values about what we think nature and life are, to do this. I’m not saying genetics aren’t real; I am saying we can never see or understand them without parsing them culturally.”

He replied:

“If [heuristic] means any model of human genetics is made by humans, I agree. But I also think genes are words we use to describe things that are “there” and measurable in the real or concrete or physical world (which humans don’t see perfectly, but is there). E.g. I think chromosomal sex is “real” (yes still problematic, yes can be ambiguous, yes to be approached humbly) in some ways that gender isn’t (of course problematic, of course ambiguous, of course humbling).

“The tension between the existence of knowledge as pre-given and its creation by actors has long been a theme which has preoccupied philosophers” (Latour & Woolgar 1979, 174-175). This fission of fact takes on moralizing dimensions when described as “truth,” which we began to do.

Before my research in the lab, I believed that, in its quest for universal truths as I understood them, bioscience is rarely interested in conscious self-reflection and critique. I was also dedicated to seeing the way “acquisition[s] of truth” are a function of power (Foucault 1980, 131), and how histories of political dominance, like those described by Anna Tsing for botany (2005), have had a profound effect on what gets defined as universal truth in bioscience. Similarly, in *Laboratory Life* (1979), Latour and Woolgar demonstrated the way scientific knowledge, or a certain kind of truth, always emerges in the dai-

ly “conversation exchanges” between scientists and their “continual generation of a variety of documents” (1979, 168, 151).

Take the cassowary as an example (figure 3 above). Linnaeus’ decision to include the cassowary in the same genus as the ostrich for his *Systema Naturae* (1748) was criticized when he was accused of having “imperfect knowledge” on zoology, and ornithology more specifically (Allen 1910, 317). In fact, J.A. Allen describes Linnaeus’s exposure to ornithology literature as “exceedingly defective” and to extant birds of the time as “deprived” by his isolation (317-318). How to classify the cassowary, or anything else for that matter, then always emerges within the cultural and political context of scientific practice. Yet, for a long time anthropology positioned bioscience and taxonomic schemes as if inert and neutral. In another text, Latour chided:

“Since the time of Levi-Bruhl, anthropology has always been interested in science, but in the sciences of the Others. [...] [H]ow come that for Them the cassowary is not classified as a bird, this was a legitimate question; how come that modern taxonomists do classify the cassowary as a bird was not in the purview of anthropologists.” (Latour 1990, 145)

This broader bias in scientific inquiry—seeing ‘local,’ or really, non-white, knowledge as culturally and socially constructed (cassowary as not-a-bird) but internalizing Western science as *epistemology* (cassowary as bird)—can limit the accessibility of bioscience to anthropological investigation even today. In Tom’s case, while he welcomed me in the lab, he had clear ideas of what my “postmodern” investigation would be useful for. I challenged him once:

[You trust me to say] something useful and valuable about science? Even in a relativistic bent? Or only as long as I keep to talking about things like SciComm and not about telomere position effects?

His reply was reassuring but he capped it by clarifying that “there are also some questions the lab is striving towards for which I am

not so welcoming for a po-mo analyses e.g. ‘what is the genotype of mouse #3’).”

I wondered then whether there really was a fundamental conflict between a bioscientific quest to uncover a universal biological truth, and an anthropological perspective that sees a process of multiple, divergent, and never settled truth-making at the core of human relationships. I think Tom and I actually saw the world in very similar ways; we both defined realness and reality as things and ideas that had weight, that could muster or even move the material and ideological properties around them. But while Tom shared my view that bioscience is a rough tool to measure the “real” or material world, he added that it can be “useful to approximate, recognizing that this can only be done imperfectly, for good and useful, and potentially ‘just,’ purposes.” In other words, scientific models are “good to think” (Levi-Strauss 1962, 89). I had already observed the constant emphasis in the lab on experiments as acts of *modeling* reality and I found that bioscientists don’t dismiss meaning in their work; rather, they confront the question of whether what they are anticipating as universal truth is in fact meaningful, even socially contingent, reality. In my conversations with Tom, I came to appreciate the ways that bioscientists are just as concerned with self-conscious reflection, and already draw from a rich critical tradition within the natural sciences (for classic examples see Kuhn 1962, Popper 1959). It was perhaps largely our disciplinary training then to initially privilege “reality” on one hand, and “meaningful reality” on the other, as if incompatible, when they are inseparable. And our habits of presentation made it sometimes harder to see, or concede on, the ways our thinking productively merged. More than once, I wrote to him something along the lines of, “Actually, that isn’t so different from what I am trying to say...” Still, we came to our discussions with the typical classificatory schemes, and boundary work, that serve as disciplinary crutches for thinking about the world, in turns playful and hyperbolic but also at times suspicious, and maybe concerned we were barging into profane territory. We battled over the things we wanted to take for granted and felt protective over, and in my case wrestled as much internally as in conversation with our set, prescribed views and our di-

vergent training. If we were suspicious of each other, I think we were equally suspicious of the limits of our own knowledge, although he wrote to me once, “I am most deeply satisfied in acknowledging that there are things I don’t know.”

GETTING FROM DISCIPLINARY DELUSIONS TO MATTERS OF CONCERN, OR WHAT HAS TO BE A CONCLUSION

Fig. 3. Exceptions to the normative distribution of Songhay space.

Figure 4: Mapping exceptions, Paul Stoller, 1980. (Used with permission of the author.)

Somewhere in the middle of the 21-day MMS project, stuck at the bottom of an email about an upcoming meeting, Tom sent me a quote from Latour:

“If this were possible then we could let the critics come ever closer to the matters of concern we cherish, and then at last we could tell them: “Yes, please, touch them, explain them, de-
 ploy them.” Then we would have gone for good beyond icono-
 clasm.” (Latour 2004, 248)

The reading had been suggested to us by the MMS prompt #15 which pointed to Latour's insistence that, as the prompt described, "we rebuild a different sort of critique by moving from 'matters of fact' to 'matters of concern.'" As I began to realize later, it was the combative, polarizing history between qualitative and quantitative sciences that Tom and I were staging and redrawing in text. Maybe with this copy and paste of Latour's statement, snuck noncommittally into a routine correspondence, he was asking me, or even both of us, to overcome this binary, and for me to handle my observations of the lab as "matters of concern." But our different disciplinary language, even the different goals we may have had in communicating in the first place (it was initially my research project, after all), made it difficult to cross over boundaries when we reached them. Ultimately, that meant it was much more difficult to (be motivated to) find a way to innovate or redraft our epistemologies into a syncretic and useful set of shared concepts that could become a basis for further, or future, collaboration, as I'd hoped.

The skeptical divides we faced, acquired in training and structurally reinforced by our disciplinary institutions, were reproduced by us here in action, in talking about and with each other, and in our presumptions and the rhetorical manifestation of our inherent incongruities. The positioning of anthropology as a form of social critique, under which bioscience itself falls to examination, has perhaps only exacerbated this relative acrimony. At the same time, there remain key differences in the operationalization of concepts of objectivity and truth which do seem discordant, if not incommensurable. Over at least the last half-century, a major thrust in anthropology has been a critical engagement with concepts of 'truth' and the production of knowledge as shifting social discourse negotiated at a specific time and place, amid specific relations of power. The biosciences tend to emphasize truth as an independent objective factor which can be discovered by the researcher, through increasingly sophisticated technological and intellectual feats. Yet, we share an interest in the process of discovery, founded on the assumption that there is in fact something *a priori* to discover. To suggest that the appearance of an asocial and ahistorical material reality is merely a con-

sequence of the practices and projections of science implicates bioscientists themselves in participating, even unwittingly, in this construction. Further, targeting bioscientists and their daily work in the lab for critical analysis then appears to accuse them of oversight and inattention. It is the application of etic forms of showmanship, where epistemologies of critique trump emic, “native distinctions, significances, and meanings” (Harris 2001, 576). It is no surprise within this clash that any productive intersections might suffer decapitation under the “sword of criticism” (Latour 2004, 248).

Over thirty years ago, after fearing he had misinterpreted Songhay village organization as a “static reification” of social order, Paul Stoller reflected that anthropologists “must struggle to comprehend systems of symbolic and social relations that are, for the most part, outside the scope of their experience” (Stoller 1980: 420). He wondered:

“Do most anthropological analyses suffer from significant omissions generated from the “delusion” of the anthropologist’s perception? Are most anthropological theories based upon misconceptions stemming from the inability of the anthropologist to perceive something his or her informant takes for granted?” (1980: 419)

In his text, Stoller describes gradually overcoming his theoretical assumptions, arrived at through a careful consideration of the history of relations between Songhay royalty, former slaves, and the emerging merchant class, as he mapped out their “field allotments” (1980, 426; see figure 4 above). Returning to what he first viewed as “exceptions” to the norm, Stoller realized that land holdings defying categorization, or really theoretical assimilation, were signs of conscious and contentious political transformation. Stoller’s description of the incongruities he encountered in the field, trouble arising when an “ethnographer [...] sees roads which intersect, while his informant see[s] roads which end in forks” (Stoller, 427), describes for me the challenge of single disciplinary approaches to human problems such as this pandemic. Within a single discipline, the potential for exceptions to be easily filed away as “noise in a theoretical system” (Stoller

1980, 427)—what may at first look like dead ends or meaningless meanderings—is multiplied. A pandemic like COVID-19 dramatizes the fundamental interconnection between human social complexity and intricate biological life, but “social complexity” and “biological life” are already divided heuristics, terms which merely describe the same phenomenon, just as forks and intersections describe differing ways of parsing and experiencing the same crossroad. My tentative and temporary collaboration with Tom, for me, reconfirmed the necessity of merging distinct epistemological visions—to bring together the intersections and the forks—just as it showed me the institutional and preconceived assumptions which remain at the crux of why this may be so difficult, for now.

For a time, Tom and I were liminally suspended, inside a “moment in and out of time” (Turner 1969, 96). Working from home like others, transfixed in place, and communicating together exclusively online, we both agreed that in these troubled times, our experiences were, as he wrote, “not so troublesome.”¹⁰ But still together we passed through “a limbo of statuslessness” (97). It is at these times that, Turner said, “In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable” (97). And for a time, I saw the promises that this indispensability might bring. But as much as living within threshold moments might be transformative, such frames of experience themselves by definition abide by ritualized rules which reinsert us into persistent, pre-established social roles afterwards, through “reaggregation” (94). Liminal states themselves are codified, an ambiguity that maintains, embodies, and enacts all sorts of cultural and institutional procedures. In Steiner’s example, border zones—those moments of crossing over—similarly work to fix and transform value in socially (and legally) acceptable ways even as they disambiguate objects from other previous contexts. These rules then guide our possible figures or potentials for transformation along predictable, well-worn routes; at times returning us to where we came from, or sending us off exactly to where we are expected to go. When the emergency declaration was over and our conversations ended, I worried that I resettled too easily, like glue, into previous ways of

thinking and doing. And that an opportunity for change had passed me by.

In another context, Nick Seaver wrote, “the boundaries around corporations, field sites, and algorithms are enacted socially, and they carry with them ideologies of access and knowledge” (Seaver 2017, 4). Disciplinary boundary work then must invariably involve a negotiation of these ideologies. But negotiation, and even recognition, does not guarantee a passage through difference out to some other syncretic side. Recently, I have listened to more than one anthropologist complain about the difficulty of working with engineers and computer programmers who, like bioscientists, don’t “share the same epistemologies as us.” And I have observed the way boundaries between academic disciplines get reified in simple, everyday ways: performed and maintained across preprint servers, prioritized government funding, journal subscriptions, departmental orientations, public attention, news cycles, and correspondences just like this one.

Yet, to present my conversations with Tom as emblematic of the kinds of “empirical [...] conversational tension” that Moats and Seaver describe (2019, 3)—a meta-comment on a century-long disciplinary divide that was doomed in advance to fail—is also, in a way, to fail to do justice to its complexity, and even its everydayness. After all, Tom told me more than once that his participation in the MMS project and seeing where my “tradition/style of anthropology and sense-making is situated within postmodernity and humanities/poetics” was useful for him. What doing useful science looked like was a topic we returned to often (although in our conversations, it was his biological research that we both tended to privilege as “science”). As he was reviewing and commenting on an early draft of this paper for me, Tom forwarded me an article about epigenetics. In the article, Scott F. Gilbert critiques genetic reductionism and argues for the inverse of the isolated unit of analysis. He reminds bioscientists that, “In the epigenotype, the gene is not an autonomous entity; it is part of a network of interacting components” (2003, 90, 91). We can hardly see the network and its mechanisms, then, without a grasp of its parts, or the parts without a sense of the whole; we can hardly see the cassowary without the question of if it is really a “bird,” or

the Japanese Fancy Mouse 1 without a view of its global circulation as a scientific material. But of course, as Tom was reminding me, it isn't only anthropologists who can see this way. Moats and Seaver describe a similar moment for qualitative scientists when they "attempt to collaborate with data scientists." They:

[...] often realize that their counterparts are well aware of many questions around complexity, politics, and performative effects, but make sense of them in distinctive ways. (Moats & Seaver 2019: 2)

We can choose then to use critical approaches, not as a dead end, an empty critique, or a sword for the sake of deconstruction, but as a useful way to see what bioscience does in the world, and more importantly to me, to do things together *with* bioscience. It is Latour again who for me offers an encouraging way forward: "What would critique do if it could be associated with more, not with less, with multiplication, not subtraction?" (Latour 2004, 248). It would be easy for me to end here, simply with this noncommittal and elusively positive statement, but alone, as a statement about statements, it can hardly advance any lasting change.

Once during our banter about postmodernism, I asked Tom if he could see the possibilities for a postmodern bioscience. He answered:

[S]ure, it could be possible. I can imagine that a postmodern natural science would develop, but I would probably not read the papers, and my bias is that it would be less useful... but I hope I would humbly judge it by its fruits.

On their own, researchers can strive to overcome the delusions of their training, to move to respective "matters of concern," to merge intersections with forking paths, to craft "moments in and out of time" (Turner 1969: 96), and to find better ways to talk to each other. But whether we decide to read the papers or not, that exponential potential for syncretic multiplication remains powerfully constrained by institutional structures and biases outside the control of individual researchers, even as we learn to internalize and reproduce disciplinary boundary work. If "science not communicated isn't [even

meaningful] science”—science defined then through its communicative imminence or failure—why do we continue in practice to so distrust, and disambiguate our disciplinary visions from those in other fields? Tom and I, like so many others teleworking, reaching out electronically and hesitantly, spontaneously joining and collaborating, were personally motivated because the pandemic confronted us with death and sickness, and an isolation we could barely make sense of with the rough tools we had been given. In response to one prompt from the MMS project, Tom wrote that: “COVID and COVID-19 are loud energy proclaiming death is coming, and death lays to total waste my sense-making and significance-making.” Even in a moment such as this one, a chance to reach across a gap we normally barely ever attend to, a moment that demanded we come together for the sake of scientific advancement to speak together about the “awful unity of all living things,” as Tom once described it, we eventually lost sight of, or came to the end of, that thread.

In the final stages of our collaboration, Tom and I drafted a letter to the president of his scientific institute, supporting an initiative for the integration of the natural and the social sciences. Together, we wrote:

“In any disciplinary field, researchers learn to draw relatively arbitrary boundaries around their object of study. Collaborative interdisciplinary research requires researchers to confront these boundaries, to understand them better and to rewrite them when necessary; it is in this process that meaningful innovations in scientific thinking and practice can occur.”

I know now that it isn’t enough to make an independent push for a collaborative cross-disciplinary approach to research on the ground, although we tried in our own way. What’s needed is a supportive institutional structure that sees the value in crossing that ground in the first place.

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I want to thank Tom [pseudonym] for his generosity and insight, and the time and effort he devoted to this collaborative project. I also want to thank Paul Stoller who wrote recently of “Troubled Times” (2017) and whose work helped to inspire me to reflect on the complexities of relations in the field and the limits of anthropological (in)sight. I want to further thank three anonymous reviewers who provided helpful and detailed suggestions for improvements. Jonathan Corliss greatly influenced my vision for this paper, just as he does for everything else. Of course, the many, many blunders are all 100% mine. This research is supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science’s Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) 20Ko1188.

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Image Notes

- Figure 1: Mice with various coats, including piebald (top left), from the 1787 Japanese book *Chingan Sodategusa*, public domain. (Modified by author.)
- Figure 2: Objects crossing borders, becoming subjects. Images from British Library Collection, public domain. (Collage by author.)
- Figure 3: The cassowary, public domain. (<https://pixabay.com/vectors/cassowary-bird-feathers-neck-48000/>).
- Figure 4: Mapping exceptions, Paul Stoller, 1980. (Used with permission of the author.)

NOTES

1. <http://www.med.miyazaki-u.ac.jp/AnimalCenter/mouseDB/labomice/html/041.html>↵
2. <https://www.nig.ac.jp/nig/2013/05/research-highlights/20130528.html>↵
3. When Tom read this quote later in another paper I was drafting, he highlighted the word “important” and replied to me in a comment box: “I’m not sure what I meant by this ‘important,’ but I guess I made my point. Trump-ian.”↵
4. A key point of context for this hope is that I have long idealized the collaborative, provocative approach of the anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch. His work insisted that collaboration “afford[s] a much more profound understanding of the subjects’ world than one posited, in the name of science, on a radical separation between observer and observed” (Henley 2020, 225).↵
5. Although there is already lively work on this topic within disciplines such as biological and medical anthropology, these fields at times often fail to reach, or fail to be appreciated as relevant to, the broader bio-science community.↵
6. In his final review of this paper, Tom wrote in a comment box: “To qualify this a bit, I think I meant that while the ‘tools’ of science applied to any question might reveal something of truth to an individual, unless it gets communicated, I would not consider it fully a part of the social activity we (most?) recognize as science.”↵
7. Global health presents countless examples of “local biology” (Lock & Nguyen 2010, 90) and behavior that is well adapted in context reversed by policy makers and public health practitioners who cite it as the root cause of poverty and disease.↵
8. When reviewing the final version of this paper, Tom wrote to correct my description: “This article looked for genetic variants on autosomes that were statistically associated with sex. This is interesting because the simple assumption is that the genetic variants associated [with] sex are the sex chromosomes themselves (i.e. NOT the autosomes). This description of the article doesn’t reflect that understanding, to me, although I am not sure it matters.” His correction for me demonstrates again the necessity for collaborating and calibrating across disciplines.↵

9. Although more recently referred to as ethnic groups, where “trans-ethnic” comparisons for GWAS are a common method, such studies might take national populations as genetically salient. This tendency has been critiqued by biological and medical anthropologists, along with others (see for example Serre and Pääbo 2004, Fullwiley 2007, Fujimura 2014).↵
10. Paul Stoller has used this very phrase recently (2017). I want to acknowledge his general influence here, as I borrow from one of his titles in my own for this article, as well as his mapping of Songhay social space which I discuss above (1980). This phrase also appeared as part of prompt #17 from the MMS project.↵

THE NOTIFICTION: HOW PUSH NOTIFICATIONS FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD SURVEILLANCE APPS CAN CREATE AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF PLACE

ANDY FISCHER WRIGHT

This article concerns the author's attempt to stay connected with his home neighborhood in Austin, TX, and how that conflicts with using the neighbourhood surveillance platform Ring Neighbors during the pandemic. Utilizing a mixed methodology based in autoethnography, the author considers how the notifications produced by this platform can create new potential narratives about his neighbourhood during a pandemic. While this app is theoretically helpful by showing what community members are thinking, the notifications that it thrusts into his daily life tend to create a fictional representation of his home, which he deems a "notifiction."

Cet article aborde la tentative de l'auteur de rester connecté avec le voisinage de sa ville natale à Austin, au Texas et comment cela créer un conflit avec l'utilisation de la plate-forme de surveillance de voisinage "Ring Neighbors" pendant la pandémie. En se basant sur une méthodologie mixte fondée sur l'autoethnographie, l'auteur examine comment les notifications produites par cette plate-forme peuvent créer de potentielles nouvelles histoires sur son quartier pendant la pandémie. Alors que cette application est en théorie utile en montrant ce que à quoi les membres de la communauté pensent, ces notifications qui s'imposent dans sa vie quotidienne ont tendance à créer une représentation fictive de sa maison comme une "notifiction."

Since March of 2020, many people have either chosen or been forced to stay mainly inside of their residences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continues, people in the United States and within my community in Austin, Texas, have

generally been slow to return to their former routines that involved appearing in public. This has become doubly true for workers whose employers have not yet required them to return to the office, leading large swaths of Americans privileged enough to stay safely stationary to increasingly view the world through a digital lens darkly. Because all in-person forms of interaction bear some inherent risk within a pandemic, representations of the outside world have come to be increasingly mediated through devices used in domestic spaces, and especially through ubiquitous mobile devices. This is to say, many people see more and more of the outside world through the visual representations on devices, especially smart phones. In this state of increased physical isolation, the role of neighbourhood social networks and apps is worth considering.

Neighbourhood platforms such as Nextdoor, Citizen, and Ring Neighbors allow users and officials to view, post, and stream text, images, and videos from security cameras and other domestic sensors about things that are happening in their neighbourhood, with a particular focus on reporting crime and potential danger. However, these networks have often been criticized for the behaviours they tend to encourage. In her comparison of Nextdoor and the popular television show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Katie Lambright noted that Nextdoor's focus on creating a trusted community can create a "resurrected discourse of small-town community values [that elides] the more pernicious effects of the entire project of upholding (and policing) 'communities'" (Lambright 89). Citizen, which was adapted from a predecessor named Vigilante in 2017, is another app used in large cities that both notifies users of criminal activity harvested from police scanners and user reports and has encouraged users to "stream and document incidents that are unfolding around them" (Herrman). Citizen has also recently been involved in an erroneous manhunt for an alleged arsonist in California in which users posted identifying pictures and offered a reward for a man who was not in fact involved in the incident (Morrison). Both of these platforms are worth considering for their methods and community norms, but this article largely focuses on Ring Neighbors, a social network and mobile app associated with the Amazon-acquired Ring brand of securi-

ty cameras and surveillance devices. According to a company blog post made in 2014, Ring's name originates from "the 'ring' of security [the company] creates around your home, and then in time, your community" (Siminoff). Neighbors is designed for smart phones and can be easily paired with Ring cameras and devices, and has a stated goal to deliver "real-time crime and safety alerts from your neighbors and local law enforcement" with the end goal of creating "stronger communities" (Ring). As might be expected, these community-based platforms have opened themselves to criticism from various advocacy groups including the Electronic Frontier Foundation. However, Neighbors in particular has a history of close association with American law enforcement, including a partnership with over 2,000 local police and fire departments that can make surveillance video and metadata more accessible to law enforcement officers (Lyons). The explicit connection between Neighbors and the police, paired with a strong tendency for over-reporting danger, can turn "what seems like a perfectly safe neighborhood into a source of anxiety and fear" (Guariglia).

For this article I specifically draw attention to the push notifications that the Neighbors app produces and the narrative they can insert into daily life. Like many other scholars writing in this issue, this motivation came partially from the 21-day autoethnography challenge developed by Anne Markham and Annette Harris in May of 2020 (Markham and Harris). This challenge asked participants to "transform our personal experiences through this COVID-19 moment into critical understanding of scale, sensemaking, and relationality," (Markham and Harris 2) containing such prompts as looking at an image of a face-mask and reflecting on it by "repeating the classic ethnographic question, 'What is going on here?' over and over" until we understood how we "frame our observations" (Markham and Harris 9). Despite their prevalence, notifications are rarely afforded this attention, and their potential influence goes largely uninterrogated as part of daily life.

I specifically consider the thin level of description offered by narrativized push notifications from the geolocalized social media platform Neighbors during a pandemic, and argue that the notifications

the Neighbors app produces represent an extension of Ring's interests into the flows of everyday life. By reporting alarming messages about potential fires, gunshots, and alleged criminal activity through the same mechanism through which most users receive more mundane emails and text messages, Neighbors creates what has been called a "vicious cycle in which police promote the adoption of Ring, Ring terrifies people into thinking their homes are in danger, and then Amazon sells more cameras" (Guariglia). By exploring how the notifications I receive from this networked surveillance app come to form narrativized 'notifictions' about my home, it becomes clear that the way these media objects represent my neighbourhood is a different, more alarmist version than what one might encounter when in closer physical proximity to the space and the people who live here. In the case of my home in Austin, I argue that the story I am presented with through this media format is fundamentally at odds with the place in which I live.

THE NOTIFICATION

Media scholars have studied how people have come to view places through the media they view about them, and how this is never a neutral process (see Turnbull et al.; Loukissas; Rapping). One classic example of media potentially creating an imperial lens is the "magic carpet" effect that Stam and Spence noted is inherent in Western cinema about non-Western places. According to these scholars, gazing at films about different places transforms Western viewers into "armchair conquistadores, affirming our sense of power while making the inhabitants of the Third World objects of spectacle" (Stam and Spence 316). While this imperialist and deficit model has been widely complicated, digital humanities scholar Cameron Blevins used historical editions of a local daily newspaper in the late 19th century to posit that a "cheap, widely available, and timely" (Blevins 128) form of information technology could come to "define the geographical context of the world by printing some locations and ignoring others" (Blevins 128). This is to say, if the only information a person reads about a city or region comes from newspaper stories, the norms of how this city is shown in the newspaper's

aggregate narrative can become a powerfully affective force wherein the newspaper's biases are reflected in the reader's knowledge of a place they have only read about. While these understandings work for their respective mediums, in an 'appified' world the digital media we consume and the apps we use have become "embedded into the everyday routines and rituals of" daily life (Morris and Murray 7). Scholars have categorized such intrusions of technology into daily life and culture through theorized systems such as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff), data colonialism (Couldry and Mejias), and technological redlining (Noble), with the common concern that the disturbing norms produced and propagated by new media technology companies are becoming both increasingly influential and accepted as mundane. Combining these methods of seeing the world with the implications of ubiquitous media technology as part of daily life sets the stage for analyzing push notifications as daily media objects. As the primary source of information about the world outside of the home that arrives via a device and a medium that is expressly designed to blend in, Neighbors notifications begin to take on a false verisimilitude cloaked in ordinary reporting.

If both narrative media and information technology about a place can produce conceptions of space that blend in to daily life, why should the same not be possible for the geolocalized push notification? I argue that notifications conveying information about a place and who exists in it can produce their own imaginative geography by broadcasting a singular message of what happens in that place, or a 'notification.' The interesting distinction between the notification and the other forms of place-shaping are that the stories told through notifications are part and parcel of daily life. Whereas Blevins read a historical corpus distantly and media scholars read movies and television content closely, notifications are read intimately at the intersection of media and the mundane that a smartphone represents. When a user is told about a sequence of things happening in the place they live through constant reporting on neighborhood happenings, the notification's information flow supplements their knowledge of their home and the things that happen within it.

In the case of neighbourhood apps and other local networks, this can have potentially disastrous side effects. In 2019, Matthew Guariglia of the Electronic Frontier Foundation quoted an assistant police chief in Arizona that seeing potential criminal acts reported daily on social media allowed for people in his area to “start believing that [criminality] is prevalent, and that crime is really high” when this was not actually the case (Guariglia). A continual flow of warnings also can create a need to stay tuned into the notification. Writing about Citizen’s reporting style, John Herrman called a similar desire to stay informed a “conflicted enthusiasm” guided by a logic of “I don’t know if I want to know, but I can’t not know” (Herrman). Ring’s own advertising has also played into this sense of curiosity, such as through the two-image ad I received on Instagram early in 2019 (Fig. 1.) The first panel of this ad reads, “Wondering what’s going on in your neighborhood?” The second panel presents an answer to this desire: “Download the Free Neighbors App” so that you may know. Keeping informed of the seemingly endless threats that Neighbors reports is presented a way of knowing “what’s going on” in this place.

Figure 1: Screenshots of a two-image Instagram ad I received for Ring Neighbors (read left to right). Screenshots recorded by author February 12, 2019.

To place this project in context, I wish to trace a notification across a few moments in time when I was able to record it. The first of these takes place before the pandemic began, when public interaction was more normal for many. The second takes place during a peak of the pandemic, when the virus and local laws in my community made all public interaction more difficult and potentially dangerous. The final entry takes place in the transitional period after vaccinations have become more accessible in my community but herd immunity has not yet been achieved. The one thread that holds these examples together is that they all take place in Austin, Texas, and specifically in my home neighbourhood of Cherrywood.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Cherrywood offers up a compelling case study because of the complicated history present in Austin. The east side of this city has been intentionally shaped by forces of redlining and gentrification, dating back to a 1928 city plan that refused city services to Black individuals living west of East Avenue (Hunt and Losey 1), continuing through a New Deal process of redlining that later involved the Federal construction of Interstate 35 along the same longitude (Zehr et al.), and culminating in an industry-friendly “technopolis” (Straubhaar et al.) that continues to struggle with inequity and the digital divide. There is also a precedent of surveillance by community members in east Austin seeming to reflect a clear sense of bias. In a 2016 study of a neighborhood listserv in the predominantly white Austin neighbourhood of Woodcliff in East Austin not far away from my own, researchers Lowe, Stroud, and Nguyen found that race and gender can shape responses to whether residents would classify a person along the lines of whether they belong in the neighborhood or not (47). These researchers determined that “residents [of Woodcliff] rely on race as one of the most important factors to determine if someone is a threat,” including a clear bias against Black men and an accompanying prerogative that “*required* [a good neighbour] to call the police and to alert others.” (Lowe et al., 47). Many of the ways the researchers describe Woodcliff ring true for Cherrywood, from its status as a “progressive, upper-middle-class,

predominantly white neighborhood” to the “well-intentioned, self-described ‘liberal’ whites” who live there (Lowe et al. 37). While these neighbourhoods and the media they produce are not completely identical, the similarity of the setting as well as the researchers’ concerns about a “recent increase in the use of digital surveillance strategies to monitor areas for suspicious activity” (Lowe et al. 37) when the article was published in 2016 raises a legitimate concern for my home.

Figure 2: A Neighborhood Watch sign under two blocks from my apartment, faded from exposure to the sun over time.

There is a much longer history of surveillance and inequitable policing in America outside of community listservs in Austin (Browne), and the most telling legacy of these platforms comes from Neighbor-

hood Watch organizations. These citizen groups usually composed of property owners in an area were originally organized in the middle of the 20th century as part of a much larger initiative to provide a “framework for citizen involvement in local crime prevention activities,” (McConville and Shepherd 3) and have often been criticized for encouraging vigilante justice, racial profiling, and extrajudicial violence. The purported motivation of Neighborhood Watch is often as simple as the sign near my apartment pictured above: “We Look Out for Each Other” by reporting “suspicious activity” to the local police (Fig. 2.) The organization of a group focused on searching out suspicious activities naturally creates a reliance on marking difference based on what data can be observed, categorized, and circulated.

Though Neighborhood Watch organizations establish difference based on subjective notions of suspicious persons or activities, platforms may also build upon user prejudices. Surveillance technologies, as a norm, tend to mark as other “virtually anything that aberrates from the norm” (Tucker), which in terms of platforms can mean those who are on the network and those who are not. Neighbourhood social networks seem to largely treat this through moderating specific instances of racism, including the recent decision by Nextdoor to add an “anti-racism” notification which “aims to make people aware of language that may violate our policy against discrimination and the harm that can be caused by the use of these phrases [such as All Lives Matter]” (Ongweso Jr). Notifying individual users that the posts they are making might be harmful allows platforms to treat bias as an issue external to the platform; a glitch, not a feature. Katie Lambright further writes of Nextdoor that “emphasizing the need for good neighborhoods, close communities, and well-watched gates effaces structural gatekeeping and reproduces the inequality that [redlined neighborhoods and boundary markers like fences] were created to produce” (Lambright 89). In addition, Guariglia writes for the EFF that, “[these platforms] are marketed as localized social networks where people in a neighborhood can discuss local issues or share concerns. But all too often, they facilitate reporting of so-called ‘suspicious’ behavior that really amounts to racial profiling” (Guariglia). In this role, the networked neighbour-

hood watch acts to report people and behavior coded as other through posts and alerts that are then translated to timely notifications.

Figure 3: The screen shown before logging into Ring Neighbors on an iPhone demonstrates that Ring has not shied away from a comparison with the neighborhood watch. Screenshot recorded May 28, 2020.

READING THE NOTIFICATION: BEFORE, DURING, AND IN TRANSITORY STAGES OF THE PANDEMIC

Considering these notifications as a media flow allows us to grasp a slippery message and analyze it over a set period of time. To showcase what the notification looks like in practice, I turn to three discrete time periods when I was able to record notifications from Ring Neighbors. I began my observations casually be-

fore the pandemic, specifically when I had just installed the Neighbors app on my phone in April of 2019. After spending a Saturday on campus working late in the library, I checked my phone to see if it would rain on my walk home. This is what I saw on my lock screen that had been delivered by Neighbors during the day:

Figure 4: Notifications I received from Ring Neighbors over the course of April 13, 2019.
I have covered the video preview for the privacy of the surveilled parties.

The first notification I saw made me stop flat: “Suspicious- Appears to be teenager’s up to no good [sic.] They heard the dog and ran” (Fig. 4). Looking down the list of notifications, I saw that the remainder of the posts that day were similar. Someone had rung a doorbell, and a “sketchy guy” had hopped a fence. Over this same interval, there were reports of two fires that had broken out. During one qui-

et Saturday, my neighborhood had seemingly been bombarded with crimes and disasters arriving in quick succession, though none of the people responsible for these deeds appeared to be recognizable by any factors outside of their perceived behaviour. The perpetrators were “teenager’s,” a “guy who came to our house,” and a “sketchy guy” whom the poster did not recognize. These people were seen as young, looked “sketchy” to the person reporting the activity, or just acted in a way that was unexpected. More disturbingly, they were reported by these alerts as dangerous forces to be wary of for nothing more than that fact that they were seen.

Though I am highly skeptical of surveillance technology, I will admit that being told about fires and crime in my neighbourhood before walking home from the library late in the evening was unnerving for a moment. The notification represented a dangerous place, but with the context of having lived there I knew that my neighbourhood was likely not actually unsafe. Walking home, the most direct threat to my wellbeing was undoubtedly the fact that I would need to cross a few major roads on a Saturday night, and when I arrived home to the small apartment I shared with another graduate student there was nothing out of the ordinary to note. Yet the notification told a story that was directly in contrast to this understanding, and moreover promoted a message that knowing about these vague threats in my area would make me and my community safer.

Figure 5: Screenshot recorded on October 1, 2019.

The notification from Neighbors continued later into that year (Fig. 5). I have included this screenshot because it shows a differentiation between three distinct types of notifications that emerged in the same series: Neighborhood Alerts, Safety Alerts, and Austin PD Alerts. While Neighborhood Alerts seem to come from posts made by community members, the Safety Alerts shown here as well as in the previous screenshot seem to be notifications of reported safety hazards such as fire or robbery. Meanwhile, the Austin PD Alert is a warning that people living in Austin should be registering their firearms in case they were later stolen. Though the sources of these alerts are all different and occurred over the course of four days, reading this collection of notifications continues to tell a notification that Cherrywood was supposedly an unsafe place and that inhabitants needed to be prepared. But again, the notification was easy to ignore with context.

My routine was significantly altered by the pandemic, but the notification presented by Neighbors remained largely the same. Before my employer and school suspended most face-to-face activities in March

of 2020, I would walk through my neighbourhood every morning on my way to campus. Even if I did not meet any people that I knew, I still passed by the same coffeeshops, bus stops, and buildings, seeing if anything had changed since I had walked home the previous evening. By contrast, the only times I would regularly leave my apartment during the heart of the pandemic were to go grocery shopping once a week, or for rare social gatherings that were carefully planned to follow public health guidelines. The face-to-face interactions that had happened frequently with my friends, neighbours, and strangers were replaced with observations made by users on platforms like Neighbors, moving my perspective from a commuting inhabitant to a stationary benefactor of this networked system of surveillant information.

Figure 6: Screenshot of notifications from July 17th-July 19th, 2020. Screenshot recorded on July 20, 2020.

By July of 2020 (Fig. 6), the notifications I was receiving about my neighbourhood had diversified in content, but had not deviated from the theme of reporting unilateral danger. During the three-day period that this screenshot shows, I received notifications that represent-

ed multiple attempted break-ins, incidents of trespassing, a reported fire, and a lost dog that had been taken in by someone. The language used to describe activities and the people who were observed performing them seems set on establishing that many people seen in Cherrywood did not belong there: one is a “stranger,” another is a “trespasser,” while another alert details how “people are getting so [brazen] now” and looking at cars. On the other hand, a found dog merited its own post under the assumption that a community member may be looking for it.

What is not immediately apparent from this screenshot is the state of the pandemic at the time. Just days before the first notification arrived and in response to celebrations during the American Independence Day holiday earlier in the month, Travis County Judge Sam Biscoe signed County Judge Order 2020-14 which prohibited most gatherings over 10 people, enforced more strict mask guidelines, and continued a disaster declaration and public health emergency for the area (Biscoe). With this order in effect and levels of infection increasing rapidly, leaving the apartment not only opened myself up to infection but was also potentially illegal. The corollary to my isolation is that presumably my neighbours were also choosing to stay inside if they were able to. Paul Preciado characterized this condition of self-quarantine as a sort of Foucauldian nightmare, writing of a society “locked up in their cage, [with] everyone at their window” ready to discipline those whom they could observe and report to their networks. With the ability to leave the home space physically disincentivized and restricted by the state, networked platforms became a more prominent way of seeing the world without changing their messaging of perpetual danger. In isolation, the notification presents a myth that had no accessible counterpart from the neighbourhood outside my door.

Figure 7: A screenshot that shows notifications received between May 18th-May 20th, 2021. Screenshot recorded May 20th, 2021.

Just over a year after the first public measures to curb the pandemic took effect in Texas, the state declared that all adults were now eligible to receive a vaccine. By early May of 2021, over a third of Travis County residents were fully vaccinated and over one million doses of vaccines had been administered (Laskey). As I write this in May of 2021, the city in which I live seems to be entering yet another transitional state in the pandemic back into public life. Due to an order from the Governor's office following guidance from the Center for Disease Control, wearing a mask will no longer be required by state governmental agencies including my home university (Ragas). The presumption seems to be that the pandemic is reaching an endpoint, at least at a local level, and that the time is coming for the general population to readjust to public encounters. And yet, the notifications that are being communicated (Fig. 7) retain their dire messaging: natural disasters, "unexpected visitor[s,]" and the occasional loose pet. It is not entirely clear how daily life will proceed after this temporary stage of the pandemic, as members of my neighbourhood

begin to see each other more frequently at work and around the city. The role of the notification in an uncertain future remains to be seen.

THE FUTURE OF THE NOTIFICATION

The messages Neighbors drives in its collective notification are not by any means reliable, but by taking this look at the continual messaging across this span of time we can outline two themes that emerge through their collective story. First, all of these notifications are localized in space and time, which gives the notification a sense of immediacy and relevancy to daily life within an actual geographic area. Second, many of these notifications represent a distinct danger or crime (fire, theft, trespassing, etc.) or less distinct suspicious activity, but few possess a clear justification for why the person reading these notifications needs to know about this activity with this immediacy. The push notifications I see and all the technology they come with aim to create a phantasmagoric neighbourhood constantly under attack, whose image is controlled by the platforms and users that make up the networked neighbourhood watch. The resultant notification of constant imminent danger within the community from without seems to encourage suspicion based on social networks that have proven potentially fallible or biased, which is not necessarily in my neighbourhood's best interest.

The notifications I received on my phone from Ring Neighbors during a pandemic present an especially prominent example of a notification, but the concept may be applied across other platforms as well. As a theoretical concept, reading notifications as both individual media objects and parts of media flows that arrive as part of daily life with discernible motivations and narratives can provide a method for analyzing other algorithmic communications that are often taken as part of mundanity in visual culture. Because of how prevalent notifications are in an economy based on getting and holding attention, the notifications apps generate and users view are various in message and influence. Documenting this particular notification joins in the project of this special issue to take a moment during the pandemic to explore that which has become hidden in daily life and interrogate it

critically. The microscopic notification tells a story of the macroscopic world, which is restricted from view in the lockdown. This reading of the notification is a start; other analyses of notifications and their stories are worth pursuing.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Screenshots of a two-image Instagram ad I received for Ring Neighbors (read left to right). Screenshots recorded by author February 12, 2019.

Figure 2: A Neighborhood Watch sign under two blocks from my apartment, faded from exposure to the sun over time.

Figure 3: The screen shown before logging into Ring Neighbors on an iPhone demonstrates that Ring has not shied away from a comparison with the neighborhood watch. Screenshot recorded May 28, 2020.

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Figure 5: Screenshot recorded on October 1, 2019.

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Figure 7: A screenshot that shows notifications received between May 18th-May 20th, 2021. Screenshot recorded May 20th, 2021.

'SELFIES' UNDER QUARANTINE: EXPLORING NETWORKED EMOTIONS IN THE TIME OF 'SOCIAL DISTANCING'

DONATELLA DELLA RATTA

This essay focuses on auto-ethnography and auto-fiction as USEFUL tools to reflect on the ways in which networked identities are reshaped and re-configured within the context of a global pandemic where social relationships, family life, work routines, and learning processes are increasingly migrating to the online domain. The piece builds upon the experience of an undergraduate class who collectively contributed to the blog series 'Selfies Under Quarantine' during the first severe lockdown in March 2020. It discusses the question of methods and suggests looking at the 'draft' as both an aesthetics and an ethics to navigate the current context of crisis.

Cet essai se concentre sur l'auto-ethnographie et l'auto-fiction comme outils de réflexion sur les façons dont les identités en réseau sont remodelées et reconfigurées dans le contexte d'une pandémie mondiale où les relations sociales, la vie familiale, les routines de travail et les processus d'apprentissage migrent de plus en plus vers le domaine en ligne. L'article s'appuie sur l'expérience d'une classe de premier cycle qui a contribué collectivement à la série de blogs "Selfies Under Quarantine" (Selfies en quarantaine) pendant le premier verrouillage sévère en mars 2020. Il aborde la question des méthodes et suggère de considérer le "brouillon" comme une esthétique et une éthique pour naviguer dans le contexte actuel de crise.

PROLOGUE: ONCE UPON A TIME IN A LOCKDOWN...

This is the opening paragraph of a series of blog posts published in 2020 by the Institute of Network Cultures (INC) under the title "Selfies Under Quarantine," which I have co-au-

Figure 1: Introduction to the blog series published by the Institute of Network Cultures (INC). "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," Donatella Della Ratta, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

thored with students from my class "Selfies and Beyond: Exploring Networked Identities" at John Cabot University, Rome, once we were put in total lockdown for the entire Spring semester¹.

The 'selfie' class, as the students and I informally call it, was first offered in 2019 with the aim of exploring the networked self in its interactions with other online subjectivities, and of investigating how these very interactions are rendered into business models generating financial capital and sociopolitical leverage for the hosting platforms. Given such a goal, the course integrated the ideology critique of data and surveillance capitalism with autoethnographic methods putting the individual at the centre of the analysis, which turned out to be particularly useful in offering an account of the emerging variety of compulsive, sometimes contradictory, digital forms and formats embraced by the online self.

In this article I account for the shared experience between myself and my students of having to carry on with the teaching/learning process and keep investigating the online self during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely hit Italy in March 2020,

obliging us to go into a very strict lockdown for three months. I draw on the collective endeavor undertaken by my students to continue producing autoethnographic accounts as the course moved into full online mode, and many of them were obliged to go back to their families on the other side of the ocean. By comparing some of the autoethnographic material produced by students from the 2019 edition of the selfie class, I shed a light on the distinct outcomes generated a year later, and on the use of a different methodological approach. I show how the uncertainty and volatility of the situation impacted the way in which the students' autoethnographic pieces were conceived, and eventually resulted in pushing them to move towards autofiction (Dix 2018) as a form of stylistic and literary experimentation narrating the experience of fluctuating subjectivities caught in a moment of instability, uncertainty, and chaos.

I suggest that this shift from autoethnography to autofiction, from a self-narration that was once disclosed only privately within the safe context of the class, to the more open, confessional format provided by publicly blogging the students' pieces, might have been generated from the profound need to find ways of self-healing and recovering from a trauma that had hit so unexpectedly. Autofiction granted a context to translate these processes centered on the self into a compelling literary format providing more room for stylistic creativity and experimentation, and to insert these reflections within a broader socio-cultural environment—as the work of Paul B Preciado, among others, has recently shown.

Moving away from the more analytical attitude of the autoethnographic practice and from the need to offer definitive explanations, categorizations, or a theoretical framework to read the unfolding of the events, towards the more lyrical and stylistically experimental format of the autofiction, implied adopting what I call the 'aesthetics of the fragment.' This entailed endorsing a sort of formal flexibility vis-à-vis the uncertain flow of the events, and giving up any effort to provide a coherent reading or a fully-fledged analysis of the situation. The volatility and unpredictable evolution of the latter, instead, have materialized into a permanent 'draft style,' a stylistic mode—which is also a mood—allowing for incursions into poetry and

a more experimental language, taking time for pauses and breaks, free from the constraint of completion.

This is spelled out in the introductory post to the blog series (see Figure 2), which stands as a sort of 'manifesto of the draft,' a declaration of intent that we will rely on fragments and unfinished thoughts rather than on analyses and interpretations. As described in greater detail in the section "Writing in a draft mode (and mood) during a pandemic," after discussing how to continue the autoethnographic path of the class during the March 2020 lockdown, the students and I agreed that posting their reflections on an online platform would be ideal, as they were much more eager to share their thoughts in public than they had been in the past. They would initially post their pieces on personal (but accessible to the public) blogs, and then I would curate a selection of their essays together with my own reflections, in dialogue with excerpts of critical texts, literature, and poetry, but also with elements from mainstream pop culture, from videoclips to memes.

Working in a draft mode (and mood) has activated a dialogic attitude, a readiness to change and be changed (by others, by the circumstances), and a preoccupation with the context and the specific situa-

For this series I choose to work on a rough, irregular, broken style.

It's a draft, it's a rough-cut. It's the aesthetics of the fragment.

At a time when everything is on hold, I cannot think about anything finished, anything with a polished and clear structure. Our lives are on hold, let our writing be in a permanent draft status. We are holding our breath, let us then hold our thoughts, as well. Let us freeze permanence, certainty, and release drafts instead. Until the curtain is lifted, at least.

This is an aesthetics of the fragment. It is also an ethics of the fragment. Permanent judgment is suspended, definitive analyses are on hold. Things will flourish in the fragility of the fragment, in the uncertain style of the draft; randomly, just as the grass now growing in the city's pavement cracks.

Figure 2: Introduction to the blog series. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," Donatella Della Ratta, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

tion it calls into being. Instead of following an abstract, regulatory, or prescriptive code of conduct, we have opted for a “contextual and situational” ethics (Markham et al. 5) which is inherently process-oriented and takes into greater account the collective energies and subjectivities traversing a given historical moment. If too often ethnographies are produced in the interest of researchers and of the research goals and communities that they have in mind, the current crisis presents the opportunity for rethinking our work in the direction of care and empathy toward others, and also toward ourselves, relieving us from the markedly neoliberal imperative of having to be productive, efficient, self-behaving, and self-controlling in crisis situations as if everything was ‘normal’.

The unprecedented circumstances brought by the Coronavirus have pushed me and my students to re-adjust and collectively renegotiate the method and the path agreed upon at the beginning of the Spring 2020 semester, and to find other ways to continue the learning process that would consider the shifted context, together with the urgent need for self-care and preserving our mental health and wellbeing. Thus, the aesthetics of the fragment got translated into an ethics of the fragment. An ethics of the fragment implies working in a sort of constant ‘preliminary version’ mode, which should allow for pauses and breaks, and would free us from the imperative of completion, of something definitive, polished, and refined, ready to be launched and announced. More than ever, the unprecedented crisis context generated by the pandemic suggests that ethics should be understood not in terms of a rigid and prescriptive regulatory framework but, rather, in connection with care and solidarity.

This essay, presented here in a permanent draft mode (and mood), is an account of the journey into the garden of forking paths into which the obscure global pandemic abruptly put me and my students (as millions of others on this planet) in Spring 2020. It is compiled and narrated using visual and textual fragments produced between April and June 2020 during the making of the blog series “Selfies under Quarantine” Formally, it relies upon the above-mentioned aesthetics of the fragment, and it adopts the same attitude at a methodological level, building on what was defined here as ethics of the fragment.

BACKGROUND ON THE SELFIE CLASS, GOALS, AND METHODS

To highlight the methodological turn of the selfie class during the outbreak of the pandemic, and focus on the shift in the process of writing autoethnography moving toward autofiction, it is useful to give a brief background on how the selfie class was originally structured and what kind of material was produced in the past in collaboration with its students.

The selfie class was first offered in spring 2019 as a major elective course within the B.A. in Communications and Media Studies at John Cabot University, Rome. The main idea behind the course was to look at the ways in which social networking platforms and their software interfaces and algorithms play a role in framing contemporary identities, and how they shape a model for social interactions, travelling from the digital to the physical domain. The goal was to explore how networked identities and emotions generate social capital (e.g. reputation and recommendations, ranking systems, etc.), which is then rendered into financial capital and new business models based on the extraction of economic value from affective interactions online (e.g. liking, sharing, commenting, etc.).

Political economy approaches exclusively focusing on unveiling and denouncing the exploitative mechanisms of platform capitalism, data capitalism, surveillance capitalism, and extractivism³ are limited in that they do not offer a framework accounting for the viral proliferation of the multifaceted forms of textual and visual expressions of networked identities and emotions (e.g. emojis, memojis, memes, streaks, selfies, etc.) that are voluntarily produced and exchanged by users. While emphasizing the critique of big data and condemning surveillance processes, privacy violation, data mining, and the obscure algorithmic regimes extracting value from our digital selves, these approaches do not consider the enjoyment and pleasure manifested in the process of producing and exchanging affective forms and formats online. Users voluntarily labour for free in order to generate the latter, being relentlessly engaged in processes of self-disclosure of their own data despite the fact that, especially after the Cam-

bridge Analytica scandal in 2018, the extractivist business model and the data mining processes that social networking sites rely upon for their profit have been made public.

To investigate these multi-faceted aspects in a more comprehensive way, the selfie class proposed to integrate the political economy angle and the critique of algorithmic regimes with autoethnographic methods. Because of their emphasis on the self and its dynamic nature manifested in relational contexts, the latter are particularly useful in exploring digital identities and the ways in which they are shaped, expressed, and modified in their online interactions with other networked selves⁴. Thus, the selfie class structure reflects this twofold aspect. On the one hand, students read and discuss scholarly literature from critical theory (e.g. Benjamin, Žižek, etc.) and affect theories (e.g. Paasonen, Jarrett, Ahmed, etc.). On the other hand, they are asked to reflect upon these ideas in the context of their daily lives through assignments focusing on autoethnography⁵.

This perspective integrating the ideology critique of data and surveillance capitalism with a more self-centred and self-compassionate understanding of users' behavior refers to what I have described, in a previous ethnographic piece accounting for the experiences matured in the selfie class, as "empathic criticism" (Della Ratta 2021)⁶. Empathic criticism combines the analytical instances of critical theory and the political economy of digital media with feminist scholarship manifesting a greater appreciation for concepts, such as empathy and care, that are often believed to lead to biased and emotional reflections rather than objective and reliable accounts (Della Ratta 2020, 111-113). This approach reaffirms the legacy of critical theory, while at the same time upgrading it with an innovative touch that does address, instead of ignoring or underestimating, the emotional and affective mechanisms behind contemporary capitalism.

Criticizing users for giving up their privacy and data and falling prey to platform capitalism does not, in fact, account either for the enjoyment and pleasure that seem to emerge within dynamics of information self-disclosure, or for the restless production of novel forms and formats of networked identities and emotions. Elitist and patroniz-

ing interpretations are often offered to make sense of these practices, such as the 'generational' reading of social media use and its disruptive consequences in terms of attention and sense-making; or the gender-biased reading of selfies as merely narcissistic and politically disengaged forms exclusively associated with female individuals. In stark contrast with these analyses, which inherit a sort of colonialist impulse to authoritatively enter a culture seen as 'foreign,' judge it, and eventually exploit it, empathic criticism offers a perspective of care and compassion, a shared interpretative ground across generations, gender, etc., from which to look at the challenges generated by the digital. Autoethnography strengthens this standpoint, offering an investigation of the self that starts bottom-up and moves, without prejudices or pre-conceptions, from the empirical observation of its behaviour toward formulating broader theoretical insights.

As an example of the kind of analysis elaborated using the critical and methodological approach described above, a previous essay which I have authored drawing on the experience of my students—and on my own experience teaching the selfie class—describes the dynamics of what I call “the curated self” (Della Ratta 2021). Natalia, one of my former students, wrote in her autoethnography: “The fact that the medium of communication was messaging allowed for a more curated conversation. We could each perfect the things we said to one another to build a person better than ourselves.”⁷ For the students enrolled in my first selfie class, curation was a precious protection from the randomness and chaos of digital media, the ‘weapon’ in their hands to hide themselves as “they are condemned to be constantly on the spot, constantly monitored, constantly ‘authentic’, constantly themselves” (Della Ratta 2021). Curation was “their little hide-and-seek game” (Della Ratta 2021).

Yet, far from being a generational aspect, this curational feature is increasingly becoming part of the hegemonic social media culture, even in older generations. As an example, in January 2019, Amanda Palmer, a singer and songwriter in her forties, started a thread on Twitter on “how people feel about phone calls.” She wrote: “Wanna change the world? Wanna do something absolutely fucking revolu-

tionary? It's Friday evening. Go to your contacts and call someone up – a friend, an-ex, an old co-worker – anyone you haven't talked to in a while. And DON'T TEXT THEM FIRST. Just call. You'll change the world" (Palmer, quoted in Della Ratta 2021). The thread became immediately heated, putting into stark relief how people across generations would interpret voice calls as a sort of privacy violation, a blunt intrusion into individuals' private life, advocating instead for a curatorial approach of replacing voice calls with texting first, so as to negotiate the time and spatial context in which the direct contact would eventually happen.

Drawing on my students' and my own autoethnographies, the essay resulting from the work carried on with the selfie class in 2019 connects our personal experiences to a broader socio-cultural context where eschewing voice calls and direct contact is becoming the 'new black' with the excuse of defending one's privacy, being more efficient, and optimizing time. "Why should I spend hours on the phone when I could just send a voice message avoiding any waste of time?" writes Federica, a student of the selfie class (Della Ratta 2021). Efficiency and privacy are inherently neoliberal values that have been nurtured by Silicon Valley's tech companies since the early days of digital culture through workshops, seminars, trainings, and, lately, by implementing apps and toolkits (Della Ratta 2021).

Under the myth of protecting these values, which would allegedly be ruined by direct human contact, lies the material reality of the political economy of contemporary social networks, for which more textualization means more data, more tracking, more mining, i.e. a more profitable business. "Voice calls fall in the domain of the performative, the ambiguous, the non-classifiable, the queer. They are definitively not welcome in the age of data capitalism," the essay concludes, with a bitter remark by Federica: "why I feel as if when I spent hours on the phone, despite my mom's screams, everything was so much easier?" (Della Ratta 2021).

This is just to give an example of how I have previously worked, together with my students in the selfie class of Spring 2019, using the method of empathic criticism to integrate the ideology critique of

data capitalism with personal lived experiences through which the ideological aspects of the latter become apparent.⁸ When the Spring 2020 semester started in January, the original plan was to work with the class following a similar path. At the beginning of the term, the students enrolled in the class (all females, coming from Italy, North America, and South America) agreed to produce autoethnographic pieces based on assignments that would be sent exclusively to me via email on a weekly basis. These pieces (in anonymous form, unless the author wished otherwise) would serve as the basis for a weekly class seminar, in which I would discuss their autoethnographies in connection with texts of critical theory, and with visual media taken from mainstream pop culture, from memes to TV series.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit a few weeks into the semester, precisely after midterm, obliging us to review our plan and face the unprecedented moment of precarity by finding new, creative ways of dealing with the uncertainty it brought.

DISCUSSING METHODS AND ETHICS: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OR AUTOFICTION, IS THAT (REALLY) THE QUESTION?

Opting for a research method implies embracing a perspective on ethics that is also a politics of ethics, as methodological and ethical choices are closely intertwined and mutually influence one another. Traditionally speaking, ethics has been understood in somewhat disciplinary terms, as a set of “codes of conduct, guidelines for attitudes and behaviors, rules for dealing with others, or for knowing the difference between right and wrong, good and bad” (Markham, “Method” 37). However, conducting research in the domain of the digital and the networked dramatically reveals the flaws and weaknesses of this prescriptive interpretation. In this context, in fact, understanding ethics uniquely as a matter of data protection and management, intellectual property, privacy, and personal information, or informed consent of participants, brings to the surface the ambiguities and the dilemmas that these notions conceal (Markham et al. 2-5).

Markham's work brilliantly illustrates how the participatory environment of the social web often generates ethical dilemmas that are unresolvable within the mindset of a regulatory approach to ethics, as the enlightening case studies provided by the Swedish technofeminist and ethics scholar Eva Svedmark underline (quoted in Markham, "Afterword" 2). The fluctuating nature of digital and networked environments, understood by users—who are, at the same time, content makers—as public venues and quasi-public spheres or, alternatively, as personal spaces whose public visibility does not change their (perceived) private connotation, renders problematic the mere ideas of privacy, ownership, and consent. The emerging challenges brought by digital and networked environments require new, more flexible frameworks and innovative analytical and interpretive tools to understand methods as "a multilayered set of inductive and non-linear processes" (Markham, "Method" 46), which includes the possibility of making mistakes and adjusting the perspective of the analysis. In this new context, ethics should be the result of a "dialogic process" (Markham, "Method" 50) that has to be mutually shared and contextually negotiated, rather than a fixed set of values imposed top-down.

It is within this contextual, dialogic, and dynamic understanding of ethics that the methodological path followed by the selfie class in Spring 2019 was revised the year after, in agreement with the students, as a response to the unprecedented emergency situation manifested with the outbreak of the Coronavirus. As we progressed in the 2020 Spring semester, with all sorts of anxieties generated by the combined action of the unfolding of the pandemic and the harsh restrictions imposed by the lockdown, we realized that the rigor and analytical distance that were originally adopted to treat the self as a field of observation needed to be replaced with an emphasis on personal and collective care, and on the healing aspects of the self-reflective practice.

Within the scholarship a sort of "dualistic approach" exists, which tends to privilege the "public (monographs)" against the "private (memoirs)," assigning to the former the quality of being "objective (ethnographic)" and separating it from more "subjective (autobio-

graphical)” ways of collecting and narrating lived experiences (Tedlock in Markham, “Method” 40). Within this framework, forms of narration, reflection, and analysis that are built around the self would be considered less impactful, trustable, reliable—in a word, less ‘scientific.’ This rigid split between participant observation and self-reflection, between public and private, between the monographic and the autobiographic, between what would be considered inherently objective and what would be dismissed as (allegedly) subjective, and therefore non-scientific, not only generates a false opposition with results detrimental to autoethnography as a research practice. It also overlooks the inherent qualities of an approach that is centered on the self in a time when multiple ways of manifesting subjectivity have gained prominence in contemporary cultural production.

The second half of the 20th century, in fact, has brought to the fore formats of “confessional narratives” (Dix 2018, 12), both in literary writing and in visual media (reality television being a prominent example), in which self-reflection and self-referentiality have become ways of knowing and shaping (multiple) notions of truth and reality. An intellectual context marked by the rise of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and intertextuality has matched with a paradigm shift in the understanding of concepts such as authorship and cultural production suggested by an abrupt technological change and the pervasive diffusion of digital devices in everyday life. The rise of the “read/write culture” (Lessig 8-31) or “participatory culture” (Jenkins 290), paralleling the new technological infrastructure of the “web 2.0 or social web” (O’Reilly, “Web 2.0”), has brought into stark relief an understanding of diffused authorship where each user is a consumer and, at the same time, a cultural producer.

As Clay Shirky (“Cognitive Surplus”) has pointed out, in the era of participatory culture even the stupidest possible creative act—from lolcats to memes, from GIFs to selfies—should still be understood as a creative act. Lately, the sheer fragmentation of subjectivities accelerated by social media platforms, together with the viral diffusion of forms of “me-media” where hyper visibility dramatically intertwines

with hyper violence (Della Ratta 2018, 178-198), has emphasized the centrality of the paradigm of the self not only as a way of knowing and understanding the world but, also, of dramatically transforming and annihilating it.

In such a cultural atmosphere, with the self becoming so empowered and central as a producer and spreader of knowledge, a cognitive shift has taken place. Truth is no longer understood as a univocal instance, but has been rendered into a multilayered process resulting from the multiple trajectories taken by subjectivities who are animated by contradictory and fluctuating ways of feeling and remembering. This shifted understanding of the notion of truth has contributed to the appreciation of research practices centred around the self, and to making them less exposed to the old critique of being too 'subjective'.

Within this shifting context, the practice of autofiction in particular has regained ground in a moment when digital media culture becomes hegemonic, imposing ideas of diffused authorship and ownership of texts, and rendering everybody (or "nobody," as Doubrovsky, the founding father of autofiction, described himself)⁹ into a potential author. As Hywel Dix (2018, 72-73) has observed when discussing the suspicious and unenthusiastic reaction of the scholarship toward Doubrovsky's first "autofiction" (1977), the French writer's work was initially perceived as a 'genre' of literary writing employing, in the apparently non-fictional format of the autobiography, "the stylistic literary techniques more commonly associated with modernist fiction," such as temporal experimentation and stream of consciousness (Dix, 2018, 71). It is only with the paradigm shift that takes place toward the end of the previous century and the beginning of the 2000s that auto-fiction is finally credited as a valid theoretical perspective within critical theory.

Moving from genre to theory, autofiction opens up to a new understanding of cultural production, disavowing "the star status of its own practitioners" (Dix 2018, 75) and eschewing the whole idea of a public, as it does not "require a mass audience or even a reader at all" (Dix 2018, 78). Autofiction works rather in the domain of the person-

al, as a way of healing or recovering from a trauma that starts within the closed doors of the inner self. And yet, what is incubated within these closed doors can later serve as a powerful gateway to reconnect the personal with the cultural and the societal. Recently published work by scholars and writers in the fields of critical theory, queer, trans, and feminist studies (Preciado; Nelson; Boyer; Dodge; Wark) has showed how autofiction starts from the personal to explore a wide range of urgent and sensitive cultural and social issues related to contemporaneity, from in-vitro-fertilization and queer motherhood to cancer treatment and gender-affirming hormone therapy.

The word 'fiction' in autofiction acts as a disclaimer, distinguishing this approach from autoethnography, which would be supposed to bear a thicker scientific layer granted by the ethnographic practice and resulting from participant observation. As opposed to the practice of observing from a distance, autofiction would instead be more interested in the formal and stylistic features of the writing practice, allowing more room for linguistic experimentation and creativity, and rendering the final product into something closer to art rather than scholarship. Moreover, the word 'fiction' stands as a powerful declaration, an acknowledgement that the 'real' truth is unknowable and unattainable, dissolving itself in a variety of accounts offered by a plurality of subjectivities, animated by multiple ways of feelings and remembering, rather than just aiming at offering a coherent analytical framework.

WRITING IN A DRAFT MODE (AND MOOD) DURING A PANDEMIC

The shift from the analytical approach provided by the autoethnographic practice towards forms of auto-fiction happened spontaneously during the Spring 2020 selfie class. As we walked through the garden of forking paths into which the global pandemic had suddenly put us, being separated geographically, having to teach and learn in full online mode and asynchronously, due to the now different time zones, the students and I started discussing the opportunity for transforming the autoethnographic pieces sent exclusively to me in a private document into something of a different

nature. We agreed that they would start posting their reflections online, on personal blogs which would be accessible to the general public, where they could add videos, audios, and any other forms of multimedia items that were excluded in the previous text-only format.

After talking to Dutch-Australian net theorist Geert Lovink, a long-time collaborator and friend, founder of the Institute of Network Cultures (INC), we came up with a plan for a series of blog posts hosted on the INC website. I would curate the students' autoethnographies, which they would initially post on their personal blogs, and make them into a sort of collective narration where their writings would intertwine with my own reflections, and with excerpts from critical theory and visual media from contemporary pop culture, following the lines of the class seminar discussions we used to have 'in presence' when we were still on campus.

The INC blog series wasn't part of the formal and graded assignments of the selfie class and wasn't mandatory. The students could decide whether to take part in it and could opt out from the project whenever they wished to. However, all of them enthusiastically joined the call and managed to take part in the project even after the class ended (episode number five and the video episode of the blog series were in fact published after the semester was over). As I discuss below, probably the blog series was understood as a way of dealing with what was happening, a way of healing the trauma in public and making sense of the unprecedented circumstances, rather than a class duty. Moreover, with life becoming all-digital during the first lockdown, we all probably needed an online platform mirroring what we were doing before 'in presence,' as a venue to confront our feelings, emotions, and reflections, and as a sort of a meeting point.

As we started this new adventure, the students' writing style became more experimental, and freer from the constraints of factual accounts and rigid self-observation. Many of them started to write poems, such as elegies to the lost freedoms or odes to newly discovered feelings, such as boredom (see Figure 3, "The ABC of Boredom"), which was once carefully avoided by virtue of their busy schedules and the planning of outdoor and leisure activities.

The ABC Of Boredom

Apparently, Boredom Creates Apathy. Be Cautious.
All Blame, Complain About, Banish, Constantly Avoid Boredom. Chane
Attitude! Boredom Creates Abilities, Boosts Creativity.
ABottomless Chance. A Bonfire Can Awfully Burn Causing Agony, But Can Also Brighten, Creating Atmosphere.
"Being", Can Annoy But Can Also Be Celebrated. A Beneficial Calmnes.

This writing style itself is a metaphor of boredom: although it feels limiting (as I had a limited choice of words), it can be a tool for creativity'.

Figure 3: The ABC of Boredom. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 2)," Elena Santoro, April 16, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 4: TikTok Screenshots. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 3)," Sophia Vivolo, April 23, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Living under a very strict regime of lockdown meant having much more time available to confront oneself with one's own feelings, which the students chose to deal with by employing a wider variety of creative multimedia languages. Some of them played with the format of the video essay,¹⁰ others produced creative Snapchat stories¹¹ (see Figure 4, "Tik Tok Screenshots").

Feeling overwhelmed with loneliness, a student started chatting with a bot and reported about the experience using screenshots of their conversations¹² (see Figure 5, "Conversation with a Chatbot").

During this process of self-discovery, which was also a discovery of creative languages and new expressive formats, my role was that of a facilitator and a curator. A facilitator, in that, week by week, I would throw into our e-learning space onto the Moodle platform quotes and excerpts from different sources—from literary to media ones—that

Figure 5: Conversation with a chatbot. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 4)," Jackie Maldonado, May 1, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

could trigger a collective discussion in the class forum, and therefore inspire the students to write their own blog posts. As an example, during the first week of lockdown, when the class was reading ex-

"Emotion is a luxury, right? To be angry is a luxury. We don't have that luxury right now. Let's just deal with the facts, let's just get through it."
Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York

"There wasn't any anger involved (I think). I mean, what was I supposed to be angry with? What I was feeling was a fundamental numbness. The numbness your heart automatically activates to lessen the awful pain when you want somebody desperately and they reject you. A kind of emotional morphine." Haruki Murakami, [Killing Commendatore](#)

"I lean to you, numb as a fossil. Tell me I'm here." Sylvia Plath, [The Collected Poems](#)

Figure 6: Inspirational quotes. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," Donatella Della Ratta, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

cerpts from Geert Lovink's "Sad by Design" and reflecting on networked emotions as the week's main topic, I shared the following quotes:

Many students reacted by writing about themselves being torn between having to "get through it"—as Cuomo says¹³—and deal with the practicalities brought forward by the crisis, and the rather overwhelming feeling of numbness that had paralyzed them since 'social distancing' had been implemented, although that very practice was not entirely unknown to their generation, as the meme posted by one of the students ironically suggested (see Figure 7).

Another time, I read them an excerpt from Walter Benjamin's "The storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" and his short story "The Handkerchief" and encouraged them to think about storytelling in the time of Instagram. What were the main differences between what Benjamin described as the art of storytelling, and their

or you're in denial. The thing that scares me the most is the fact that we are adapting to social isolation. It will be harder to leave our phones and easier to stay home even when we are free to go out. Does adapting to social distancing lead us to numbness, or is it numbness related to excessive social media use?"

Figure 7: Social distancing? "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," picture by Marta Masciarelli, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

own experiences of producing Instagram stories? Was boredom still a productive concept to think through, or was its creative potential completely undermined by the urgency of having to fill all void spaces in perpetual avoidance of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out)? Had "what are you doing" finally become the new "how are you" for Gen Z, as a student wrote?

As a curator, my goal was to dig into those repositories of creativity that their posts (whether audiovisual or written) were, and edit them together, building a narration and a narrative where both Benjamin and their thoughts on Instagram would be felt. I followed a path of assonances, of having these very different sources and material resonating together in terms of themes and tropes that they pushed to emerge. Sometimes I would also do the opposite, by letting the dissonances surface instead, underlining gaps and discordances rather than harmony and consistency. In both cases, my role was to build a sort of score—a musical, audiovisual score—that would guide readers (and ourselves) into the multiple possible paths of exploring subjectivities and feelings in a time of unprecedented distress.

Is this a work of autofiction, involving literary experimentation and playing with subjectivities, rather than a journey into autoethnography as a scientific method? Probably. Perhaps it's just a matter of definitions, which doesn't really change the substance of what had happened to the selfie class in the time of a global pandemic. Most likely the ethnographic part of the project, the distance of participant observation, and the scientific rigor that had originally informed the objectives of the class, had been replaced by the urgent need of using autofiction as a practice of dealing with the unexpected trauma and making sense of what was happening in the very moment in which the disruptive event was unfolding.

As for myself, I also had to put away my tendency, as a scholar and class instructor, of offering definitive explanations and categorizations, of looking for a coherent framework to interpret the circumstances. Instead, I fully embraced the aesthetics of the fragment, which also involved a similar approach to ethics. This implied giving up an already chosen methodological path to embrace another, more apt to the crisis context, suggesting a greater preoccupation with the self and the others, and the promptness of disregarding the original plan, as self-care and wellbeing were deemed a priority.

CONCLUSION (IN A DRAFT MODE)

This essay has accounted for the choice of a research practice, i.e. autofiction, which has translated into opting for a specific kind of aesthetics and ethics, i.e. the aesthetics and the ethics of the fragment, as a result of a dialogic and situational process that is constantly revised and renegotiated with those involved, in light of an ever-changing context. It has narrated the collective journey of an undergraduate class that had to review its learning process in the midst of an unexpected pandemic outbreak. It has described the shift from autoethnographic practice toward an experiment in autofiction, and the switch from a private, research-oriented discussion to a debate happening on a public platform and trying out stylistic experimentation and the use of lyrical language.

As a ‘conclusion,’ it advocates for considering the draft as a helpful category to navigate the complex and uncertain circumstances we live in. As an aesthetics, the draft hints at language experimentation, stream of consciousness, an approach to writing that treasures broken thoughts, interruptions, lapses, and breakdowns, rather than reading them as fragilities and flaws. Drafting is about sketching out but not necessarily developing ideas, sometimes leaving them fluctuating and blossoming in the hiatuses of the text.

As an ethics, working in drafts suggests looking at and confronting issues in a permanent preliminary mode. The ethics of the draft implies collaboration, attention, and care for the specific context in which something occurs, and for the subjectivities who inhabit it. It hints at a dialogic mode of doing, and at an attitude of always being ready to revisit the decision taken and undo it.

Being in the draft mode, this essay does not draw any definitive conclusion, prescribe, or recommend, but rather celebrates indefiniteness and embraces it as a mode of being and existing in the current circumstances.

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IMAGE NOTES

All images curated by Della Ratta, Donatella. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome." Institute of Network Cultures. networkcultures.org/blog/2020/04/09/selfies-under-quarantine/

Figure 1: Introduction to the blog series published by the Institute of Network Cultures (INC). "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," Donatella Della Ratta, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 2: Introduction to the blog series. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," Donatella Della Ratta, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 3: The ABC of Boredom. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 2)," Elena Santoro, April 16, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 4: TikTok Screenshots. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 3)," Sophia Vivolo, April 23, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 5: Conversation with a chatbot. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome (Episode 4)," Jackie Maldonado, May 1, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 6: Inspirational quotes. "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

Figure 7: Social distancing? "Selfies Under Quarantine: Students Report Back to Rome," picture by Marta Masciarelli, April 9, 2020, released under CC BY-NC-SA-4.0.

NOTES

1. The five episodes of the blog series and a final video episode were posted on the Institute of Network Cultures website between April

and June 2020. All the material has been released under a *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY NC SA 4.0)* <https://networkcultures.org/about/>.¹

2. As an example, see Jarrett's piece on the 'gift economy' on social media, or Karppe's essay on the value of Facebook in Hillis, Ken, Paasonen, Susanna and Petit, Micheal (eds) *Networked Affect*. Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press.²
3. For example, Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor and Thomas Ramge. *Reinventing Capitalism in the Age of Big Data*. New York: Basic Books, 2018; Srnicek, Nick. *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2016; Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs-Hachette Book Group, 2019.³
4. On applying ethnographic methods to the digital domain see for example: Markham, Annette and Baym, Nancy. 2009. *Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Markham, Annette. 2017. 'Ethnography in the digital era: From fields to flow, descriptions to interventions', in Denzin, Norman, and Lincoln, Yvonna (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Markham, Annette. 1998. *Life Online: Researching Real Experiences in Virtual Space*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.⁴
5. For example, after reading Žižek's take on ideology and watching the documentary "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology," they are called upon reflecting on what is, in their daily digital life, that 'they do anyway', even if aware that it will eventually harm them. Or, after reading excerpts from McLuhan's 'The Medium is the Massage', they do the auto-ethnographic experiment of scrolling down and checking social media for about a hour, then writing down what content they've got from the experience.⁵
6. I coined this expression in a conversation with Geert Lovink.⁶
7. In order to protect the students' privacy and, at the same time, credit them for the work they have done on their auto-ethnographies, I have given them fictional names.⁷
8. At the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester I illustrated the students my approach to the analysis of their auto-ethnographies, which would consist in having them sending me each week their writings on a pri-

vate email. Then I would curate a selection of these auto-ethnographic pieces and analyze them in class, always in the anonymous form unless the author explicitly wished to be mentioned. Each week, I would discuss their pieces in close dialogue with texts of critical theory assigned as readings for the class, and in connection with visual media taken from contemporary popular culture (e.g. memes, social media posts, TV series, etc.). I would also bring up my own auto-ethnography, and examples taken from my own daily social media life, as the above mentioned Twitter discussion following Amanda Palmer's post. The discussions happened once a week for the duration of fourteen weeks, and they were so lively and inspiring that, at the end of the semester, I asked the students how they would feel if I used excerpts of their auto-ethnographies to compile an essay following the method I had used during class seminars. They all agreed to have their material featured, in the anonymous form, in an essay titled "Reflecting on the Online Self Through the Looking-Glass: From Auto-Ethnography to Empathic Criticism" (Della Ratta 2021).↵

9. Serge Doubrovsky, *Un amour de soi* (Paris: Folio, 2001), 104. The term 'autofiction' first appeared in Doubvsky, 1977.↵
10. <https://networkcultures.org/blog/2020/06/27/video-episode/>↵
11. <https://networkcultures.org/blog/2020/04/23/selfies-under-quarantine-students-report-back-to-rome-episode-3/>↵
12. <https://networkcultures.org/blog/2020/05/01/selfies-under-quarantine-students-report-back-to-rome-episode-4/>↵
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc1guXDx9Ag>↵

MAKING SENSE OF WHAT WE CAN'T SEE: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE OF COVID-19

ANNETTE N MARKHAM

How do we make sense of the global and granular at the same time? This visual essay explores the relationship of the macro and micro through everyday practices of image making, cropping, and sharing. It asks whether new ways of knowing emerge or if perhaps patterns of sensemaking pre-exist, a psychological or social equivalent to fractals in nature. This becomes relevant when we consider that it is precisely within the mundane details of everyday actions of sensemaking that future structures are born. It wonders about how, in times of global trauma, might these micro practices reinforce or resist existing relations among humans, technologies, and the planet.

Comment donner un sens à ce qui est à la fois global et granulaire ? Cet essai visuel explore la relation entre le macro et le micro à travers les pratiques quotidiennes de création, de recadrage et de partage d'images. Il pose la question de savoir si de nouveaux modes de connaissance émergent ou si des modèles de création de sens préexistent, un équivalent psychologique ou social des formes fractales dans la nature. Cela est particulièrement pertinent si l'on considère que c'est précisément dans les détails banals et les actions quotidiennes de création de sens que naissent les structures d'interprétation futures. Alors que l'on traverse une période traumatique à l'échelle du globe, l'essai s'interroge sur la façon dont ces micro-pratiques pourraient contribuer à renforcer ou à résister aux relations existantes entre les humains, les technologies et la planète.

Figure 1: Balancing in the wind. Photograph by Annette Markham. Used by permission.

How does a massive and incomprehensible global crisis like a pandemic connect to the microscopic moment of lived experience of COVID-sponsored isolation? In this visual essay, I explore a core premise behind my design of “MMS,” the large scale project “Massive and Microscopic Sensemaking in Times of Global Trauma” (2020).

Beginning in March 2020, I spent 113 days in near isolation from other humans, walking obsessively on the cold and windy shores of the northern Danish coastline. In temporary housing and a country I couldn’t call my own, I explored the natural landscape through image making, in equal measure with doomscrolling the news on my smartphone.

It felt chaotic, as if I was slipping on constantly shifting terrain. Yet the visual evidence I find now in my journals and camera defy my own memory, building a soothing symmetry of retrospective sensemaking about this situation. What’s happening at these everyday microscopic levels, where the human, the planet, the technology of the lens, and memory practices meet?

My body (as it made its way through storms and seasonal changes) intersected with fractal patterns in nature (as witnessed through my phone), along with overlapping swirls of information (as experienced in my constant searching and consumption of more, more, and more news about COVID), and ebbs and flows of friends (presenced in various timezones through social media).

Figure 2: Wandering. Photograph by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

In these days, I found myself image cropping more than anything else, which I attribute to the desire to explore depths of field my own eyes could not see, even behind glasses. My camera is a phone. And like a fighter pilot's airframe, I trust it as an extension of my body. There is a type of blindness in the perception of seeing through a camera because one is unable to do otherwise in screaming winds and driving rain.

Figure 3: Walking in the wind. Screenshots of camera video. Image by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Through posting (on Instagram, or Facebook), I recognize an impulse to convey a particular sensation, share the affect of a moment. This effort is a creation of my own sense, more than simply an “extension of the senses” in the way McLuhan describes our relationship with a technological medium.

Zooming in and out and cropping a moment for others becomes a rhythmic performance to extend my understanding of my Self. By ‘extend,’ here I mean that it deepens and complexifies my sensibilities, as much as ‘augments’ my physical ability to see.

Figure 4: Even glasses don't help. Screenshot of Instagram post. Photo and screenshot by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 5: Wind carved microscopic sand cliff. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 6: The process of making a post. Photo collage by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

This effort (exercise) to understand what I thought I was trying to capture is not a solo act, but a performance with others, actual or imagined, the success of which relies on the responsiveness of others. Meaning requires reverberation in the network.

While I sought to generate a disturbance in the exosystem, the images themselves seem to present only a certain stillness. It is only in the critical juncture of Self and Other(s), in interaction, that this disturbance occurs. Then, a reverberation of echoing signals returns to me a sense of my senses. Through retrospective sensemaking I discover, as an aftereffect, some of the things I could not see or know in the lived moment.

Figure 7: Reaching out to the universe. Screenshot of Instagram post. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Repeated patterns and textures bespeak an apparent calm of soothing colors and syncopated rhythms. Amid the lived experience of chaos and anxiety, perhaps this is a serendipitous levelling of affect, as if to produce deliberately a counter-punctum to the nauseating spin of daily news from around the planet. There is both a recognition and a forgetting, especially as time and the encounter of Self/Other has passed.

Figure 8: Pattern Recognition Type I. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 9: Pattern Recognition Type II. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Fractals are recognized by their patterned features. They are the product of recursion, and present as rhythmic, because they repeat at different scales, as well as across different dynamic systems.

Figure 10: Pattern Recognition Type III. Screenshot of iCloud photo album on laptop.
Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 11: Fractals in Nature.
Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 12: Fractals in Tech. Screenshot of photo editing glitch on iPhone. Screenshot by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Akin to rhythm, reverberation has become a fruitful tool for conceptualizing relationality and connectivity. Taking seriously the eco-

logical metaphors used by scholars in the 20th century to depict the complexity of self and sociality (e.g., Bateson), or life lived in and through media (e.g., McLuhan), terms like resonance, rhythm, and reverberation foreground certain elements of the immediate media ecology within which we are making sense of the world around us. The emerging reverberations carry their own chronology, difficult for me to see until well after the fact.

Reverberation pays attention to the echoing qualities of the senses. Even in the seemingly original turn of the camera's gaze toward something that caught the eye, this experiential moment is not 'raw,' but a continuation of a relation. Perhaps the patterns are always already there.

Figure 13: Partial Fractal A: Onion. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 14: Partial Fractal B: Tennis Ball. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 15: Partial Fractal C: Jellyfish. Photo by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Fractals are scale irrelevant, which means we can see patterns at the micro- or macroscopic level. But they are never singular; fractals are only noticed or understood in and as a relation. Whether we use Mandelbrot's classic notion of fractals or Latour's 2012 revival of the concept of the monads, the part is always greater than the whole. Or, as William Blake's now common idiom reminds us, we can "see the world in a grain of sand."

The massive is thus always reflected in the microscopic. The only question is how we might interpret this, and which microscopic elements we are paying attention to any given time. To understand the lived experience of a pandemic, therefore, is not about generalizing but specifying, within the details of a lived moment. To extrapolate.

Figure 16: Partial Fractal D: Trees and Lichen. Screenshot of Instagram post and photos by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Fractals have rhythmic properties, or perhaps vice versa. For months of isolation during these early days of a global pandemic, I felt the world's rhythms by virtue of the massive interruption in the flow. At the same time, I felt the flow of information as a matter of breathing. As Lefebvre noted, "In suffering, in confusion, a particular rhythm surges up and imposes itself: palpitation, breathlessness, pains in the place of satiety" (2004, 21). There's a moment, between the in breath and the out breath, when everything just stops. A suspension of time, an endless waiting to breathe again.

Figure 17: The tide breathes deep. Sighs a little. Screenshot of Instagram post and photos by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 18: Precarity. Erosion. On the edge. Screenshot of Instagram post and photos by Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 19: Disorientation. Photo by Annette Markham. Used by permission.

*"The dizziness of not knowing. I cannot orient myself.
My body knows the world is precarious; its equilibrium
is gone."*

—Journal entry March 21, 2020.

I can't help but identify patterns that already exist. I might initially notice an anomaly, and once this difference is picked up (sometimes literally as I'm walking along), all subsequent noticings are about finding similar data points. One might ask if the pandemic only highlighted patterns that were already there, or if the world, and all of us grains of sand, swiftly found patterns in how to make sense of the situation. The collective gasp catching in the throat; a global moment that returns to a rhythmic sense of being in the world.

(Parenthetically, if not conclusively, one might as well be describing Instagram's *relevance algorithm*, since it is designed to generate these patterns, presenting more of the same, over and over, until one simply believes the pattern was always already there).

Figure 20: Pattern Recognition Type V. Across the Networks. Screenshot of Instagram post by Annette Markham. Used by permission.

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IMAGE NOTES

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Figure 20: Pattern Recognition Type V. Across the Networks. Screenshot of Instagram post by Annette Markham. Used by permission.

Figure 1: Blue. Corinna Peterken.

INTERLUDE III

Breathe, masked, sky, vigil ... all blue. An exquisite corpse. Blue
takes me for a walk.

Corinna Peterken

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Blue. Permission of Corinna Peterken.

UN/THINKING WITH THREAD/S: NEEDLING THROUGH BOUNDARIES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND MEDICAL TRAINING

VERONICA MITCHELL

This article draws on my connection with sewing threads, and explores how the 2020 Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) online challenge contributed to an emergent entanglement of timespacemattering related to COVID-19, teaching and researching medical learning in obstetrics, and thinking further with my PhD. It explores affirmative processes enacted during times of anxiety, when my thoughts needed through in-between spaces with different times and materials that were generative and productive. I explain my rhizomatic movements that bleed through conventional separations and boundary-making assumptions. I draw on Karen Barad's agential realism to theorize the emergence of creative relationalities with artful artifacts enacted with medical undergraduate students, with partici-

Cet article s'appuie sur mon lien avec les fils à coudre et explore comment le défi en ligne 2020 Massive Microscopic Sensemaking (MMS) a contribué à un enchevêtrement émergent de l'espace-temps lié à COVID-19, à l'enseignement et à la recherche sur l'apprentissage médical en obstétrique, et à la réflexion plus approfondie de mon doctorat. Il explore les processus affirmatifs mis en œuvre pendant les périodes d'anxiété, lorsque mes pensées se frayaient un chemin à travers des espaces intermédiaires avec des moments et des matériaux différents qui étaient génératifs et productifs. J'explique mes mouvements rhizomatiques qui saignent à travers les séparations conventionnelles et les hypothèses de délimitation. Je m'appuie sur le réalisme agential de Karen Barad pour théoriser l'émergence de relations créatives avec des artefacts astucieux mis en scène avec des étudiants de premier cycle en médecine, avec

*pants in the MMS project, and with
my own PhD during times of tension.*

*des participants au projet MMS et avec mon
propre doctorat en période de tension.*

INTRODUCTION

*“[T]he crossing of boundaries is an essential, but often troubling,
part of learning.” (Smith-Oka and Marshalla 2019, 115).*

Can an academic’s work with thread be anything other than a relaxing distraction separated from the world of research and knowing, particularly in the discipline of obstetrics? This question sat with me for a long time as I began my Masters degree in 2013 at a mature age and kept the fabric cupboard closed. Later, time appeared to stop as I anxiously waited for my PhD dissertation examiners’ comments, and again when our university closed down with the rest of the country, and much of the world. South Africa’s COVID-19 lockdown initiated the declaration of a National State of Disaster under Coronavirus, and also revealed a different kind of time.

Both the PhD waiting period and the initial lockdown time seemed to allow a return to the cupboard, an opening up to the array of fabrics and related items: a renewed sense of joy in which the touching and working with threads would contribute a vitality and new potential to my academic work, rather than invoke guilt or feelings of wasted time. The unusual mix of craft work, art, science, and philosophical concepts was first revealed to me in the massive crocheted coral reefs project (Wertheim and Wertheim 2015), an international collaboration that Donna Haraway (2016) uses as an example of entangled practices which she refers to as “science art worldings” (71). Playing with ideas through handiwork, such as crochet, enacts new material-discursive relations. These relationships then enable spaces for differences to become integrated with each other so that those differences, such as the detrimental effects of climate change on coral reefs, can then come to matter.

In this article I explain my movements of thoughts and the experimentations through which I shifted into unusual artful processes

that immersed me into intense in-between spaces. For instance, arts-based creative inquiry with students has contributed to revelations of concerning entanglements with their harmful curricular experiences. By enabling such risky and disruptive pedagogical practices in conventional medical education, an affirmative process has emerged to work with the tensions. What was revealed for me as a facilitator/researcher was that art-in-the-making-with-students can provide an avenue for relooking at students' experiences. Furthermore, my involvement in the MMS online challenge during corona-time has reinforced the notion that such creative intra-activities offer valuable potential also for educators, as well as for postgraduate students. From a more personal perspective, I point to my tentacular wo/anderings with spiders, inspired by Louise Bourgeois' large spider sculpture, *Mamon*. Through various rhizomatic movements, my re-turning and becoming-with needles and threads has helped mediate my multidirectional experiences with/in indeterminate times.

Global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic appeared at the start of 2020. Time seemed to stand still, then it shifted, becoming corona-time, moving through the waves of increasing and decreasing levels of transmission of infections representing the virus spread across country borders, and then later intersecting with vaccination programmes. The virus has entered our worlds with a powerful force, unanticipated, with incredible intensity that has taken over our habits of being, as well as over-burdening health systems. In the media it is frequently depicted and represented as a spiked ball, perhaps to highlight its penetration into boundaries of bodies both human and more-than-human. The patterning of the virus can be viewed as beautiful and appealing—highlighting contradictions and the reality of our porosity (Figures 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a: Image of COVID-19 (Public Domain).

Figure 1b: Embroidered spiky virus.

In their recent *Imaginations* article titled “*Discussing the Anatomy Table and the Vaccination*,” Caulfield, Caulfield, and Holst (2020) explore the interface of art and biomedicine, referring to different perspectives related to vaccinations as well as acknowledging the current distrust prevalent in medical matters. The roles and responsibilities of health professionals as key actors in the global response to the pandemic have been a deep concern. Both experienced professionals and those in training, such as undergraduate medical students, are affected by these multiple challenges. Although many medical procedures were postponed and delayed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, birthing facilities had to continue their services. Obstetrics is an essential discipline and a core component in medical curricula. It is the curricular space where my teaching has engaged with students over the past fifteen years, and my subsequent research projects. Birthing brings its own uncertain and often troubling time.

At the onset of corona-time my engagement with fourth-year students in the Health Sciences Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) was halted. Our earlier classroom participatory workshops in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology had involved the sharing of students’ experiences through personal narratives, role-play performances, poetry, music, and other forms of art-in-the-

making related to their clinical encounters in various public health birthing units (Mitchell 2016). Later in 2021, our discussions (complemented with drawings) resumed online in Zoom.

Students' expectations of observing kindness and compassion during a joyful birthing process in their obstetrics learning rotation are surprisingly replaced by encountering frequent shocking practices; they witnessed neglect, disrespect, and abuse of women during labour. *Obstetric violence*¹ is acknowledged as a global problem, and a form of gender-based violence (Mitchell 2019; Šimonović 2019). There is no boundary protecting students from the reality of practice.

The time that medical students spend learning their obstetrics skills is filled with tensions and uncertainties (Mitchell 2019). In my efforts to promote change to current practices, supported by departmental colleagues at one of the most prestigious medical schools in Africa, we have collaboratively troubled student learning, attempting to move away from binary assumptions of subject/object, cause/effect, blame/shame, and similar humanistic perspectives. We recognize that past, current, and on-going injustices have tentacular e/affects on medical students now and as future doctors, as well as on midwives and those giving birth in and under adverse conditions.

Unlike corona-time, the actual birthing process is marked by an endpoint, i.e. the third stage, which is the expulsion of the placenta. During pregnancy, the placenta has an essential role in-between; it is positioned between the mother and growing foetus, establishing crucial relational responsibility through the development process and labour. Students learn the significance of the placenta in terms of colour, texture, and shape as they grasp and feel it, look at it, and sense the smell, with the sensual memory remaining with them. The placenta is not a barrier separating mother and foetus, nor a separate entity, but an intra-acting "fetal-maternal interface" with "diffuse responsibilities," as explained by Yoshizawa (2016, 81). The concept of Intra-action is a neologism introduced by Karen Barad (2007), based on a relational ontology in which relationships pre-exist entities, with an understanding that entities come into being through relationships.

In what follows, I expand my thinking beyond the placenta to draw more widely on Karen Barad's (2007) relational ontology with reference to my student class activities and related research, moving on to the material agency co-constituted through the Massive Microscopic Sensemaking online challenge (Markham, Harris, and Luka 2020). Finally, I illustrate how my working with threads generated an extension to my doctoral research project, opening ways for more to come.

Through these arts-based creative inquiries I explore the emergent material-discursive relationships, providing different insights to conventional human-centred discourses that identify individuals as atomic, rational, independent entities. Barad (2007) puts forward that matter is "not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming - not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" (183-184). Therefore, handwork is not a separated material activity but is enacted through multidirectional agentic relationships.

CLASS-TIME AND RESEARCH-TIME

Arts-based activities in the classroom and in my PhD research focus groups (Figure 2) enabled students to think-with crayons, clay, and other materials, not including needles and threads, and not the usual in conventional medical education settings. These experimental movements appeared to open up difficult and important conversations about student responses to troubling clinical encounters, their responsibilities and response-abilities, with the potential to enhance students' capacity to respond to injustices they observed in birthing units.

Figure 2: Concerning students' responses related to their obstetrics learning (Mitchell 2019).

As teacher-facilitator-researcher, I found myself immersed into the in-between space with the students' drawings, clay models, and mandalas, recognizing how these material relationships could generate powerful opportunities to promote change to enhance student flourishing in obstetrics. Haraway (2016) notes the value of thinking with and between other bodies, using her wit and biology expertise to express this point:

"Flourishing will be cultivated as a multispecies response-ability without the arrogance of the sky gods and their minions, or else biodiverse terra will flip out into something very slimy, like any over-stressed complex adaptive system at the end of its abilities to absorb insult after insult." (56)

It became apparent to me that the theoretical perspectives of Feminist New Materialism (FNM) and Posthumanism could offer novel insights into promoting respectful maternity care (RMC) and empower students in their capacity to respond. By moving beyond human-centric notions of meaning-making and interpretations, Barad's (2007) relational ontology opens the potential to explore the more-than-hu-

man relationships that impact on students' being and becoming-with their curricular tasks; a justice-to-come² that acknowledges multiple and dynamic intra-actions with both human and non-human agents.

CORONA-TIME

Figure 3a: Embroidered
clock-time.

Aion time offers a different understanding of time to chronos (or clocktime). It moves beyond structured and sequential issues of linear time.

Aion, its Greek concept of time, refers to the cyclical time of becoming with inherent forces acting in each encounter.

Figure 3b: Chronos and Aion time.

COVID-19 has dramatically disrupted habits of chronos, or clock-time. This linear, chronological concept of time can be deceptive, as it carries an assumption that time past can be closed off (Figure 3b). Barad (2010) puts forward that the past, the present, and the future are threaded through each other. I wonder, how will the future be haunted by past/present corona-time?

Of particular relevance to this article is the Corona Reading Group (CRG), which became a congealed force during corona-time in 2020, reinforced by the MMS online challenge (Bozalek, Newfield, Romano, et al. 2020). Over the strict lockdown period and beyond, our group of seven academics connected, and continues to connect, through multiple devices enabling us to read aloud different texts, provoking conversations that frequently lead to synchronous writing on Google Drive. During the early, unpredictable, stressful lockdown days of COVID-19, Barad's 2007 text, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* held the seven of us together.

Additionally, from a more personal material perspective, after these inspiring collective sessions I reconnected with my fabric cupboard. The touch and feel of old denim on torn jeans attracted my attention and desire to allow my thoughts to wo/ander with threads. I cut out a piece of the denim which then became the foundation for creative explorations, needling the fabric with threads, expanding my own sensemaking with and through the MMS journey (Figure 4). Becoming-with the material agency of the different patterns enabled a new, unexpected performative relationship to develop through this visual experimentation. I recognized that the threads could work further with me, through different avenues where different relationships mattered.

Figure 4: Working-thinking-creating with threads through the MMS challenge.

As I question corona-time and wonder if it will continue like a haemorrhage that is unstoppable, I relook at the borders of my MMS sewn artefact. Along the upper edge, the green dye from the fabric has seeped into other spaces. It reveals an unexpected bleed, appearing

to highlight the indeterminacy of corona-time and our projects. I am reminded about diffraction patterns³ that can be “a manifestation of times bleeding through one another” (Barad 2018, 68). I refer to Stacy Alaimo’s (2010) concept of trans-corporeality to highlight the webs of interdependence that are interwoven and continue to be interweaving, enabling the meshing of borders rather than assuming defined boundaries. Our bodily substance is vitally connected to the broader environment, with porous boundaries that cannot be considered as fixed. The boundary fence on the denim fabric depicts boundary-making in academia. It is made with a soft plastic rope material to highlight the gatekeeping actions that are visible and invisible in academic practices.

Another of the border fabrics is one designed by textile-artist Kaffe Fassett, who describes the pattern as “beautiful glass candies” in fragments of Roman glass (2021). This special fabric has waited in my cupboard for a very long time, waiting to find a meaningful placing. Now the pattern takes on a different relationship; it appears to symbolize the force and intensity of the coronavirus, with its many mutations and variants moving through international borders, emerging with new and different challenges in terms of risk and containment, invoking much anxiety and uncertainty. The embroidered mask, (Figure 5a) a symbol of corona-time, reminds me of the start of deep global concerns (Figure 5b), and how face masks have become a global form of protection from the potential violence of aerosol transmission of the virus (Figure 9).

Figure 5a: Mask as protector.

Figure 5b: Mask buying and mask making.

While immersed in the daily activities shared in the MMS project, I was attracted to a favourite turquoise fabric with planetary patterns, folded tightly in my cupboard. Through my sewing efforts, the fabric unfolded, transforming into seven masks distributed to each of our CRG Zoom-mates, creating a bonding relationship across different geopolitical spaces that could help to protect us (Figure 5b). Through corona-time, it has become apparent that masks not only act as protective barriers to the virus, but also have materializing effects with different belief systems and cultures that have sparked unpredictable adverse reactions.

In what follows, I further explore my practical and theoretical movements, explaining the relational enactments connecting my research-thinking-doing with threads and artworks.

THINKING WITH THEORY AND SPIDERS

Rosie Braidotti (2006, 4) develops Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of nomadic subjectivity, describing it as "a contested space of mutations" in which we "weave a web connecting philosophy to social realities; theoretical speculations to concrete plans; concepts to imaginative figurations" (5). Although mutations now set off alarm bells with the infectious spread of COVID-19, my own nomadic movements with threads and other forms of art-in-the-making have shifted my thoughts through webs

of relations with different theoretical tools. Braidotti (2013) points out:

“Thinking is the conceptual counterpart of the ability to enter modes of relation, to affect and be affected, sustaining qualitative shifts and creative tensions accordingly, which is also the prerogative of art.” (14)

A sensitivity to the affective forces and flows enables nomadic thinking, which, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is a way of picking up the tensions that are not easily evident, often hidden in the cracks or ruptures of habitual thinking, enabling these tensions to emerge by breaking through into new spaces. Such movements tend to occur in the middle/in-between spaces, causing a disruption to established boundaries.

Alecia Jackson (2017) refers to a spider strategy, drawing on Deleuze’s (2007) work suggesting that it “is not a plan or a starting point but is emergent and revealed in fragments along the way” (667). I think with Jackson and Mazzei (2017), finding myself “plugging in” to many open relationships, not constrained by boundaries, binaries, or linearities. New connections are revealed through my relationship with the material agency of needle-thread-fabric-sequins-beads. Avoiding thinking with predetermined structures, my thoughts have moved across in-between spaces through ever-changing assemblages with each intra-action (Barad 2007). Jackson and Mazzei (2017) put forward that “ideas, fragments, theory, selves, affects, and other lifeworlds as a nonlinear movement, [are] always in a state of becoming” (728). Sewing with-research has been generative and productive. Furthermore, I find myself contributing a different perspective through my eyesight impairment. Congenital nystagmus shifts my eyes, producing alternative visual experiences to others with more visual acuity.

I have found Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the rhizome helpful to describe the patterns of exploration in my thinking and working. The middle is my preferred starting point, and then my ideas spread out in an expansive manner, seeking possible new cre-

ative opportunities. Following a sequential, predetermined structure with a beginning point leading on to an end moment is difficult for me. An understanding of the rhizomatic researcher (Clark and Parsons 2013) acknowledged this positioning, and seemed to offer me permission to continue my research-teaching journey in medical education through fluid, multidimensional, experimentation. At times, this process was risky; it generated messiness and disruptions.

In finding my rhizomatic self, caught in and drawn through numerous webs of relationships during our troubling corona-time, the spider has crept into several projects and activities. One bold member of this arachnid species was waiting at my front door recently to greet me—a reminder of our kinship (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Sense-making with the spider at my front door. Photo by author, May 2020.

As I flip back over my digital photographs from the first year of corona-time, I pick up the beauty of a spider's web photographed in the forest on Table Mountain that overlooks our city of Cape Town. This image (Figure 7) reminds me of a welcome walk and a connection with our spectacular natural surroundings before our movements were heavily curtailed, with restrictions not permitting us to leave home except for essential services. My appreciation of our environment has grown as I now consider the material arrangements and materialising effects that are enacted in our multiple and dynamic intra-actions.

Figure 7. Shimmering patterns and connections of spiders. Photo by author, February 2020.

Donna Haraway reminds us of kinship with and between human and other-than-human beings. In her book, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), she describes tentacular thinking in terms of rhizomatic connections and collective thinking in “multispecies muddles,” which can be joyfully generative while also invoking terror (31). She refers to a specific spider in the redwood forests of California, recognizing that this *Pimosa cthulhu* helps her with “returns, and with roots and routes” (31). The spider, according to Haraway, also reminds us to think about sympoiesis, which is a process of coming-together; “poiesis as making, sym as together-with” (256). “I love words that just won’t sit still,” admits Haraway in her interview with Martha Kenney (2015), when she also explains figuring as “a way of thinking or cogitating or meditating or hanging out with ideas” (257).

In the 21-day online MMS project, I was introduced to Louise Bourgeois’s giant spider sculpture, *Maman*. This female spider symbolizes her mother’s protective strength and support that Bourgeois felt throughout her life. Our Corona Reading Group created a collective photographic collage that appeared to resemble the *Maman*, with similar tentacular connections (Figure 8). By referencing the *Maman*, we noted that our “working together through a shared screen evoked a tentacular arrangement like that of the spider with its many eyes and limbs” (Bozalek, Newfield, Romano, et al. 2020, 6). Since com-

pleting our shared MMS project, the spider has continued to inhabit various parts of my life, both physically as noted above, and more intimately in my needlework that has also activated the metaphorical spider. I feel the connection with Bourgeois's mother who worked as a weaver in the tapestry industry.

Figure 8: Of cables and webs, with acknowledgement to Maman of Louise Bourgeois.
Created online by Nike Romano with Corona Reading Group colleagues (Bozalek et al. 2020).

Bourgeois' art has become part of several of my recent enactments within different assemblages connected to violence, trauma, and healing in my research in which art, women's bodies, fabrics, and researchers come together-apart; one move, rather than separations (Barad 2007). One such connection was generated with a local artist and friend, Gina Niederhumer.

Niederhumer's (2016) sewing-artwork-thesis attracted my attention. She admits that her needle and thread form a bridge for her to reflect on the past as well as a healing connection to work in the present and future—supporting her autoethnographic account of separations and trauma. She stitches bits torn out from her personal narrative together with thread and fabric, taking her through her brokenness (Figure 9). Niederhumer (2016) expresses the “physicality of the work itself; which pins, pierces and binds, one's thoughts into the cloth in hand, changing its appearance as it orders and mends the gaps between the

torn and frayed edges in one's self" (11). Using naive applique and different patterns of stitching, she found that her needlework provided "a point of re-negotiating the past and an apparatus of healing" (31). While her movements with threads appear to have acted in a therapeutic manner with her discomforts, what I find striking in her thesis is the separation of her personal accounts with her academic thoughts, as represented by a column of text for each, with examples of her stitchwork.

Figure 9: Gina Niederhumer's (2014) needlework titled, I am also not Louise Bourgeois (2016, 36). Reproduced with artist's permission.

In 2019, I attended a workshop facilitated by Niederhumer, who alerted me to the value of using fabric with text. She was on her way to Austria to display her art-thread-work and promote her newly published book, titled *Mend: A Personal Exploration of Healing*. I wondered what thinking with thread could mean for me and my engagements with medical students at UCT. What became apparent was that thread could do work through different intra-actions in terms of becoming-with research, health activism, and more. Niederhumer's work inspired me to think-with threads and to connect sewing to my research-teaching, thereby bridging the boundaries that had previously been present.

Boundary-breaking and disruption has characterized COVID-19's penetration into our lives. However, unexpected new opportunities

have emerged such as our engagement with others in the MMS online project. Below I examine how my needle and thread connected with the daily prompts in this challenge. A piece of old denim fabric cut away from torn jeans became the base for relating to my MMS journey with others during a period of time when the world was waiting for new knowledge, vaccines, and other ways of responding to the viral onslaught. I demonstrate the tentacular wo/anderings of my thoughts with threads, and then follow through to describe another indeterminate time and period of anxiety between the submission of my doctoral thesis and the examiners' responses. Pat Thomson blogs about this period, calling it "thesis limbo-land" (2019).

WAITING WITH COVID-19

The MMS challenge in April 2020 opened up a 21-day period for collaborative creative online engagement guided by three key questions, including asking us, the participants, how, in these times, *are we making sense of Self, Other and the World?* (Markham, Harris, and Luka 2020). The fascinating daily prompts in this innovative, experimental autoethnographic project helped our Corona Reading Group work with the tensions created by the disruptions of COVID-19 (Markham and Harris 2020). The prompts facilitated a process for spreading our thoughts and online activities beyond the constraints of spatial boundaries during a very strict lockdown period in South Africa. More broadly, the project, which included over 150 participants around the world, addressed the common need for distraction during the anxiety of early corona-time. It invited us to reach out across our differences and connect globally in an asynchronous manner, not limited by the usual constraints of working together in different time zones. Alongside the MMS project daily prompts, I felt the warmth of encounters together/apart through my coffee mug, bringing a reminder of Barad's (2014) explanation that there is an electromagnetic repulsion between atoms in our fingers and the porcelain.

My favourite mug for coffee during online meetings was bought in San Antonio, Texas soon after my first AERA conference. The mug came with a chocolate egg inside giving a taste of newness. It continues to connect me to those special learning moments with colleagues, and waking amidst the stalls along the river.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the shared collective creativity also opened my sewing-self, though it stayed contained in my personal space at home. At the end of the challenge, on the last day, these boundaries were broken by my uploading a photograph (Figure 4) of my sewing artifact into the collaborative writing Google document set up by our Corona Reading Group. In our Day 21 prompt I wrote:

“[This sewing artifact] seems appropriate as threads are touching fabrics, sequins, beads, needles, pins, my fingers, as well as the marks on my body that sparked off each of these shapes and texts which now may be viewed as representations of my thinking. Yet, to me they continue to be alive with agency. Is this an example of Barad’s claim that “matter is condensations of response-ability” (161), or that Viv reminded me of “the congealing of agency? For instance, the yellow text in the lower right hand corner refers to Black Lives Matter that is now boldly written across the central street in Washington. It also denotes timespacemattering in and through our reading group, as well as reminding me about always asking, “what matters?” Interestingly, and much to my surprise and annoyance, the green dye of the folded fabric at the top bled into the denim showing me that an assumed boundary is no more.”

My sewing-based contribution to our MMS project was greeted with appreciation and admiration from my generous reading group Zoom-mates. Then, the group understandably moved on, continuing

to explore further readings from Barad and other interesting texts enhancing our understanding of Feminist New Materialism. However, my relationship with the agency of the fabric-thread-artefact continued to grow over the following days and months. It did not become a passive, inert object that could be separated from my being. The affective force emerging from this relationship of the artifact with me generated a sense of urgency that resisted any separation. I could not bring myself to hide the worked-on denim piece nor to have it tucked away with other unfinished sewing endeavours. A new relationship was becoming established that I could not ignore or discard. I felt a calling, an invitation that more was needed, a creative-relating⁴ that had the potential to stretch across and between boundaries, without limits (Harris 2020).

By taking up four specific MMS prompts below, I briefly explain my emerging thoughts and actions with/in/through this sewn apparatus. First, I refer to basic food insecurities; second, to a digital learning experience reminding me of the many different forms of messaging relating to data and digital access; third, to the ups and downs of indeterminate undulating waves of daily transmission numbers of the virus and its mutations that are non-discriminatory; lastly, I take up the notion of dynamic fluidity of corona-time symbolized through the melting of an ice cube, which connected me to the energetic activism in terms of vulnerability in another global space.

1. Prompt 5: Walking with Guavas

A guava tree in my back garden led me to be mindful of the shocking state of hunger (exacerbated by COVID lockdowns) affecting many South Africans. In my MMS Facebook post I wrote:

“I’m pushed to consider the iterative intra-actions that are enacted with each of my movements in the back garden. Barad’s relational ontology helps me look beyond my individual intention to rather consider how, during this lockdown period, the back garden has beckoned to me. Once in that space, I feel a new sense of time, pleasure and freedom enhanced by the different experiences that have come to matter, such as picking and eating wormy guavas.”

I sense and feel my privilege as I move through a flourishing, contained garden space, and question the impact of a fleshy fruit shared with a hungry worm. Later, stitching a pile of autumn leaves enabled me to continue to take my thoughts for a walk (Springgay and Truman 2018) considering individuals and communities who do not have safe spaces to comfortably walk through during COVID lockdown. Intimate partner violence in South Africa has been named as a “silent public health epidemic” (Gordon 2016, 962).

2. Prompt 3: Team Video-Making

Joining unknown others to create a video was a new experience for me, depicted on the denim fabric by the video logo made with se-

quins and threads. Our ideas and work stretched across unexpected international boundaries, with MMS participants in Finland and Colombia. I give thanks to co-authors in this issue, Anne Soronen, Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg, and Polina Golovátina-Mora, who exposed me to new digital expressions.

Figure 12a:
Video icon.

Figure 12b: Video screenshots of our collaborative effort.

3. Prompt 8: Snakes and Ladders

Figure 13: Ups and downs of corona-time.

The stressful uncertainty of corona-time brought to the fore my many memories of the board game Snakes and Ladders. What has become evident worldwide, is that the coronavirus does not discriminate, even for those who feel they are in good health, on top of the ladder. If we are in the vicinity of an infectious COVID-19-positive individual, considered as the ‘wrong place’ at the wrong time, we are

likely to slide down with the snakes, to succumb to the grip of the virus, with indeterminate symptoms and possible long-term sequelae, passing into the unknown ‘afterlife.’

4. Prompt 9: Moving with Ice

Figure 14a: Threads as ice.

Figure 14b: Melting ice with hand.

Re-turning to the ice cube activity from MMS, I think about the enactments of fluid movements. New ideas are generated with the ice-hand-skin assemblage as my thoughts have moved to video recordings of Latai Taumoepeau’s (2020) performances with ice breaking, shaking, cracking and, and, and... : activism towards forces of fragility and vulnerability faced by the Pacific people.

Finally, before concluding, I describe how needle and thread provided support and inspiration during an anxious period familiar to many academics working on their doctoral theses. I acknowledged that becoming-researcher led me into an unanticipated terrain, questioning relationships of time, place, and space. In my PhD thesis I put forward that the text was an open apparatus with the potential for more to come, yet I had not expected that the more would become-with thread and needles re-turning to a past pastime and pulling the threads through my new life in academia.

WAITING IN-BETWEEN THE PHD PROCESS

As mentioned earlier in this article, during the PhD research process I attempted to keep strict boundaries to avoid distractions. I was cognizant of the impact of prolonged sitting which also excluded any desire for sewing. My training in physiotherapy provoked a sense of guilt for the many hours spent in a relatively static sitting position facing my computer screen. However, waiting for responses from external examiners situated across the oceans created a space of discomfort that I was unprepared for after all the pressures to complete the thesis task. Waiting for my research assessment felt like sitting in a labyrinth not knowing which way to turn. I recognized that working so intensely with words was not the usual for me (Figure 15a).

Figure 15a: Wordy world. The dominance of text in academia.

Figure 15b: Cover page of my PhD thesis.

Then keywords and phrases began to glow as I worked with/in them creating sewn squares with texts of self-expression, such as: research-sewing-creation, sew what-when-waiting, wild times, one month thesis in—needle out, moving beyond, opening up, differences, not a straight journey, entangled becoming, layers, unfolding, supportive family, lighting up, entangled, circles and drawings, wait-

ing, assemblages, im/possibility, and more (Figure 16). Maggie MacLure (2013) points out how we can be invited back to specific fragments of our research data, leaving us to wonder further as these “hotspots” have an intensity and force to “exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought” (228).

My research with swimming achievements surprisingly emerged in one of my first fabric squares. In recognizing the importance of a balanced life with the need for exercise, I began swimming at a local gym. Taking length after length, moving with the water, I eventually reached 80 lengths, while just not being able to attain that desirable 100 that could be celebrated with a huge sense of achievement from a swimmer who was only becoming-with water through the research process. In terms of sewing as a form of artwork, I refer to Sylvia Kind (2008) who explains how art making helped make sense of life’s experiences, noting:

“I hold the finished squares and read back their stories. I lay them out side by side and consider the ways I have been cut and stitched together with the fabric.” (109)

Figure 16: Collection of thoughts in-between my PhD process.

KNOTTING BUT NOT ENDING

In this article I explore my involvement with others (both human and more-than-human) in a South African Health Sciences Faculty, in terms of teaching and research, and online with the MMS challenge during corona-time, and how these relationships intersected with my different embodied activities. My movements through various forms of self-expression are described in this text with images of spiders, embroidered objects, and related items that thread through each other, intra-acting in and through our emergent relationships.

Making as pedagogy and making as method, in terms of my teaching and research with undergraduate medical students during their obstetrics learning, has reminded me of the seeping through of nutrients across the placenta, with reciprocal affective engagements between a growing foetus and its mother. My experiences were nourished and enriched through these wo/anderings, enabling a process of needling through previously bounded professional and personal compartments of my life—a disruptive, risky journey which has appeared beneficial.

A relational approach moves beyond binaries and fixed boundary-making separations. It acknowledges the entanglements that are enacted with each encounter—a bleeding through porosities that contests the dominant essentialist epistemology established in scientific disciplines, like obstetrics, and is valuable to consider for encouraging transdisciplinary work.

Moving beyond human-centred representational modes of thinking and doing, I have highlighted how experimental craft-making art works offered alternative pathways to engage affirmatively with tensions during corona-time, as well as in curricular tasks in obstetrics and connected research. A scrap of torn denim jeans became a different landscape for working with the 21 days of intense intra-actions in our collaborative MMS project. And the end-journey of my doctoral thesis continued beyond text-on-computer screens to text-with-fabric and threads, creating an openness for new possibilities.

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IMAGE NOTES

- Figure 1a: Image of COVID-19 (PD).
- Figure 1b: Embroidered spiky virus.
- Figure 2: Concerning students' responses related to their obstetrics learning (Mitchell 2019).
- Figure 3a: Embroidered clock-time.
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- Figure 10a: Mug with coffee.

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Figure 14a: Threads as ice.

Figure 14b: Melting ice with hand.

Figure 15a: Wordy world. The dominance of text in academia.

Figure 15b: Cover page of my PhD thesis.

Figure 16: Collection of thoughts in-between my PhD process.

NOTES

1. *Obstetric violence* is a term coined in Venezuela in 2007. It aims to address women's loss of autonomy and freedom of choice, gaining legal protection (Shabat 2020).↵
2. Barad (2019) refers to Derrida's "justice-to-come" which implies an ethical and ongoing commitment to address injustices.↵
3. A diffraction or interference pattern occurs when waves of water, light, or sound are disturbed as they intersect with each other. Barad (2007) uses the example of two stones dropped into a pool of water resulting in waves moving outwards, overlapping and creating new patterns as they intra-act through their force and movement.↵
4. Harris (2020) refers to her work with Jonathan Wyatt's creative-relational inquiry to explain that creative-relational moves are "a performative way of knowing and expressing that is rooted in neither the discursive nor the material but transcends binaries and breathes through connection" (17).↵

LISTENING TO AND LIVING WITH NETWORKED MEDIA DURING A PANDEMIC

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This article explores mediated listening from the perspective of intimacy during the first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic. The theoretical frame builds on the literature on listening and presence in mediated environments, audience engagement, and intimacy as meaningful connections. Methodologically, the study is connective ethnography, and the data was collected by collaborative autoethnography. Our data show that listening was an individual sense-making strategy of the outside world and a means to form connectedness. Threading between different screens on digital platforms caused the collapse of public and private contexts, and through these, particular types of intimacy arose. When the position of academic mothers is often that of a 'knower,' the severe crisis compels them to look for receptive ways of

L'article explore l'écoute médiatisée du point de vue de l'intimité pendant les premières semaines de la pandémie de coronavirus. Le cadre théorique s'appuie sur la littérature, sur l'écoute et la présence dans des environnements médiatisés, l'engagement du public et l'intimité en tant que connexions significatives. Méthodologiquement, l'étude est une ethnographie connective, les données ont été collectées par autoethnographie collaborative. Nos données montrent que l'écoute était une stratégie de perception individuelle du monde extérieur et un moyen de former une connectivité. Le filetage entre différents écrans sur les plates-formes numériques a provoqué l'effondrement de contextes publics et privés et, à travers ces derniers, des types particuliers d'intimité sont apparus. Lorsque la position des mères universitaires est souvent celle d'une "connaissseuse", la crise grave les oblige à rechercher de manières réceptives de savoir, comme une écoute attentive des

knowing, such as careful listening of others. Listening is a means to form belonging and understanding, but from a silent position. We should pay more attention to the silent presences and audiences in contemporary mediated environments.

autres. L'écoute est un moyen de former l'appartenance et la compréhension, mais à partir d'une position silencieuse. Cela suggère que nous devrions accorder plus d'attention aux présences silencieuses et aux publics, dans les environnements médiatisés contemporains.

INTRODUCTION

The uncertainty of what to think and feel is an experience many of us have shared during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the viewpoint of communication (research), the exceptional and uncertain situation created a sudden outburst of COVID-19-related communication. Suddenly, threats related to the coronavirus filled all communicative situations we could imagine: affective social media shares, state council press releases, eye-witness reports on television, and daily statistics on the spread of the virus. COVID-19 filled official press, human-to-human encounters, and social media platforms. Every bit of information, experiences, *anything* about COVID-19 seemed important. Interestingly, we faced not only information about and experiences of the pandemic. We faced an enormous increase in screen time and time spent at home (e.g., Hardley and Richardson). We reached across screens for sensing the bits of COVID-19 communication to make sense of the situation.

At the same time, the lockdown forced us to sustain connections (in working life, in spare time, with our friends, family) through screens, on numerous digital platforms. As recent studies show, the pandemic has caused a significant increase in digital communication, including social media, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools (Nguyen et al. 2020; see also Kemp; Koeze and Popper). What became evident is that our everyday life was suddenly filled with screens and captivating, disturbing, and woeful voices arising out of them. Consequently, it seemed that a specific attention economy arose in the middle of the screens, with their competing voices and some undertones.

The main symptom of our mediatized environments (Couldry 2009) is that in and through digital platforms we encounter a vast array of voices that would deserve an attentive orientation towards them. As Honneth argues, individuals aiming to become part of a society are deeply dependent on recognition. Various digital platforms intensify the quest for recognition. Through recognition, we may form belonging in various social realities (Hjarvard; Kaare and Lundby). Consequently, the voice and the capacities for listening are crucial components when living in a mediated society (Hjarvard; Kaare and Lundby). Indeed, in cultural studies, a key idea has been that those who are oppressed and excluded need to be heard. Accordingly, literature on the politics of listening uses the concept of voice to highlight the emancipatory idea that for previously silenced individuals and minorities, having a voice is a way to power and agency (Weidman; Lawy).

According to Couldry, the discourse of “having the voice”—the voice without any processes for listening and registering it—can become “the banal oxymoron of neoliberal democracy” (Couldry 2009 581). Following him, the mere voice is not what counts, but more the ability to listen, recognize, understand, and be co-present. In this article, we focus on specific communication situations during a global crisis, in which the listening was intensified and enabled receptive orientation to ‘others’ (familiar and unfamiliar others). At the same time, listening was a central part of coping with change and facing fears: it made our relation to the world possible altogether. We aim to widen the knowledge of listening in and through mediated environments as a mode of intimacy in exceptional circumstances.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the 2000s, many studies of digital culture privileged the user as an active doer. Consequently, terms like DIY media practices and participatory culture (Jenkins) highlighted users’ active agency, such as producing and sharing the content. New digital communication technologies enabled voices for previously silenced and invisible ones, from the bottom up. Idealistic hopes of im-

proved citizen participation arose (see Gillmor et al.). Meanwhile, media scholars took notice of the role of lurking as online engagement in which users observe other users' discussions but rarely or never contribute to them (Crawford 2011). Lurking was perceived as continuous with or nearly similar to sensemaking practices that people were already involved in with broadcast media. As a mode of participation lurking was understood as relatively uninteresting compared to users' visible production of content. However, some internet researchers indicated that active posting in online communities is the work of only a few, and the majority of users are mainly 'lurkers', observing and following others' activities (e.g., Nonnecke and Preece). They described lurking as a form of receptiveness and participation that is central to the dynamics of online communities (Crawford 2011).

The user-centered perspectives of media studies have contributed to understanding the user as an expressive and creative actor engaged in making sense of self by creatively writing themselves into being in different networks (e.g., Bechmann and Lomborg 775). These studies have produced essential knowledge about participation and "produsage" (Hine 2017) in digital and social media, but, at the same time, they have to a large extent ignored other important aspects of media uses that are closer to the position of audiencehood. As Christine Hine (2017) states, to explore networked life as an embedded social phenomenon and as a component of contemporary lived existence, we need to acknowledge diverse forms of engagement with online spaces, including their roles in people's calibration of themselves as social beings. Relationships managed through networked media are always part of a broader bond of social proximities and distances, mediated presences and absences bleeding beyond any binary divisions between the online and the offline (Paasonen 2021 53).

Since the rapid emergence of Web 2.0, the question of how media uses are meaningful to audiences-as-practitioners has been reconfigured many times. Joke Hermes has argued that new media ecology demands an open approach to audiencehood as practices that highlight thematically organized media uses. Hermes suggests theorizing audiencehood as a layered palette of activities, attachments, and in-

vestments, widely differing in intensity and importance, paying attention to how audiencehood is caught up in everyday social relations (Hermes 115-116). The idea of understanding audiencehood as practices, investments, and attachments, captures well everyday uses of media in an ever-changing media environment in which fleeting attention is a major form of investment (*ibid.*, 114). Application and platform-oriented media use have in many cases sidelined the thematically organized use of media. However, the idea of audiencehood as investments and attachments still offers a lot of potential for investigation, especially during the ongoing pandemic, when the thematically organized use of media focusing on COVID-19 information intermingles with the platform and application oriented uses of media technologies.

Surprisingly, much of the research on social media still seems to privilege the user as a producer, as in, for example, the studies on social media influencers and microcelebrities (Reade; Jerslev). Anja Bechmann and Stine Lomborg assess that less visible, audience-like engagement patterns with digital and social media are under-researched areas. According to them, social media research prefers to focus on what is readily and easily observable. They state that more studies are needed that deal with the meanings of reading social media without engaging in interaction with peers through content creation.

Against these prevalent scholarly approaches to everyday uses of digital media, Nick Couldry and Kate Crawford's suggestions for perceiving online media users as listeners who pay attention and recognize others' accounts of their experiences and lives deserve more empirical exploration. Couldry (2015) has offered an idea to approach the media environment in a way that highlights the media's social presence in our everyday lives. He considers our practices within and toward the media environment through the metaphor of listening, which aims to involve a complex mix of engagement and disengagement, enjoyment and distaste (Couldry 2015). Mediated communication is perceived as a relational space of interacting practices and positions, a space of recognition, refusal, connection, and dissent (O'Donnell et al., 423). Listening, or "listening out," is the act

of recognizing what others have to say, recognizing that they have something to say, or that they have the capacity to give an account of their lives that is reflexive and continuous, an embodied and reciprocal process of reflection (Couldry 2009 579-80). In the process of recognizing our claims on each other as reflexive human agents, an account of lives that needs to be registered and heard, our stories endlessly entangle in each other's stories. Couldry emphasizes that through listening, the value of voice is mutually registered between people (Couldry 2009 580). Consequently, listening involves ethical and relational stances towards others.

Crawford further develops Couldry's construction of listening in the context of social media. Crawford proposes the metaphor of listening to analyze forms of engagement and paying attention online. As she states, listening has not been given sufficient consideration as an effective practice of intimacy, connection, obligation, and participation online (527). It is a central part of experiences of being and connecting in networked environments. Crawford describes listening as a mode of receptiveness in which people contribute to the community by acting as a gathered audience that moves between the states of listening and disclosing online (Crawford 2009).¹ As a central part of the networked engagement, listening involves a deep sense of connection and shifting alternations between action and distraction. For example, listening to networks through mobile phones involves shifts in attention and presence across multiple platforms (Crawford 2012 220). Without calling online engagement a form of listening, Susanna Paasonen also illustrates how distraction and attention intermesh in our attachments during the use of social media. According to her, attention and distraction are variations in the intensities and zones that people's perception and experience take (Paasonen 2021, 65). Varying degrees of paying attention online, and the constant flow of small pieces of information, circulate to form a critical part of experiencing presence in a networked media environment (Crawford 2009 528).

The pandemic caused a significant change in everyday media practices. As Jess Hardley and Ingrid Richardson point out, the (habitual)

engagement with mobile media changed drastically, and domestic space became the primary site of net locality during the pandemic. They illustrate how during physical distancing in domestic environments, the dynamics between public and private space, work and leisure, and networked and face-to-face interaction were quite suddenly reconfigured. Hardley and Richardson observe the merging of the public/private space, work/leisure, and networked/face-to-face interaction as embodiments of mobile media use. For some of their research participants, the sudden collision of public/private enhances social connectedness and enjoyment, while for others, this boundary-crossing is more a burden.

But, most importantly, this collision and negotiation of the borders is also written into everyday practices, such as individual coping strategies of what to show/share when zooming. Hardley and Richardson argue that mobile intimacy emerges as the layering of place, technology, and social relations. Even though much of their framing of the exceptional situation resonates with our COVID-19 experience, it seems that the coping strategies that they reported are just the other side of the coin (or screen). While a crisis situation intensified the dependence on the networked media it also induced a short period of unstrained social media communication and a relational stance towards voices recognized through screens of several devices. The constant attunement to screens and reacting to voices heard and scenes seen from other people's homes was exceptionally strong during the early days of the pandemic.

We, the co-authors of this article, argue that the pandemic and its home-centric living intensified our attempts to pay attention to varied media texts and accounts of other media users in a way that highlighted recognition and orientation to others instead of concentrating on one's voice becoming heard. The mode of listening practices varied in relation to their intensity and importance, but those practices were central to our way of being. Through them, attention was keenly divided between diverse sources and different screens. The motivation for these audience-like practices is related to one's effort to understand the situation through others' reactions, journalistic content, and expert opinions. However, all these information sources

overlap and partly mix to form an affective basis for coping with the uncertain and stressful situation.

We examine our lived experiences through listening in times of crisis, when information and communication technologies allow for meaningful connections and vital information. As Crawford suggests, listening is a way to understand engagement and connectedness as a practice of intimacy (Crawford 2009). However, in this article, we do not highlight relations with technology, but focus more on *living with* different technologies and screens when they manifest themselves within interactions with other people or things used in the complexity of mundane situations (see Hine 2020 26). We examine how our coping with daily uncertainties was intensively interwoven with digital and mobile technologies and the deep connections they made possible.

To capture the nature of the attachments and intensities that recurred during a period of ongoing online presence, we supplement the notion of listening with the notion of intimacy. Crawford describes listening as a practice of intimacy, but she does not focus on the intensities and nuances of intimacy online. We perceive intimacy as a mobile process that emerges as “the kinds of connections that *impact* people and depend on living” (Berlant 284). As Lauren Berlant suggests intimacy involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, involving oneself and others. Intimacy figures prominently through connections and networks that matter. In this sense, it is crucial to consider the infrastructural role of digital technologies in the functionality of personal, social, occupational, and collective lives (Paasonen 2021 50). In crises, as during the coronavirus pandemic, populations and individuals sense that their definition of the real is under threat, resulting in a sense of anxiety about how to determine relations with others in a completely new situation. On the other hand, listeners on digital platforms, and their efforts to capture others’ viewpoints and moods, can produce a strong sense of connection and presence. Different devices, screens, platforms, and information sources, as well as other users’ posts and updates, afford an opportunity for multilayered co-presence that can function as an accommodation to changing circumstances.

Mobile phone users have habituated themselves to tuning into their networks frequently and checking the activity of their feeds (Crawford 2012 218-19). In mobile media practices, various forms of intimacy infuse public and private spaces and create co-present worlds (Hjorth and Lim). Consequently, plentiful online sources and communication channels affect how people make sense of COVID-19. Even though people may share the same global information sources, microscopic sensibilities and domestic ways of knowing make them experience the pandemic locally, privately, and as here and now.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study incorporated (auto)ethnography within a connective field site. Consequently, as ethnographic researchers, we constructed the field of investigation where we moved between different modes of communication and spaces (online or offline). Through this process, the researcher can trace forms of sociality according to theoretically-driven interests focusing on contingent connections that emerge as people make sense of online activities offline and vice versa (Hine 2017 9). The underlying ethnographic assumption is that we as participants enter into the social world, which is “created and sustained in and through interaction with others when interpretations of meanings are central processes” (Emerson et al. 2). An ethnographer learns culture from the inside, through immersion (Maanen 3; Emerson et al. 3). Through this process of immersion, we produce a “thick description” (Geertz 19).

We, the co-authors of this article, are two academic mothers from a Nordic country, and in the following, “we” refers to us. Our data collection started within a research project exploring datafied intimacies. We wrote diaries of everyday experiences in the early stage of the pandemic in March 2020. During the diary period, we made observations about our sociality and connectivity online and offline, and reported how our experiences of domestic life changed during the first weeks of the pandemic. In our diaries, we reported our daily uses of digital technologies, and reflected on the situations where

digital technologies had some role in our relationships. Through that, we generated data on our daily uses and relations to devices, connections, and information resources that Paasonen (2017 25) calls infrastructural dependencies. Further, we also reported on our lived experiences of physical distancing. Our interest was to seek out situated uses of platforms and networked media that we felt were personally relevant during the crisis.

We used two methods to produce the data: 1) during the first data-gathering phase, we made observations of our reactions through autoethnographic diaries; and 2) during the second data-gathering phase, we used reflexive interviews based on the diaries from phase one. Autoethnography enabled us to pay reflexive attention to living the pandemic life, looking at emotional and affective dimensions of daily encounters on digital platforms (see Hine 2020, 31) that emerged in our lived experiences. We kept diaries from March 17 to March 31, 2020. That is, the data collection started right after the Finnish Government declared a state of emergency in Finland over the coronavirus outbreak a few days later, on March 16, 2020.²

After the first data-gathering period, we wanted to use a more dialogical approach (Hernandez et al.; Geist-Martin; Sawyer and Norris; Toyosaki et al.) than the traditional autoethnographic approach in phase one. We applied collaborative autoethnography, which meant a shift to the more reciprocal collective agency (see Lapadat 599). The need for reciprocal agency emerged when we looked back to our diaries after six months of the first diary period, aiming to understand the complexity and messiness of past experiences. We interviewed each other on the diary entries' affectively charged situations. In these, we noticed that online presence, communication, and sensemaking impacted us. We generated this observation through conversational interviews about our diary writings via Zoom. This combination of collaborative autoethnography and diary-interview method (involving the diary period and a post-diary interview) (e.g. Bartlett; Spowart and Nairn) served best our methodological purposes. A preliminary analysis of the diaries and interviews comprised our individual close reading of the material. After that, we dis-

cussed each other's interpretations of the affectively charged situations together. Listening was a key concept of the research to better understand our lived experiences in the data we had collected. Different phases of data collection formed a functional approach to our everyday knowledge, characteristically incomplete and in progress.

EXPLORING MEDIATED PRESENCE, CO-PRESENCE AND CHRONIC CONNECTIVITY

The first weeks of the pandemic concretized how domestic environments transformed quickly into the locus of remote work and school, the maintenance of relationships, information search, and sharing pandemic experiences. Different media and communication technologies were crucial for our daily lives with many overlapping contexts. It seemed that people's threshold of communicating and posting on social media platforms became lower during that time. Digital devices and their screens, various platforms, apps, and connections were essential to knowledge workers' working life. Still, their uses had a novel focus: scraps of information about the spread and mode of action of a virus.

The diaries were characterized by perplexity, the incompleteness and fickleness of the information, and the restless use of different media, as they played an increased role in our experiences at the time. There were frequent situations where we felt our connectivity and online presence primarily by recognizing other people's (friends, family members, acquaintances, and unknown posters) concerns, thoughts, and feelings. Many previous casual and affiliation interactions on social media platforms changed to meaningful connections that offered an important, reflective surface for our thoughts and questions. One of us wrote in her diary: "When looking at different social media posts that individuals are sharing, you tend to observe them through some type of corona filter, thinking [about] what their feelings and reactions in the situation are." This quote illustrates that a receptive activity of other people's posts resembled a coarse sieve that sorted out the pandemic moods from other experiences. It involved intense orientation to others' perceptions and feelings related to the

coronavirus in the moment. The coming weeks and months seemed to be far away. For a while, in those early days, the competition for other people's attention on social media changed to more approachable and inviting communications. The expression of a 'corona filter' refers to a sensitive and reflective approach to the content received in one's social media feed. A listener might focus on sensations and emotional states arising from the pandemic and how these 'resound' in her.

However, the communicative environment was also cacophonous. The number of different apps, platforms, and screens used during working and school days was enormous. Through them, family members kept the everyday going on, but they also asked for various types of attention. Hardley and Richardson similarly point out how the home became, all at once, the center of everything, which "meant renegotiating domestic space as a digital place and situating oneself and one's things in ways that maintained a sense of personal privacy..." (2020). This negotiation was one of the key experiences of the time, as one of our diary entries described:

"Eventually, we found instructions on how to log in to Meets video conferencing platform. Found it from the teachers' messages in Wilma (digital communication platform between school and home), and in the distance school instructions stored in Drive. The teacher had created an automatic link, from which the schoolboy eventually got easily into the first remote lesson—a feeling of relief for all of us. At the first check-in, we [both parents] assisted. I thought maybe I should have put on day clothes before opening the connection; the man was in his pants too.

"Feeling confused, suddenly we and our confused morning routine flicker on the screen of the school-at-home class. Who is the distance school student here? We did not remember to look for headphones in time, so each family member pops in and out of our home library, a space where school-at-home takes place. We appear there just like listening students. Our schoolboy got seriously nervous and showed some [emotion-

al] expressions. After that, we tried to whisper (except, of course, not our preschooler). Our schoolboy is ashamed; he does not want to transmit an overly authentic stream of images and sounds from home.”

When occupational, educational, governmental, and familial contexts collapsed into home environments in those early days of the pandemic, the actual possibilities for listening without distractions were scarce. A peculiar way of paying attention in an un-concentrated manner developed. This reminds us of the idea of background listening (Crawford 2009), as a way to cope with uncertainties and continuous updates of information. Hardley and Richardson argue that a hybrid experience of distributed and networked presences uncomfortably reconfigure the dynamics of public-private relations within the home. This was evident in our experience also. But the collapse also created listening that was oriented not as much to content (circulating) as to forms, material embodiments, and technicalities of the platforms.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the meaning of regular social media practices shifted. For example, birthday congratulations among Facebook friends proved to be an easy way to affiliate with friends and colleagues during the lockdown:

“In addition to WhatsApp groups, my use of Facebook has increased to some extent. I noticed that although I have felt birthday congratulations via Facebook are a little silly, during this exceptional situation, they are again somehow more natural, or at least they are not so artificial. [...] I follow online news too actively. If I must concentrate on some work matter, I decide that I don't look at online news for three hours. But on the other hand, the employer's corona info also trickles into [my] email inbox or other emails that indirectly relate to the pandemic.”

“Chronic connectivity” (Gregg xi) and the intensity of living with digital technologies required that people practice self-control to restrict themselves from continuously (obsessively) monitoring news

and stories about the coronavirus even while these were pervasively capturing the screens of laptops and mobile phones. As the daily world was filled with COVID-19 updates and guidance from different sources, it was impossible to differentiate between the use of home computer and work computer, since both operated as repositories of coronavirus information.

Listening was our way of relating to the world; it also highlighted the thriving growth on digital platforms we encounter in our daily lives. The following diary note exemplifies this and the affects it raises:

“We find that an online webcam on the snakes, awakening in the spring, has been re-opened. Despite our long wait, the snake seems not to appear on the screen. My preschooler is curious and becomes impatient. She suggests that we should rewind the webcam stream to the point where the snake appears. I explain that the idea of live streaming is that the thing is happening right now, albeit somewhere else. She seems to understand but suggests that we should pause the watching and restart it again once the snake appears. I try to explain again that “live” can’t really be on a pause. Suddenly I become anxious—what if the snake would slip on the screen, at the exact moment when we are not watching.”

Initially, this episode seems not to have anything to do with the pandemic situation or with listening. Yet, our inability to keep up with the constant flow of content was a key point. It highlighted how internalized the idea of constant listening was, for making sense of what was happening in the world – through various platforms available to us. The whole idea that we could pause the watching of a livestream and that something could still happen out there without our witnessing it caused anxiety. In this episode, it was the snake, but in our diaries, we wrote similarly about the constant attunement and need to check if anything in the pandemic had changed. Endless watching and listening positioned us as witnesses of an evolving crisis, where one could react (for example, by commenting) and be remotely present but not act. Interestingly, this reminds us of the type of background listening that Crawford has discussed (Crawford

2009). Through it, one listens to online content as background noise, which only from time to time asks for a more attentive orientation. These occasional moments create a sense of intimacy and awareness of discussions online (Crawford 2009). For us, the endless listening was a means to 'know' the pandemic, and the shifting between different modes of listening, however, created a sense of connectedness. Through this, and as Crawford states, listening was a practice of enacting connections online. We further noted that in the pandemic context, this practice of listening to something online often intensified meaningful interaction and a sense of intimacy offline.

LISTENING AND FEELING INTIMACY IN A RITUAL FRAMEWORK

In the domestic mediated environment, 'listening to' friends and acquaintances' posts intermingled with following journalistic sources and future scenarios presented by the Finnish and international health authorities. In the context of societal upheavals, live press conferences provide a ritual framework for releasing information and managing public emotions. According to Valaskivi et al. (23-24), as a familiar repertoire of media production, press conferences help experts, administrators, and politicians coordinate their actions and messages quickly, even while informational content remains unpredictable. Press conferences offer ritual stability in which they open an immediate connection between the audience and the unfolding events during their representation (ibid.). The following diary extract deals with the situation in which one of us sat on the sofa in the living room on a weeknight and watched the Finnish Government's COVID-19 live press conference on television. As an audience member, she was very responsive to the content, but many details of the information faded quickly because of the situation's intensity.

"I had already opened this [diary] file yesterday evening to write my thoughts after the Government's press briefing. However, I couldn't write anything. The briefing lasted probably over one hour, and I decided to go to bed after it. I became a little moved when the Prime Minister opened the event and

when the Minister of Justice spoke. The whole situation felt suddenly more severe than previously. Their manners and words simultaneously expressed concern, demand for responsibility, and, if I interpreted correctly, a disguised uncertainty about Finland's possibility of recovering the epidemic in forthcoming weeks and months."

On that specific occasion, the affective and emotional reaction to the official briefing came unexpectedly. Intimacy here emerges from the macro context (an unpredictable threat of a virus to people near and far), the micro context (the publicity of the event and the privacy of one's living room), the nature of genre (the ritual stability of the press briefing), characteristics of representations (the appearances, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of the talk of ministers on the television screen), and the listener's position as an audience member in a moment of great uncertainty. The content received through digital television unexpectedly resonates in the listener without any 'second screens' or other actions online; right after the situation, she wanted momentarily to withdraw from online connections.

The listener's reactions were not based merely on the exceptional information, such as movement restrictions concerning the region of Uusimaa, but also a hunch that society will not be the same after the crisis. On the one hand, viewing the press briefing on television afforded ontological security that proved to be highly relevant in lockdown culture (Hermes and Hill 656). On the other hand, viewing brought on a sense of intimacy when affective intensities emerged unexpectedly while listening to the authority talk and by watching so many policymakers lined up onscreen. In this case, intimacy as unpredictable affective intensities emerged even though this public drama was easily recognizable as a form of familiar communication: a press conference. The situation brought on contradictory emotional and affective states because being 'moved' by the explanations seemed to turn up in the 'wrong' context: in most cases, authorities' press briefings are associated with the neutral release of information instead of engendering the sense of being affectively touched by the things heard and seen. If the politicians' purpose was to create "more

intense audience involvement in the ritual of public drama” (Valaskivi et al. 23), they succeeded very well. The excerpts above illustrate how something we felt as intimacy emerged as an affective and relational orientation in a situation where the words said (including the overwhelmingly constant digital information flow that was uncharacteristically highly official), and the listener’s deeds or thoughts were slightly unbalanced.

Our means of adjusting to the information we listened to were occasions we felt as intimate moments of engagement. They involved an experience of sharing and belonging with family members or with other Finnish people in their domestic environments watching the same briefing at the same time: “The whole family at home, watching the news and the press conference, I don’t remember such a common focus for a while. It, therefore, feels somehow comfortable and safe” (an extract from the diary). The lockdown brought out our deep dependence on digital communication platforms in everyday lives, which the diaries illustrate. These platforms, and the circulation of content between different platforms, also generated moments of emotional attachments to affecting stories, within and outside the platforms. The platforms were, in this sense, a breeding ground for intimacies that took place not just in our own homes but elsewhere—in our attempts to formulate shared day-to-day captured moments, alone or together with family members.

In many cases, attunement to another’s voice and its tones enabled us to pull through daily anxieties. The diaries also involve listening situations, which intensified the listener’s social stress and anxiety. There, the listening was attentive and receptive, but it resulted in experiencing demanding emotional states. The anxiety arose from the merging of close interpersonal communication with work-related communication, as well as official communication from nation-state authorities, resulting in an imbalance of the listener’s attunement to any of the specific sources and messages received. These attentive modes of listening emerged in domestic environments, in which we witnessed close listening to digital channels and their sensitivity to incoming messages. Hardley and Richardson notice how at home, on mobile devices, the pandemic caused the enmeshing of public/private

spheres, and uncharacteristically, a fluidity among these different spheres. Diaries document this merging well, and how this caused affective anxieties which we felt as intimate instances of listening:

"I still try to maintain intimate digital relations by calling, messaging, etc. A new form of remote digital connections also appears in this set; my husband tells and conveys the corona messaging (email) of a friend living in a big city in Europe. The message, among other things, is a description of the distress and despair of a situation when a girlfriend's friend has spent a very long time at home waiting for someone to dare to take her deceased mother away. Of course, the information touches and moves me. I don't know why I immediately think this is somehow intimate."

This episode demonstrates how a disquieting piece of personal news related to the social impact of the virus felt intimate for the listener in a way that involved contradictory feelings. The listener describes how she didn't experience emotions towards people she didn't know. She assesses that her strong reaction relates to processing such a significant thing as death through emails. Usually, email is felt to offer lower social presence (see Nguyen et al.), but in this case, the effects of an email message were emotionally intense. In a non-crisis situation, communicating someone's death through work messaging might have appeared strange. But this episode illustrates how the crisis and its unpredictability intruded into work-related mediated environments. From the listener's point of view, the traditional registers and loci of listening or attunement were suddenly invalidated. Listening as a way of orienting oneself relates to imagining how a bereaved person probably feels. But more than that, it involves considering that it is no longer possible to distinguish matters concerning one's work from the global health crisis and personal destinies involved in it. As much as networked technologies have changed our sense of availability and engagement with work, the presence "bleed" described by Gregg (2) seemed to rise to the next level. In our diaries, we documented many emotional overloads of varying degrees. These entries tell us that listening, as it means to connect and understand

the outer worlds, is a fragile position. It is fragile due to its openness. But listening, as a constant process where the attentive mode varies from a background listening to a highly concentrated attunement, also brings responsibility.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This article explores how listening situates us as audiences in mediated and networked environments, and what this listening produces in a social crisis. We build on the previous literature on intimacy as a relational act and listening to mediated environments as an open attunement. Throughout this article, we concentrate on how intimacy and relations emerged in our autoethnographic diaries and diary interviews. Using this autoethnographic approach allowed us to concentrate on our experiences of listening. Our data show that by framing listening as an individual sensemaking strategy for the outside world, we could also understand it as the practice of connectedness and belonging in critical times.

Contrary to understandings of passive listening in networked environments, listening proved to be a position where attentive and passive orientations, as well as modes of listening, varied. Background listening (Crawford 2009) was a basic listening mode, which was quite constant. But during background listening, the listener also took part in the mediated pandemic, as a receptive witness of the situation, constantly in flow. This was also a means to form a sense of connectedness and belonging through the shared act of mutual witnessing, both to the outer world and with close family and friends. Interestingly, as some literature on the coronavirus pandemic has reported, the strategy against COVID-19 has primarily employed isolation, which consequently has guided us to stay at home, for “doing nothing does something” (Vallee 8). Thus, press conferences that at the outset reminded us to do nothing involved us in doing a lot. This is what background listening as witnessing is also about. It is a means to form belonging, connectedness, and understanding—but from a silent position, in a similar way to the lurkers of early internet years. However, the position of the listener is silent only at the out-

set. As we have explained, it involves changing orientations to the platforms, content, and others. Particularly in the beginning of a pandemic crisis the boundaries of different platforms and applications lost some relevance and the main attention focused on continuously updating coronavirus information as well as the joys and sorrows that people shared in social media and other messaging services.

Our study suggests that we should pay considerably more attention to these silent presences and audience involvements in various mediated environments. Listening involves a lot of commitment and reflective consideration. Listeners are active participants in the mediated environments and in networked attention economies. However, to be involved in situations that ask for listening, digital media platforms play a central role. In everyday experiences, the need for material know-how of where and how to connect is evident, and this we encounter daily. That is the minimum prerequisite for listening in mediated environments. But at the same time, paths to digital media platforms are also a prerequisite for reaching towards a sense of belonging. These are also infrastructures of intimacies (Petersen et al.). They operate as socio-technical affordances that modulate intimacy. Through digital platforms, we unfold connections and relationships.

As a result of our study, we found two types of intimacy in our mediated lives at the beginning of the pandemic. First, the lived experience of intimacy is related to situations in which the *context and things heard are unbalanced*. In these cases, the listener's horizon of expectations is often disturbed, and her customary registers of listening are not competent to process information in the usual ways anymore. For example, the public sphere with official press releases invades the screens of computers, television sets, and laptops, whereas private matters may turn up in the middle of work interactions. The fluidity and intermeshing of private and public spheres often result in sensitizing one's receptive modalities as the listener. Second, intimacy emerged as *an unsuspected affective reaction during audience involvement*. When the listener handles an increasing number of uncertainties and reflects on the meanings of sudden transformations, she can react with strong intensity of affects and emotions. For example, one can be very familiar with press conferences and have

some expectations about the form of the content. Still, the insecurity in authorities' tones of voices and gestures and facial expressions may also bring about a sense of helplessness and a momentary desire to withdraw from the networked connections.

At any given point in our research process, our goal was not to substantially 'know' everything about this complex situation. It was, and is, an ongoing process in which the hunger for listening and curiosity to know more and recognize others' voices feed each other. When we have felt the pandemic situation to be so very fluid and constantly variable, our ways to orient ourselves and relate to the world happened by accepting the blurring of many spheres during the lockdown life. Finally, listening was about subtle presence, making sense of the suddenly changed world, and living daily lives with connections that matter.

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NOTES

1. Crawford introduces three modes of listening: background listening, reciprocal listening, and delegated listening (Crawford 2009, 528-30).↵
2. In Finland, the declaration of a state of emergency occurred for the first time after the World War II.↵

SKIPPING ON THE GRAINS OF MULTIVERSES TOWARDS A PORTAL: WORLD-BUILDING EXPERIENCE

POLINA GOLOVÁTINA-MORA

This essay is a fictional autoethnographic sensemaking of the experience during the long lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sensemaking mainly draws on the thought of Deleuze and Guattari and Karen Barad, with a methodology inspired by Donna Haraway's conceptualisation of speculative fabulation. The experience is defined as multispecies migration in the multiverse. The essay is an exploration of relations between different forms of memories and associations that they produce in their interaction under the conditions of the current pandemic, as well as between the agencies involved and created in these relations. This includes childhood memories, immediate memories, readings, conversations, imaginative work, dreams, and cinematic images that form the worldview of the author. The essay experiments with the

Cet essai est un sensemaking autoethnographique fictif de l'expérience vécue pendant le long lockdown causé par la pandémie de COVID-19. Le sensemaking s'inspire principalement de la pensée de Deleuze et Guattari et de Karen Barad, avec une méthodologie inspirée par la conceptualisation de la fabulation spéculative de Donna Haraway. L'expérience est définie comme une migration multi-espèces dans le multivers. L'essai est une exploration des relations entre différentes formes de souvenirs et d'associations qu'ils produisent dans leur interaction dans les conditions de la pandémie actuelle, ainsi qu'entre les agences impliquées et créées dans ces relations. Cela inclut les souvenirs d'enfance, les souvenirs immédiats, les lectures, les conversations, le travail d'imagination, les rêves et les images cinématographiques qui forment

forms of exploration and its presentation to emphasize the intra-action between the content and the form of writing. The author aims to contest the linear idea of research and writing and expand the acceptable referential framework.

la vision du monde de l'auteur. L'essai expérimente les formes d'exploration et sa présentation pour souligner l'intra-action entre le contenu et la forme de l'écriture. L'auteur vise à contester l'idée linéaire de la recherche et de l'écriture et à élargir le cadre référentiel acceptable.

"I am so post-post, I am so meta-meta" (Monetochka)

Inability to concentrate caused by severe stress is known to medicine (Robinson et al.). Distress as one of the results of the current pandemic has been also discussed (Pfefferbaum and North). While this essay can be read as an experience of being unfocused in distress, I prefer to think of it as an autoethnographic attempt to make sense of the multispecies collaborative migration experience that has been catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is migration of multiple species—humans, books, records, dogs, birds, plants, bricks, shadows and many others—between multiple universes and “an ongoing re-working of the very nature of dynamics” (Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity* 818). They migrate not by themselves but in pairs, groups, together, supporting and pushing each other, creating the worlds as they move. In these collaborative alliances, they notice the portals to those worlds, point each other towards them, open up new ones, and become the portals themselves.

This text focuses on these coincidences and explores them as in-between spaces, leaps, ruptures, as skipping in search for an alternative continuity, for the decentralized and decentralizing order. Observation and inquiry (M. Wells), poetic, speculative, and imagination-driven mental, material, and discursive experience are the tools for this exploration. It could be defined as a fictional autoethnography, but is it really fiction? Speculative fabulation (Haraway, *SF*), more accurately, frames the nature of this paper: a dynamic assemblage of distributed knowledge. This knowledge is collaborative becoming in and of the entangled multispecies worlds.

THE CONTACT

With the beginning of quarantine, my thoughts have been increasingly less and less straightforward. I find it difficult to focus on one thing: like Sheldon in one of the first episodes of *The Big Bang Theory*, “I was working on [the article], and I thought, hey, ...” (Litt et al. s.1, ep.4). The thoughts jump from one matter to another, making mental bookmarks and notes for the ‘better’ days. I think, I probably should write them down but it would be another distraction from what I have been doing then. I see in social media that I am not alone. It comforts me yet skipping accelerates. I try to hold the thoughts together and they burst in pieces like in the Big Bang...

With almost an awe and curiosity, I notice that there is too much coincidence: it feels the thoughts themselves lead me somewhere. Are they tuned in to the world? Or am I in a simulation, and if so, who created it? Martin Wells wrote about the life script narratives of our own creation, which like order-words (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*), define our words, gestures, relations, and the roles we play. From the perspective of transactional analysis, the psychoanalytical method of dealing with emotional problems through raising awareness of one’s own discourse by means of observation and inquiry, “life itself becomes the therapist to us” (M. Wells 143, 149). Martin Wells elaborated that true liberation from the restrictive structure-structure (Berne) starts with awareness of the connectedness of the world that we are part of. It resonates with the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of becoming in the rhizomatic world as a constant movement between the striated, or structure oriented, and smooth, or nomadic, spaces. Connectedness, Martin Wells offered, contributes to healing (150) as it helps finding stillness, silence, and the space in-between. Becoming clandestine, moving in-between and inside in motionless voyage, performing “a veritable ‘defacialization’”, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari proposed, break “walls of significance [...] to which dichotomies, binarities, and bipolar values cling” and save us from getting sucked into the black holes “around which lines coil to form borders” (190). It is the “simplest and the most sig-

nificant lesson of all”, which the Ancient One (Derrickson) summarized in the words “It’s not about you”. This lesson enables breaking through the keyhole of the ego’s illusion of control and fear of losing it towards the magical multiple possibilities of the entangled world.

I remember the feeling of being overwhelmed when too many pieces burst in too many directions—silently, as if inwards, I scream “Stop”. They stop and wait... I think... Is it the uncertainty or precisely this knowing-feeling that comes from the outside-inside? I notice that not only are my thoughts jumping from one subject to another, but the thoughts are not thoughts exactly. They are hybrids of thoughts, memories, sounds, smells, images, voices, movie quotes, song lyrics, feeling of dance movements even when I sit still in front of my computer... —ruminations (Henson, *Aftershocks*, *Wrangling Space*). These mutations happen fast. It is difficult to say what is the continuation of what. Rhizome-like, they have neither beginning nor end... (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 21).

Anxiety impedes concentration, but it can “also improve the ability to detect and avoid danger” (Robinson et al. 203). The anxiety fed by confinement reveals or reminds me of the sensuality of knowledge, of individuality and the complex nature of logic, of the lines of flight from reductive conventional logic’s continuum towards “a virtual cosmic continuum” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 95). Arundhati Roy called the pandemic a portal opening the new possibilities, a chance to rethink the reality we live(d) in and build the world anew. The portals glow yellow and I turn around to see them the moment I read her words. I feel their presence neither around me nor inside me, but rather we are together, a becoming-in-between, having a certain shape only “in the smallest interval” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 94). In contact, immediate or by quantum entanglement (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; Einstein), bodies mutate, maybe taking each other’s shape, learning about each other and mutually transforming. Mutation and shape shifting are part of the learning process as in the cartoon *Contact* (Tarasov and Kostinskii).

SUBCREATION

The voices of Deleuze and Guattari fade into three images, yet with every new thought more images appear... I stop and make a mental selection, focus on the smallest interval: on the initial three images. They do not come in sequence nor are they simultaneous. I do not think I will ever be able to say what came first. They have been there. I see them in a distributed manner, as one sees optical illusion images: the focus skips from one shape to another in acceleration.

The morning breeze smells like summer as I remember it—fresh and warm. It calls me out. I get up. The blades of different weed grass that grows better than anything else in my backyard, leaves of wine, their shadow doubles on the brick walls in the dispersed light, plantago leaves that one day miraculously appeared in my closed brick backyard are my portal to/from the past... The breeze lightly moves the leaves. I breathe in and skip from one leaf to another with the rhythm of the breeze. Clue 1.

Dark emptiness, the distant stars are not the stars but the glowing grains, all that is left of the destroyed Fantasia (Petersen). I skip from one grain to another till I see the bluish light of the Ivory Tower floating in the empty darkness... The hopeful joy squeezes my heart: It survived! Is it my grain skipping that maintains it alive?

I am half asleep, I had a flu, a fever. I think I am six, eight (?). I feel heavy and at the same time warm and cosy in the blanket... the cosiness could be the later memory. I think it is winter, Christmas time: I think I feel the warmth of the heater. I hear/feel the pulsation of the bells of different sizes. I wish they would stop ringing. Is it my memory or did I read about it in a children's story? I start jumping from one bell to another, swirling around them, from one paw of the Christmas tree to another—an overlapping memory of the waltz scene from the Nutcracker (Stepantsev, 5:06-5:16).

Rereading my diaries, stories, articles, and conference papers written or presented in different years, I clearly see the repetitions or refrains that trace the tune. What is this tune? Is it the music of Self or the music of life? The colours, smells, associations connected to some real or imaginary memories become nodes in a cosmic rhizome and intersection of different vectors and intensities (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 109-110). The rupture in the routine caused by the quarantine makes them sharper. The mutating and transformative nature of the virus shakes the striated spaces and reveals the porous nature of the borders seen before as walls. The walls become windows, doors, or something else.

The meanings of time, days, hours, usual territories, property, street noise, and house sounds are lost, put on halt, and transformed. Everything is and is not. I long for the end of the quarantine and at the same time I dread it. Waiting/fearing, I notice time does not fly but falls into a black hole. With curiosity and awe, I feel it also drags me in. Boris Lavreniov described the post-revolution months: “The wind fraternized with the time,” and overnight peeled the husk off the streets, signs, buildings, words, people, their memories, their titles— “the dried scab falling off from the broken body that had survived the fatal moments of the crisis, being driven by the wind along the ghostly world of a bare street” (1). It is a healing stage. And it is simultaneously microscopic and massive, structurally affecting everyone and everything: “When a massive body flies through the space, smaller bodies even against their will are drawn into its orbit. That is how a seventh satellite comes into existence” (17). This massive body, as a huge wave, drifts off the sand and moss from the pier’s columns, reveals their artificial origin, and makes their revision easier. This revelation could be fearsome as it shakes up the customary, ‘normal’, striated. Similarly, Tiutchev explained our fears of the night: the night tears off the day’s gilded cover and lays bare the abyss

“[...] to the sight
With its black horrors of perdition,
'Twixt them and us lies no partition:
And that is why we fear the night!” (May)

Playfulness of imagination works as a distraction from this “fateful abyss” and allows (re)constructing the alternative structures, relations, and consistencies. This “ruminative storying and restorying of life lived in the consequences of space and time [...] resist[s] the imposition of coherence” (Henson, *Wrangling Space* 518) and defies the norms of storying Self and the Other. In dreamlike fashion, when the sense of Self is interrupted, the ruptures help finding the overlooked in the coherence of the awake life (Golovátina-Mora 338-339). Those ruptures and inconsistencies ally with imagination “to make sense of the nonsensical, to organize the disorganized, to reconcile the irreconcilable” (Henson, *Aftershocks* 819).

The imaginary worlds, Mark Wolf wrote, are complex constructions with their own structures, interrelations and subworlds. They have their own logic and consistency; they are, as Wolf illustrated, transauthorial, transsensorial, transmedial, and inter- or trans-disciplinary. Different media open “portals through which these worlds grow in clarity and detail, inviting us to enter and tempting us to stay, as alive in our thoughts as our own memories of lived experience” (Wolf 9). For both authors and audience, world-building becomes a meaningful life event (10). It goes beyond storytelling (12), in fact, as Henson (*Wrangling Space*) noted, “I make my memories in the living. The living, rather than the telling” (521). It is the process of subcreation (Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*), which is after all co-creation. Resistance of creativeness (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 108) makes the whole process transformative for its participants and the world (Wolf 9; Henson, *Wrangling Space* 522; Levitas). Wolf described world-building as a deliberate activity, an artistic endeavour (10) that generally corresponds to natural human abilities, which could be suppressed or developed further. For Abraham Maslow too, creativeness is a fundamental characteristic of the human nature that defines our relatedness with the world, “a special kind of perceptiveness” (65), and indicates the path to self-actualisation for an individual.

The “encyclopaedic nature”—complexity and richness in details—of the world-building requires an encyclopaedic approach (Wolf 12), or borrowing advice Fellini allegedly gave to Katherine in *Under the*

Tuscan Sun (A. Wells): “You have to live spherically in many directions”.

A WORMHOLE

Imaginary world-building is more of a journey in stillness: “we engage emotion systems while disengaging action systems” (Wolf 10).

The seventh month of quarantine, I hardly leave the apartment and experience the world through media windows (Wolf): social media, books, films, songs, plants, scents of my puppies. The wind brings simultaneously warm and fresh scents of grass. Is there more or less contact? I see fewer people, but I hear them more—before at times the building felt empty, now I hear them through the walls cooking, singing, playing inside their apartments. The first months of the lockdown, there are fewer cars—I do panic that I cannot travel and see my family, friends, the sea... I feel I cannot breathe at times. But there are more scents now in the air: grass, trees, walls, cooking... I see a big brown dog looking at me through the window from the opposite building. The dog sees me. We silently check on each other every day at around the same time for about two weeks. I have not seen it since. I wonder if it was real.

I look inside my moonstone ring—the North Sea’s wind hits me in my face. As if in a close-up movement I move back in time—I am ten (?). I look inside the micro crevices in a massive ice slide. The sun is warm and creates these caves full of crystals. They are so small that only a tip of my finger can enter. It is cold inside. I wonder how it is there deeper inside, how the sun plays on its walls, if there is water dripping. How does it sound? I wonder now or then...

A dancer (Quinn Wharton) recreates the last dance scene from ‘Dirty Dancing’ with his white lamp while at home alone during the quarantine. A musician plays musical instruments with echo while in social distance exploring and enjoying the versatile materiality of the pipes, sound, landscapes (Marshall). I hear the sound in my head:

But could you
 now
 perform a nocturne
 just playing on a drainpipe flute?" (Maiakovskii)

Are the dancer, the musician and the poet lonely? Alone? Or are they more?

The leaky stains on the roof reread me a story of a moose... each time there is more there in this comic. Clue 2. With curiosity and growing awe, I feel my feet, now legs... turn into roots, they grow quite fast, deeper into the forest soil. Where is the sofa? I thought I was on it. I cannot turn and I panic, I feel claustrophobic and cannot breathe. Did I fall asleep? Do I need to move more? Or was it a call through my body to stop and go into stillness?

Hawking (1) described his work:

"Although I cannot move and I have to speak from a computer, in my mind, I'm free. Free to explore the great questions of the universe [...] Finding out delves deep into what it is to be alive, to think, to be a human being, right to the limits of reality itself."

The fragments of thoughts turn into a golden glowing net of coordinates. They are clues... The bricks of the walls of the backyard come closer and expand. They are like a comic strip, a quilt, but not linear, not flat; they are multidimensional, moving and changing. As in *The Magicians* (Gamble et al.), I collect the clues and they indicate where to go further between the worlds. As in *Future Man* (Overman et al.), I am producing ever new reality. There must be thousands and thousands of them by now. As in a time-lapse of sprouting, I feel I am not still but move with microscopic pulsations, turning around and aside in sync with my surroundings. The moment I notice this net of coordinates, it expands and starts sucking me in as a black hole—a wormhole to be precise: it has a funnel shape. We move from inside—outwards—inwards. It is a pulsating rhythm of movement.

In an instant, I move with massive leaps, skipping fragments of the worlds. For an outsider, I am still. The world-fragments open up as soon as I touch them and burst into pieces. The glowing, pulsating, coordinating net is a Deleuzo-Guattarian tracing. They are like stars in constellations: far apart yet making drawings in the sky. I focus and see one map, another, more, they burst the moment I see them. Unfocused I see more, almost all of them together in their (our) potentiality. Maslow spoke of creativeness as an ability to bring together “dissonances of all kinds”, and its constructiveness depends “in part on the inner integration of the person” (65). I feel the dissonances show the way, not fatefully impose it but rather raise the gilded cover. They are the secret language within that Colombian poet and muralist Rodas Quintero (Señor Ok) spoke about. It is the exteriority-within (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*) that one explores in becoming.

The thinking-in-movement (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*) of world-building is an open-ended process (Wolf), and “sometimes a conclusion is just what happens when you’re done thinking,” summarized Henson (*Aftershocks* 823).

CONVERGENCE

Pandemic is the time-space of the “Convergence” of the multiple realms—a cosmic event of the alignment of the worlds (Taylor), which becomes the window of opportunity to form new alliances through time, space, and dimensions, alliances with multiple Selves and Others, and as a collaborative co-creative effort to make the change, to survive, to stay sane under sensory deprivation conditions (M. Wells 149; Charlo), and to become more. I raise my eyes to the sky and, as if in multiple exposure, my memory visualises the Convergence scene from Marvel’s *Thor: The Dark World* (Taylor). The intra-active (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*) and open nature of the Convergence prevents it from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy as it is often discussed in the science fiction (Wasserman).

I write with ink the script on a paper. I put the paper on the balcony floor in the sun and place an ice cube on it.¹ The bubbles become like a window to read the letter, or, maybe, to look at me. In an instant, everything starts moving, the cube begins to rewrite the text together with the wind and sun. The ink seems to flow from the ice cube out onto the paper. The letters become clearer. The ice fortress is fluid, sensitive. A little puddle is a fortress now, its walls are steady yet responsive to the wind, they mimic and transform in a choir—in choreography—the dance of the letters, ink, the leaves and clouds far above yet inside the puddle. The paper is soaked. The ink is on the floor and on my fingers. I do not remember touching the paper. I wonder what is on the other side of the leaf. I turn it over hours later. The paper absorbed the waves of the puddle, the dance of the wind and the rhythm of the letters with them. The waves are now part of it. I am surprised and not: a baby dragon spitting fire looks back at me from the other side of the ice becoming water becoming air becoming paper waves. Clue 3. The dragon turns its head from side to side in the spatially interrupted dimension, skipping from the floor to the paper. Instantaneously, I feel my palm burning. It held an ice cube hours ago. I would feel it for hours in reminiscence, in expansion, rhythmically. The sensation is in-between bodies, imaginary and present, now and then.

The key to a portal was a note sheet that started appearing on the wall in the mornings. It was slightly blurry but the light notes were quite visible. They were there every time the sun hit the window. They are shadows of the little garden of my backyard. I work in the garden to make the closed brick-walled space somewhat more open with the smell of the leaves, rustling sounds in the wind and under the rain. In the allied response, it gave me that clue. To solve it, I needed more alliances of machines and people, social media and memories. I got up almost abruptly when I saw the note sheet on the wall. I could not unsee it, and Chopin's *Impromptu* filled in the space. With it, the rye fields with scattered red and blue strokes of the poppies and knapweeds brought the warm smell of earth. The windy green forest surrounded it. I wonder if it is the nota-

tion of *Impromptu*. I look for it online. It doesn't look as messy as mine... I leave this window open, and start exploring the possibility of a transcript of the light notation. Camera preserved and digitalized the image to complement my memory. Photoeditor flipped the image and made the tune more obvious. Paper and pencil began reshaping the shadows. Clue 4. A week later someone would post the notation of Stump's *Faerie's Aire* on social media. It was the same kind of notation, "arranged by accident" (Stump).

So, fairies... Indeed. I once hoped for them to settle in my garden. I saw a bird that I believe is a shape shifter or a fairy carrier if not the fairy itself a couple of times on my garden walls. The found notation was liberating as hope—I will find the clue...

Working on this text, I remembered remembering with a surprise earlier during this pandemic a short story I had to write down in 2014. Was it then an echo of today's pandemic? An echo of the convergence event, or the convergence itself revealed at this moment of remembering? The writing of that story was not a process, but rather a thought-image flashed in my head, I believe, as a reaction to the events of the year. It struck me with its preciseness and I had to write it down as a short story before it started haunting me. Almost immediately a title, 'Lock it up,' flashed in, leaving me wondering about the possibilities for its interpretations. Soon after the beginning of the lockdown, the memory of this happening came back as a pulsating flashlight and a refrain. Clue 5. The similarities with my current emotional state and the overall situation struck me then and even more so now when I edit the text. The virus' effect on the body reveals the porosity of the borders within the body between the organs, outside between the bodies, between the body and broader environment, and within the environment itself.

The story is full of refrains and patterning itself. Rereading the story now, I stumble over some images as if over a stone on a path, and the stone moves and speaks or rather sings in a silent but loud voice that goes straight to the brain or pops up inside it. It has the voice of contemporary Russian poet and singer Lisa Monetochka.

Those are the life rhythms of the seventh satellite, echoes of the quantum entanglements between beings in the shared world. Brought from the past, the story and the memory of its appearance stop being a memory as a mere piece from the detached past, but become a tunnel to navigate not the line but a time-space network, echoing back and forth in all directions, connecting and hinting at the connections.

DRUMS IN THE DEEP

It is the second week of May: the second month of quarantine almost finished. I slept well; it is a nice sunny morning. I feel anxious or rather I feel awe. The next immediate thought after having pinned down the name for the feeling are the words in my head: I am a beetle. I ask: “Like in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*”? This is so sudden and unexpected that I do not hear the answer or if anyone answered at all. I do not feel those were my thoughts as in logical consequence of causal relations. They were just there, popped up, floated up to the surface. Their suddenness amazed me and made me finally write it down in the diary. The first note of the quarantine, even though I have been thinking of doing it since its beginning.

I try to recall my school-time composition on the interpretations of metamorphosis. The first thought is the Jungian archetype of rebirth, of transformation, or rather a thin line between death and life, conscious and unconscious (Main). Various Google search results also speak about creativity, cooperation, and an inevitable change without losing one’s integrity that can come with a little thing that is easy to overlook. Was it something I dreamed about that day? Was it rather synchronicity, “the simultaneous occurrence” between inside and outside events (Main)? Or maybe it was that “spooky action at distance” (Einstein 157), the phenomenon of quantum entanglement that Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*) unpacked with her agential realism, or a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome?

I have my eyes closed, still not quite sure whether I am awake or not, I can still feel the emotions of the dream. The distant bark from the streets grows louder as if it is rolling. I almost

can see a pack of different sizes, colours, forms of ears running, jumping over the knee-high walls of the little green areas between the buildings and a pathway. Some doggies are fighting over a little branch that could be found occasionally in the streets so well cleaned even during the quarantine at least in this part of the city. There are no less than 15 of them. They are happy, free, and purposeful. They run together, enforcing each other's selves. The rising bright fresh yellow sun fills empty streets with happiness and strength highlighted with the well-marked shadows. It makes the dogs fluffier as every hair in their ears shines with the sunlight. They will run till noon more or less, then they all return to their homes to get some rest. People are at home these days. Streets are car-free. My puppy twins' ears raised alert with the first fragment of this morning tune. As if being a slur or a crescendo symbol they merge that melodic sentence. They run together happy, free, and purposeful... The balcony window and my shouting to stop barking at 6 am break the harmony between them and the other barkers, possibly only two or three of them, to be fair. That breaks the connection between the dream, the thought, and the reality. I felt anxious till the afternoon... till when they would come back to get some rest of the heat of the sun. People are at home these days. Streets are car-free. Buses, cars, motorbikes... The streets are busy, the pathways are the same narrow, the forests did not magically grow up. Yet there is something. I feel its pulse.

The feeling of the rhythm of coastal drums was increasing with every day of the quarantine. It was not the suspension sound of the Jumanji drums (Johnston), or ominous Orc drum sounds in the deeps of Moria (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*), but the sound of the rain shower and the sea waves as in the song of Colombian singer Totó la Momposina, *Aguacero de mayo*. It is a thrilling from awe to excitement wave-like motion. Awe comes from recognition: of the sounds, of its volume and multidimensionality, of impulses that her voice and rhythms give my body. The motion starts by itself first nearly invisibly and then with an increasing amplitude. This pulsa-

tion is in the world, in me as I am in it, as I am of it (Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity*). Probably the most accurate way to describe it would be the octopus swimming: an expanding/unfolding then contracting, the tentacles are the multiplicities “lived along lines” (Haraway, *Tentacular Thinking* 2). It is the movement of a flow, transformation, mutation between in and out, myself and the other, thoughts, forms, origins, microscopic and massive, in multiple directions and between the species. In rhythmic sequence it makes me thirsty and satiates me.

While I have been working on this essay, something was forgotten, rediscovered and re-membered, reinserted in the sequence of Self, rewritten anew. Writing this autoethnography was more difficult than I expected not only because I willingly share my vulnerability (Strom), but also because of the constant desire to make the narrative coherent, organised, logical, and to rationally explain what is non-rational. It was not a report of the experience or a journey from the beginning to the end towards a specific purpose. Instead, it was an open process of mattering, in which “‘part’ of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another ‘part’ of the world” (Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity* 817) as parts of this world and its making. The essay was part of the world-building, whose purpose is momentous. It is not relative but relational, part of the complex multi-species (dis)assemblage.

As I migrated between worlds, I found support in the multiverses throughout time and space: my past, present, and future assembled Selves, things around me and their shadows, literature, fellows in the journey of the project that makes this publication. The multiverses are full of clues or portals, ready or in making. They are not clues to how to interpret the worlds. They indicate the in-between, the spaces of co-creation, the openings.

The pandemic reshuffled my stabilized accents of attention from forms and causal linearities towards relating and becoming. It is therapeutic and liberating because the accent is shifted from the uncertainty of the local structures’ mutations towards the uncertainty of world-building. Skipping between the clues was a way to navigate

the uncertainties in trust of the larger logic of relations between the worlds in making. It was the result of this trust, of looking for the allies, of listening to the new openings.

Now, looking back at the text, I see how its elements interact with each other and acquire new meanings with every new reading, as they open up new clues to navigate and re-story the experience. It would still be to a certain extent a selected piece frozen in time and space, yet, I hope, its open form would keep it a living breathing and pulsating experience.

++++++, types my dog... He wants me to stop and rub his belly. I stop and that becomes the conclusion.

Clues

Clue 1. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/vNr8UPnvqmMPbRDb6>

Clue 2. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/K16A1sc2JKXeBTpi9>

Clue 3. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/WYqPJ2DGeQr5Xrv3A>

Clue 4. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/1uaasU2gAq7qXZ1E7>

Clue 5. <https://www.golovatinamora.info/lock-it-up>

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NOTES

1. An exercise provoked by Prompt 7 "Observing, sensing and sense-making" of the collaborative series of exercises/prompts developed by Anne Harris, Annette Markham and M. E. Luka in May-June 2020.↵

SATOH'S DANCE OF ANGELS AS A DRAMATURGICAL
DISCOURSE SEEKING AND DOUBTING THE YOUNG
GENERATION'S REVOLUTION

DARKO SUVIN

To the memory of my friends:

— Yamamoto Gen and Napa

— Sam Noumoff who impelled the beginning

— and her that I call Kazuko, sine qua non

0. INTRODUCTION

Reflecting deep societal and personal fissures scarcely visible on the surface, many forms of art may, at their best, foster through their sensual shapes an estranged way of looking at reified power relationships and existential quandaries, thus helping personal and collective subjects to move toward political clarity (cf. Suvin “What”). Such art opposes the pragmatism or fake realism of the powerful and the conformist that, as the great historian E.H. Carr put it, “excludes four things which appear to be essential ingredients of all political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgement and a ground for action” (85). The new stance may be elaborated before the political movements, as a prefigurative practice, or it may happen after them, as an echo or unfolding; or indeed, in a most interesting case, during the struggles, as an immanent depth probe or taking stock. This is clearly the case of Satoh Makoto’s Kuro Tento group in its performance of *Tsubasa o moyasu tenshi-tachi no butō* (*The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Wings* hereafter, *Dance of Angels*).¹ My horizon for evaluating it is of the kind Ernst Bloch described speaking of music: “This world is not that which has already become but that which circulates within it, which [...] is imminent only in future, anxiety, hope” (1088).

In a previous publication for a specific venue with what I now consider to be an unclear horizon of ‘own’ vs. ‘foreign,’ I have written about the dramaturgic discourse of *Dance of Angels* as compared to its triggering factor, Peter Weiss’s *Marat/Sade*, and their differing relations to the central theme of radical revolution. Now, the earlier discourse about the Kuro Tento, which translates as Black Tent Theatre (hereafter as a rule BTT) play will be enriched by an insistence that this play can be best understood through its most intimate relationship with the great Japanese student and youth rebellion reaching its height in 1969-71.² A comparison with Weiss will only be used at the end as a strategic way to appraise and judge Satoh’s play.

To put my cards on the table, my horizon for evaluating this play is to keep in mind the possibility of humanising power relationships

of the kind Ernst Bloch described speaking of music: “This world is not that which has already become but that which circulates within it, which ... is imminent only in future, anxiety, hope.” (1088). I have written much more about the political implications of a dialectics of “possibility”; however, in this essay I shall omit my reservations about Satoh’s sharp notional rejection of Hegel, who insists on determinate division and specific opposition, “until we come out on the other side – a requirement that seems to me to distinguish this dialectic from the more absolute skepticism of deconstruction” (Jameson 85).

I shall begin with a sketch of some aspects of the Japanese *angura* (underground theatre) stance pertinent to my analysis and then discuss the play’s paradigmatics by means of its dramaturgic agents, spaces, and meaning. The syntagmatics of its flow will be indicated by means of pregnant examples within a dialogue with its Japanese audiences in the midst of the youth revolt, without a full blow-by-blow analysis. Finally, I shall draw a conclusion about the values at stake, oriented toward the horizon of revolution.

1. THE BLACK TENT THEATRE PLAYS DANCE OF ANGELS

Figure 1: Kuro Tendo (BTT) Stage image from 黒テント
<https://btt-tokyo.amebaownd.com/>

1.1. In their "Prospectus 1970," the Theatre Center 68/70 announced a three-months' tour of their "mobile theatre caravan" consisting of two 3.5-ton trucks, and sundry other vehicles "[which] will carry our tent, lighting and sound equipment and a company of 35 people around the country" (10). The black vinyl tent (from which the theatre took its later name, Kuro Tendo 68/71) slung between the two trucks produced a mobile enclosed space of 30 x 15 metres and sloping up to seven meters high, seating up to 300 people; another report speaks of a maximum of 800 people, including standing room.

The Prospectus announced the performance of *Dance of Angels* as "a multileveled collage based at center on Peter Weiss's play [*Marat/Sade*] and [borrowing] from [...] a wide variety of political and other writing" (11). The borrowings ranged from the fantastic and surrealist tradition beginning with Lewis Carroll, to modern activist writings, and to Sartrean existentialism. However, this was all inserted into Satoh's Japanese ascendancies and his own idiosyncratic system, so that here reference will only be made to the radical rewrite of Weiss's historiosophic framework, though I shall mention Benjamin when I discuss the "Angels."

An extraordinarily high degree of both theatre information and theatre sophistication permitted Satoh and his group to enter into a critical dialogue with Weiss's play which amounts to a *counter-project*. In an interview with me, Satoh, the driving force in this collective "total theatre," explained:

"Weiss's play had been a model that moved me. However, *Marat/Sade* placed the normal, non-mad words into a situation of madness. The meaning of these words was seen redoubled by madness. The meaning of these words was seen redoubled by madness. The basic idea of Weiss's play is excellent. But the madhouse itself is in Weiss historically determined by the social system of modern times, born in the French Revolution. For the actors in *Marat/Sade* it is the same to play lunatics or politicians; these are just roles seen from the point of view of normality. Our group took dream instead of madness." (Interview with D. Suvin, Dec. 21 1987)

I shall return to the key concept of dream as compared to Weiss's ambiguous madness of history. Clearly, Satoh and Weiss shared the central preoccupation with radical political change to save the world amid the apathy of a majority of citizens. However, the Satoh group also had some central objections to Weiss, spelled out in his "Comment":

"While having everything develop in parallel, I also want our uncertainties, Weiss's uncertainties, to remain alive and to actually appear on stage. [...] [T]o force bourgeois consciousness and proletarian consciousness off to opposite extremities of history [...] is to presuppose salvation through historical dialectic." (21-22)

This final analysis of Satoh's will itself be critically examined in this essay. Nonetheless, it will be taken as the statement of his very original critical sensitivity, which can be queried as to its ideological horizon and consistency but not as to its self-awareness. It developed within the theatre's fundamental feedback between performance and audience that changes both (cf. Suvin, "Performance").

1.2. If *Dance of Angels* is a counter-project to *Marat/Sade*, it is also the (up to that time) most vivid Japanese repudiation of the European-style, naturalist or 'realist,' *shingeki* theatre. Born at the beginning of the 20th century as part of the modernization of Japan, and looking to Ibsen and Stanislavski as its patron saints, *shingeki* appeared to the *angura* theatres of the 1960s generation as not only hopelessly out of touch with their problems but also as a major problem itself, precluding any possible solution. With its closed buildings, organized but safely passive audiences, a vaguely liberal or rosewater-socialist individualist progressivism, and a highly respectable if small niche in the society of the budding 'economic miracle,' it was for the young theatre people analogical to the corrupted father to be overcome in the political psychodrama that unfolded during the Anpo anti-militarist demonstrations of the latter 1960s. This was not fair to radical exceptions such as Senda Koreya's Haiyû-za theatre,³ nor to the his-

torical achievements and even a possibly useful role of *shingeki*. Yet the claim by the BTT that *shingeki* “has lost its antithetic *élan* [...]”; rather, it has become an institution” (Tsuno, “Tradition” 11; see also his “Biwa” 9) has a solid nucleus of uncomfortable truth about cooptation into the dominant “repressive tolerance.” *Angura* was born repudiating the *shingeki* hallmarks of 19th-century psychological realism, with ‘round’ characters and a linear plot, plus the privileged status of hallowed written drama in a permanent theatre venue. To the contrary, *angura* was a ‘poor theatre’ in constant conflict with bureaucratic authorities and their egregious abuse of fire-laws and sanitation codes to prohibit performances. When choosing actors, enthusiasm and commitment outweighed professional training that was very rare; few were paid in cash, working conditions were poor and precarious (cf. Eckersall 41 and passim). While words remained important for *angura*, they were in frequent interaction with music, noises (such as the Angels’ motorcycles), dance, and song in fluid and rapidly changing imaginary spaces that emphasised body-centredness. The actor’s body was the same body as in political demonstrations yesterday, it was supposed to be more intelligent than the words it spoke. Youth mobility claimed the freedom so far reserved for businessmen and the jet set; the *angura* poverty and wandering broke out of the loved or hated bourgeois salon of supposedly realist dramaturgy, and its troupe collectivism—though often accompanied by a firm guiding nucleus—broke with actor individualism.

Satoh’s generation had also gone back to the repressed popular culture of the century’s beginning, in part harking back even to some pre-Meiji cultural traditions. The “small theatres” organized around *auteur*-directors, playing in narrow basement rooms, in discos, over coffee-houses, within the precincts of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, or under elevated superhighways, revived some elements of the plebeian—popular or bohemian—theatricality of street entertainers, sideshows, cabaret or vaudeville (cf. on *manzai* Tsurumi, chapter 4), and improvisations, which “had never lost their [...] spark completely” (Buruma 4, cf. Raz 36). The burgeoning popular music in which their generation was immersed was grafted onto that: Satoh’s *Woman Murdered in Oil-Hell* was a rock-musical adaptation of Chika-

matsu's puppet play, and *Dance of Angels* is halfway to a rock musical, with music by four composers, of which the best known was the protesting folk-singer and songwriter Okabayashi Nobuyasu.⁴ These theatres had also looked at the re-exhumation of Japanese folklore, often rather theatrical, pioneered by Yanagida Kunio and Origuchi Shinobu, and the attendant photo-albums of archaic feasts and performances.

Finally, the *angura* visual *écriture* was shaped by two major influences. The major graphic influence on the media avidly consumed by the young was Tadanori Yokō—from comics and graffiti through posters and other commercial illustrations to the immensely popular *yakuza* movies; in theatre, surprising conceptualizations of space and lengthy time were first seen in the dance-dramas of Hijikata Tatsu-mi in the 1950s-60s (cf. Richie, also Watanabe). In his wake came the poetic and grotesque drama theatre of Terayama Shûji, and then the generation of younger dramatists and theatre groups, among which Kara Jurô's "Red Tent" and the early phase of Suzuki Tadashi were the most cognate to Satoh's collective. At this time of mass explosion of *manga* in weekly publications and then on TV, the link between comics and activism was well known. Many *manga*, eagerly read by intellectuals and male students, dealt with past peasant revolts and Japanese history, as well as directly with Mao, the Burakumin pariahs, poverty, oppression, class warfare, and the Anpo movement itself (cf. Andrews 129). *Manga*-like bold simplifications and cinematic cuts were, to my mind, a major component of Satoh's style.

From *angura*'s founding gesture, Fukuda Yoshiyuki's *Document No. 1* of 1960, it was not only "played as a parallel discourse to simultaneously occurring events of the protest struggle," it also aspired to be "a process of making theatre from protest, [where] the gap between the human and political dimensions of reality was reduced, and protest activity ideally and symbolically became a form of art and vice versa" (Eckersall 49). While there was no pretence that the stage was reality, reality often became theatricalised; the German Idealist conception of 'two realities,' the low pragmatic and the high artistic one (still observed by *shingeki*), no longer fully applied.

Within this constellation, Satoh and the BTT clearly emerged as the most intelligently political unit, at the extreme anti-militarist pole of the New Left and youth movements of the latter 1960s in which they were deeply involved. As the whole movement, they were also strongly against existing ideological and power hierarchies, thought not without tensions of their own between plebeian impulses from below and their top power group of writers and intellectuals. Satoh himself (born 1943) had since 1966 written a trilogy of short plays and three full-length plays; in the following decades he became one of the most ambitious and sophisticated playwrights, as well as directors and theatre organizers, of Japan. Already in the preceding play *Nezumi Kozō the Rat*, his central preoccupation had been with the coopted failures of plebeian, potentially revolutionary subversion. In *Dance of Angels*, written and performed during the hectic months at the height of the youth revolt, this preoccupation became thematically foregrounded, and the play grew to be not only the culmination of his work so far, but the clearest depth intervention of the whole *an-gura* wave 1960-71. In this case, the consubstantiality of theatre and youth rebellion took the most interesting form in which a part of the movement being as it were the organ for a criticism of the whole.

2. INTERPRETATION: DRAMATURGIC AGENTS AND THEIR SPACETIMES AS METAPHORIC STRUCTURE

Figure 2: Structure of Satoh's Play.

Satoh's play has a four-level structure. One each is built around his three types of collective dramaturgic agents—Angels, Birds, and Winds—while the fourth level is the 'authorial voice,' or *intentio operis*, as manifested through songs with music, and slogans projected on the screen at the furthest end of the tent.

Figure 3: The Dance of Angels who burn Their Own Wings: The Black Tent Theatre as it was arranged for the 1970 production (in Goodman, David G. *Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods*. Sharpe, 1988, 290).

The imaginary spaces are hierarchical insofar as each has a dominant and a subordinate species: Birds command Angels, and Angels send forth Winds to sound the past; yet the Angels are in rebellion, culminating in the armed insurrection of the diseased Angel Red. The physical space is also carefully tri-partitioned into: 1) a circular area at the further end—as seen from the audience—divided into four movable pie-shaped wedges raised to unequal heights, called *kichigai basha*, “Lunatic Landau,” and housing the Winds; 2) a small high area at the other end, overlooking the rest of the acting and audience space, and called *hana no shindai*, “Flower Bed,” housing the Birds; 3) the ground in between these two spaces, housing the Angels and eventually their motorcycles. Yet the spaces are not rigidly partitioned but elastic; while remaining roughly tied to a given type of dramaturgic agents, they do at some points admit others. In par-

ticular, the Angels are not only spatially but also in terms of plot the central bearers of this play, communicating with and entering into both other spaces. At least as important as fixed architectural space, and probably more so, was the space created around the dramaturgic agents by their looks, gestures, actions, and words. The Angels were dressed in blue jeans with beads until the final scene, when their dress dramatically changes and they sprout white wings. The Birds were in pure white with large wings; they screeched and moved like ungainly birds of prey. The Winds were dressed in rags, they had no wings, and enacted most of the Marat-Sade conflict remaining from Weiss's play. Any interpretation of *Dance of Angels* has to construct the paradigm of the play by finding a meaning for these agential species, and for their relation to each other as well as to the manifest epico-lyrical level of songs and slogans. (Such an interpretation would finally have to be integrated by means of a feedback to the full syntagmatic flow of this ballad-play, which I cannot do here. Let me only note that the flow was immensely appealing in its use of sound and movement interacting with words, yet rather cryptic even for its original audience.)

Figure 4: "The Birds dance before their King." Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*. Photograph n.d.

2.2. None of these three agential signifiers is easy to read; much would depend on the way they are performed. However, the *Winds* are the least difficult. In Japan, an open country that traditionally depended on winds, their power—clearest in the typhoons—is a traditional theme of history (for example, the *kamikaze* or Divine Wind that saved the country from Mongol fleets) while in lyrical poetry from the *wakas* on they have to do with passion. In Satoh's play, the division into Red and Grey Winds is to be read as *empty and self-destructive power*, much akin to the ongoing youth revolt factions. The Winds were for Satoh a swirling tempest "of passion and delusion" (*Dance of Angels* 310), with the foci of bodily, individual passion and self-expression on one hand, and the cerebral, political passion and revolution on the other (the Red and the Grey). They oscillate between collective and individual enactments, so that Sade is principally presented by Red Wind 1 and Marat by Grey Wind 1—the Old Left

colour of blood red for revolution supplanted by the tired grey of abstraction.

The *Angels*: there are heavenly flying beings in the Japanese tradition, and in the science-fictional Astro Boy in *manga* read by most boys between 1952 and 1968, but not really angels as divine messengers. I assume that for the BTT they were suggested by and then re-fashioned from Walter Benjamin. His Angelus Novus (itself strongly reinterpreted from a Klee painting) is the personification of history, swept along by the wind that blows from Paradise, looking backward at a landscape of catastrophically heaping rubble, which is the unfolding past (84-85). The Benjaminian tempest called Progress has caught in the Angel's open wings, it does not allow him to stop and redeem the dead and the rubble; he is carried along in horror backwards toward the future. Satoh's *Dance of Angels* is a blend of the US Hells Angels bikers (already used in his modernisation of Chikamatsu—see Goodman "Satoh" 173-79), popularised as an emblem of counter-cultural youth through US movies, and of an almost Benjaminian sense of agents existing within catastrophic present history and looking for a way out—or a way of making sense—of it.⁵ They are "messengers from hell" (Theatre 11), and hell is where the present generation (or indeed the whole people) lives. As compared to the Winds, the Angels are *the doubting and questing aspect of the youth revolt* and the Satoh troupe. A special role is reserved to Angel Red, who will be discussed later.

Finally, and most puzzling, what of the *Birds*—ironically defined in Marcusean terms as "the forces of benevolent repression" ("Theatre" 11)? Clearly, they are the hypostasis of existing social hegemony as experienced by Satoh's New Left sensibility: beautiful on surface but a quite negative power—if themselves beset by problems (cf. also Yamamoto interview). Birds have strong associations to a supernal, not earthbound, power. Possibly, their spacetime and power dominance over the Winds and Angels are a laicisation of Japanese *kami* (numina), who are traditionally dangerous (they may be benevolent and/or malevolent) and who, in the tradition derived from one kind of folk theatre, *minzoku geinō*, descend onto the performer (Raz 10-16).

But what are the Birds paradigmatically, within the play? The answer may perhaps be best found if one examines the relationship of the agential spacetime levels to the implied *time-horizons*.

[2.3.] This play is based on a metaphoric or analogical logic, where—in the post-Surrealist tradition—anything may metamorphose into anything else if sufficiently buttressed by connotations brought along by the solicited audience. Within this metamorphic logic, the semi-numinous spaces of theatre (cf. Suvin, “Performance” 15-17) have since Modernism ceased hiding their undoubted links with numinosity. None of this implies religious faith by author or performer: it implies, however, the recognition that major questions of collective salvation have in past human cultures been imaginatively articulated (and also bent) as theological questions. The Japanese cultural and theatrical tradition is perhaps the major enduring case of links with numinosity. Particular spaces or points can even become—indeed, in Esoteric Buddhism the centre of everybody’s being can be reborn into—a purified abode of the divine (Grapard 199, 208, and *passim*).

Figure 5: "Red Wind embraces Red Wind 6" Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*.

As to temporality, I accept David Goodman's analysis that the Angels' position on the ground level—at the end they roar in and then out of the tent—signifies that they are rooted in the same historical spacetime as the audience; in brief, they show forth *historical, goal-oriented time in the present moment*. They come into and go out of the play searching for "the weatherman," inverting the US student revolt song "You don't need a weatherman / To know which way the wind blows," but also connoting its activism. If they do not find a way out of their—and the audience's—hell, they might be condemned to cyclically revolve within it forever (another *topos* of the Japanese

religious tradition). Goodman also rightly notes that the Winds are deputised to present the past. The historical time of the French Revolution—or other analogous revolutions since, most notably the Russian and Chinese ones, as well as of the Second Anpo protest movement—is seen as a dead-end, and this kind of revolution (at least) as past, in all the senses. However, the interaction in which the Angels constantly manipulate, deride, and devalue the already ambiguous enactment of history by the Winds, seems to leave the Angels with no way out either: *historical time as a whole has apparently run into a dead end*. This concept is physically personified in the appearance of the most important dramaturgic agent, Angel Red. He is the only one distinguished from the others (called Angels 1-5) by name, by a half-mask, and by using a drum or trumpet to sometimes function as Weiss' privileged Herald-commentator. Angel Red is thus both “the image of the labyrinthine contradictions of the revolution” (Goodman, “Revolutionary” 119) and, as in Scene Six, suggestive of a helpless *hibakusha* (victim of an atomic bombing, cf. the Fujimoto quote in 3.3). The grotesque half-mask shows him as “the victim of an incurable disease [...] his movements are slow and painful: his gaze wanders aimlessly in space. With the passage of time, his condition will gradually worsen and his [red] spots will increase in number and virulence” (*Dance of Angels* 305).

The events of the play show that the three agential types are both commensurable and different. They are similar insofar as they are all *flying* symbolical fantasy types, derived as much from comic strips of the *Flash Gordon* kind or *manga* as from any ‘high’ tradition (for example, Aristophanes' *The Birds*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or Modernist poetry). But they are distinguished by *degree of power* and by *historical horizon*. Winds and Angels are (to different degrees) *the ruled*: the Winds are ruled more by their own blind passions than by external dictate of the Angels and Birds, the Angels seem ruled more by the external dictate of the Birds than by their also undoubtedly present confusion. The direction of the Angels' search may be unclear or even wrong, but the necessity of the search for a better climate is nowhere put into question. (Indeed, like the Angels, even the King of the Birds complains constantly that he is cold.)

Figure 6: "Scene Seven: Angel Red is restrained by the Birds" Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*.

However, if there is some clarity as to the orientation of the ruled, the temporal horizon of the rulers is not clearly articulated. Within the play's metaphoric logic, the Birds are the most material and least fantastic beings on a scale on whose other end are the Winds, while the polyvalent Angels are ambiguously in the middle—quite earth-bound as today's biking Hells Angels, quite allegorical or transcendental as seekers for a way out of the hell of our society. Thus, while the Birds can and do order the Angels about as their servants, they are not ontologically different from them, nor are they unreachable godheads. It is most important and revealing that Angel Red can at the end of Scene Seven without any absurdity attempt to assassinate the King of the Birds: the attempt is simply foiled by the guards, in strict parallel to an aborted plebeian revolution. I would therefore dissent from the thesis of Goodman, this play's most meritorious and knowledgeable first interpreter, that the Birds are wholly supernal *numina* or that they dream all the other agents (Eckersall 76). They are probably *homological* to the *kami*, as lungs are to gills or Godot is

to God; but it is dangerous to reduce analogy or homology to identity. Rather than divine or meta-historical, they seem to me an image of a powerful and (in Japan for the last seven centuries) undefeated upper-class hegemony. Their historical horizon is neither the present nor the past but *permanence or duration*: in the BTT's main theoretician Tsuno's discussion with me, he saw it as the cyclical time of ruling tradition—Benjamin's enduring return of the same but apparently new. Thus, Goodman's argument that the King of the Birds is God (Jehovah) seems to me unfounded.⁶ That monarch has instead, to my mind, connotations of an ideal-type Emperor (*tennō*), and Tsuno agreed with that: "We [BTT] hated such a recurrence and cast about for ways of destroying it." If so, it would be strange if Satoh (whose play *Nezumi Kozō* is a ferocious attack on tennōism) were to agree that the Emperor is divine, ontologically different from the struggling and fallible people represented in *Winds and Angels*. No ontology need be: the knife bites into the Birds, the tea of the Mad Hatter's party—or of the tea-ceremony—feeds them, nor do they lack politico-existential problems (the motif of "who's that behind me?"). They are not necessarily eternal or divine, nor are they more immaterial than either *Winds* or *Angels*, they are simply—but very weightily—*long-duration upper-class power*.

2.4. In this interpretation, at the end of the play the future is epistemologically unclear but ontologically open (while oppression by supernatural powers would have implied the pre-established closure of classical tragedy). The *future is, as always, contingent*: as Aristotle put it, "it is not necessary that [a sea battle] should take place tomorrow, neither is it necessary that it should not take place, yet it is necessary that it either should or should not take place tomorrow" (182). The revolutionary past is seen as an awful mistake and failure; the present is so far also a misleading failure. Pessimism dominates, but nothing is forever predetermined. At the end, after a full annihilation of the *Winds* and the abortive rebellion of Angel Red: "One entire side of the tent suddenly opens onto the outside world. The Angels come roaring out of the distance on their motorcycles and drive into

the tent in a cloud of exhaust smoke and dust. They are clothed completely in white” (*Dance of Angels* 344). They dance and sing “The Lunatic Landau Rock.” Since that Lunatic Landau (*kichigai basha*), derived from Weiss’ Lunatic Asylum (*kichigai*), had been the scene of the total collapse of the Winds playing at Marat and Sade; since that energetic song is “an unabashed paean to youthful optimism” (Goodman, “Sato” 270); and since—as their final gesture—Angel 1 picks up Angel Red’s dropped knife, a clear impression arises that a battle has been lost but the undecided war goes on.

Yet, finally, the play remains ambiguous: the “audience ‘release’ is then in its turn cancelled” by “a return to our miserable reality and to the beginning of the play” (Sato, Interview), symbolised by its first and last slogan “THIS IS A DREAM,” now “flash[ing] on and off” while the company sings the highly ambiguous final song “So Long For Now” (*Dance of Angels* 344-45). The play as a whole clearly shows forth not only a painful contingent defeat but also the collapse of the myth and horizon of predetermined, linear progression toward revolution, shared in Sato’s spacetime by the Old and the New Left. Their kind of struggle, linked with collective and/or individual terrorism, cannot be won. For Sato, “The play has two aspects: 1/ writing it meant we [the BTT] didn’t go out and throw bombs, which we probably would have done otherwise; 2/ it was designed to overcome our socio-political situation or condition” (Sato, Interview). If the Angels, still waiting for an updated Carrollian “weatherman rabbit” (*Dance of Angels* 344), have learned nothing from the experience with the Winds, defeats will go on. This is possible, but remains to be seen.

3. REVOLUTION, DRAMATURGY, AND A HISTORICAL LESSON

Finally, what is the historical lesson to be drawn from *Dance of Angels*?

3.1. Disalienation and Politics: The Involution of Revolution

My horizon is one of human creativity as emancipation, a disalienation that pivots upon self-determination and self-government leading to direct democracy. I would argue that to a large extent “the movement for ‘student power’ [...] is a natural descendant of [the revolutionary tradition of workers’ councils]” (Stedman Jones 52). I have come to some insights about that tradition in a book diagnosing ‘socialist’ Yugoslavia, and I briefly present here what may be of general validity (see much more in Suvin, *Splendour* 298–317 and *passim*). Matters of political economics, power, class conflicts or regroupings, and ideology are to my mind *means* of human liberation, an exodus from bondage. As Marx told us once and for all, the titanic forces of production called up by capitalism are fettered by political power relationships, which are in the age of world wars increasingly enforced by the capillary State in the service of by now mainly destructive capital. Very simply, capital means the power of command over labour and its products, wrote Marx in many variants (for example *Capital* 1, chapter 11): the emancipation of labour, the disalienation of our lives, means that *labour commands itself*. All of us proletarians, living from our work, associate to command ourselves. The horizon to be striven for may also be defined as freedom as creativity (cf. Kosik 67–68 and 124–25)—that is, *a marriage of work and poetry*.

The insurgent youth of the 1968 moment thus to my mind rightly felt that spontaneous plebeian democracy is the only way to counteract not only the deep physical misery of the manual workers, but also the “moral and civic” misery of all those working within authoritarian and hierarchical organisations (Supek 139 and *passim*). The concept of self-management, in French *autogestion*, was the only

one that could link the New Left goals of self-realisation and direct democracy in collective decisions, new lifestyles, and new ways of exercising power with minimum or no violence (cf. for Europe Gilcher-Holtey 120). Here we cannot do without the lesson of Gramsci (cf. Suvin, “Communism”). To him, politics is “the central human activity, the means by which the single consciousness is brought into contact with the social and natural world,” since in it “understanding the world and changing it are one”; and this applies to revolutionary attempts at liberty and solidarity as well as – perhaps more than – anywhere else (Hobsbawm 321). Yet just here the Left had largely got mired into a malignant mutation: Stalinism as a structure of feeling—which was, as argued earlier, for Satoh and some of the factions a lay analogy to tennoism. Its belief in necessary progress was by Gramsci scathingly called a “[fatalistic] ideological aroma [...] rather like religion or drugs” (*Selections* 336). Stalinism’s monolithic centralism, with one-way traffic from top to bottom, is a parody of Marxism and communism, or their perfectly alienated form (cf. Petrović, *U potrazi* 219 and “Humanism” 2-3). This inner organisation of the increasingly restrictive Party and its State was, as Mladen Lazić wittily notes, an image and allegory of the very structure of a new oligarchy as a new collective ruling class (42; cf. also at length in Suvin *Splendour*, *Lessons*, and “Communism”). Monolithism abhors supple mediations and leads to despotic suppression of contradictions, and simultaneously to ad hoc compromises trampling on principles.

Thus all revolutionary situations of the half century after Lenin’s death have been caught in what I have analysed in *Splendour* chapter 6 as the central communist contradiction of emancipative disalienation and power alienation. Examples of this abound in the Japanese 1968 moment, where the youth factions’ refusal of Stalinism and of the very partial Leninism in the Comintern tradition was organisationally constitutive but ideologically only partial. As Stalin liked to recall, his type of party was in some ways an army (see Suvin, *Splendour* 306); as he did not say but practiced, it was also a Church. This salvational monolithism was bequeathed to the Third International and all of its parties. Problems of a group intervening into politics as if it were an army with a Church core, and a double mystique of mil-

itancy and triumphalism, were to return with a vengeance in most 20th-century revolutionary situations and movements.

Yet any such self-proclaimed vanguard party aiming to conquer State power faces at least two initial problems. First, knowledge of the real contradictions in and around it cannot be arrived at without free debate with all groups of people working to clarify them, which debate the clerical pretence of party omniscience tends to stifle. To the contrary, it is essential to dismantle the trinitarian monster State-Party-Ideology (cf. Althusser 122), especially pernicious when official theory is supposed to be identical to reality, as in Borges's story "On Exactitude in Science," where map becomes territory. This would include expunging from any vanguard party all traces of a monotheist Church as guardian of a static Truth and inquisitor into heresies. Knowledge and learning wilt under authoritarian methods, but quicken and thrive in a polyphony of voices, a comradely competition. Second, the militarism within "the [Party] organising structures, copying those of the [bourgeois] State" (Althusser 123), led to very costly mistakes, and to a souring and haemorrhage of often the best activists. To paraphrase Marx's *Thesis* 3, the educators have to be educated.

Satoh and his group's nucleus knew most of this well: all shades of the then current youth movement abhorred Stalinism, many sympathised with a spread between existentialism and Trotsky.. It is this syndrome in the youth movement, and especially its activist factions, that *Dance of Angels* aims to articulate and unfold as to its possibilities and costs. It does so more in lyrical suggestions and a not fully clear allegory about revolt and power than in what Satoh called "to make straightforward statements about those things to which straightforward statements are inappropriate" ("Comment" 21). This is why he refused what he—I think not quite rightly—saw as Peter Weiss's progressivist pseudo-dialectics of an upward march of history, within which problems such as the personal vs. the political, or indeed killing in the service of higher aims, can be justified. Symmetrically opposed, in Satoh's play not only do all of Weiss's protagonists, exemplifying the varying shades of revolution (Marat, Sade,

and Corday), fail and meet a nonsensical death, but all these figures become faceless Grey or Red Winds. At the first culmination of their debate, in Scene Two of *Dance of Angels*, Sade seduces Marat into a homosexual anal penetration during the latter's frenzied revolutionary speech: the violent mockery of the gap between saying and doing is what Satoh somewhat defensively called a "physicalisation" that devalued both ideology and all surface realism. As he put it to me,

"The words 'history,' 'revolution': such concepts do not fit the [Japanese protest] events. The New Left is in this respect identical to the Old Left, their action was different but they use the same words; the New Left does not have its own, new words."
("Interview")

Thus he had a problem of scenic *écriture*, and invented his whole new grunge outlook based on strange and estranged dramaturgic agents.

Refusing the importance of Weiss's opposition between political and sexual revolutionary, the very notion of revolution—its character and components—is being unpacked for behavioural inspection: perhaps sex and revolution can fuse, but only in sterile frenzy that is nonetheless a kind of suicidal self-affirmation? It would then be a collective cousin of, say, Ōshima's *Ai no korīda* (*Empire of Senses*) movie, within a frequent Japanese equation of eroticism with death, and Satoh wrote in 1973 a play on this famous story, *Abe Sada: A Comedy*. This equation seems also to have been a dark undercurrent of the New Left structure of feeling at least in France, from Sade to Bataille, Genet, and the very Parisian Weiss, collapsing Eros and Thanatos (on that tradition in theatre and France, cf. Gritzner ed.).

3.2. The Audience, Japanese Passive Dreaming

In Satoh's ideological debate with Weiss, he opposed his central vision or macro-metaphor of *dream* to the German's *madhouse*. If the play was not only for the necessary personal and group self-understanding, who was the play ideally for and who really interacted with it as audience? The play was being written in 1969, at the height of

the protest movement in the universities, and it toured, being constantly adjusted by Satoh, from October 1970 to January 1971, immediately after this highest wave. It was written mainly for the potential young audience, generally under 30 years old (see Yamamoto, "Interview," and Yoshida), many of whom were still engaged at Sanrizuka or in violent city and university conflicts. In places, it adopted some of the protest modes, such as yelling slogans through a microphone. Tsuno and Yamamoto believed the number of *Dance of Angels* performances was around 45 in 1970 and around 20 in 1971; in 1970 the play was in repertoire for about four months, with two major stretches of playing every day and two major intervals of pause. The number of spectators at a performance varied between 20 and 400 with an average of around 200, or perhaps a total of 13,000 spectators. The young audience consisted of: 1) those who enjoyed the rock-music atmosphere, sometimes joined by famous jazz or rock singers; 2) a better informed and more intellectual group with a very strong interest in all kinds of cultural novelty (music, theatre, movies); 3) finally, those interested in politics, except that at the time this included a cultural revolution (Tsuno, "Interview"). To the rebels the play said *tua res agitur*: What is the sense of your struggles? Can you win? Are they really pure as the activist factions believe? What time-horizon of the population as a whole are you acting within, favourable or unfavourable to our project of radical change?

David Goodman puts it precisely:

"Instead of Peter Weiss's question, 'Marat or Sade?' the question raised by Satoh and his coauthors is, 'If not Marat-Sade, then what?' If revolution conceived along the lines of the French model cannot be accepted, then how is revolution to be conceived? Is it really a possibility? [...] One of the things that made *The Dance of Angels* an intense theatrical experience, bringing thousands of people out into the bitter cold of winter nights to sit for nearly four hours in an unheated tent, was the way this general philosophical theme was taken up as an urgent issue for the theatre." ("Dance" 293)

A most revealing event occurred when the Chûkaku faction invited the BTT to participate in a rally-meeting of theirs at Hibiya Park, as recounted to me:

“There the first song of *Dance of the Angels*,” “The Ballad of Fallen Birds,” was sung. Also, the Kuro Tento joined with “Brain Police,” a radical anarchist rock-group who sang the “Song of the Red Army Soldier” (derived from the young, anarchist Brecht and meant there for [quite a different] Red Army of the 20s but in Japan applicable to the faction just developing then). The songs were severely criticized by the Chûkaku students (in fact fist-fights broke out at the meeting) on two levels: 1) we are fighting by putting our bodies on the line, while you (the Kuro Tento) are only singing and dancing (this mainly about the *Dance of the Angels* song); 2) you are being ironical about the revolution (about both songs).

The Kuro Tento felt that a revolution should be new, they were simultaneously denying and renewing the concept of revolution. The denial was what angered the Chûkaku faction.” (Tsuno, “Interview”)

“I should add this is one retrospective and incomplete account. Another eyewitness wrote me he saw no fistfights but vigorous and invigorating plebeian arguing on important matters between stage and audience” (Lummis, e-mail to DS of Aug. 30, 2021).

The play’s moment of intervention was well chosen. In retrospect it seems clear, just as the Satoh group suspected, that by roughly 1970 the Japanese New Left, because of “repression, fatigue and disillusionment” (McCormack 133), ceased animating a broadly based militant movement and became navel-gazing. The activist factions decayed to isolated *groupuscules*, not rarely to proactive violence including mutual murders; its eventual culmination in the so-called Japanese Red Army internal murders and the Antijapanese Front turn to terrorism, which fully internalised the murderous tennōist and Stalinist time horizon, came to confirm Satoh’s doubts in spades. They marked the sorry end of this youth movement, dovetailing with

the consumerist “thoroughgoing depoliticizing effect” of anticipating the benefits of prosperity, however limited (Marotti, *Money* 312) after the first Anpo protest wave.

Thus, Satoh’s creativity was extremely sensitive, indeed clairvoyant, about nuances in his generation’s structure of feeling and imagination; but he was not much interested in a cause-and-effect story with identifiable real existents. Since in his experience events in the phenomenal world did not lead to significant changes, it is ontologically and moreover ethically devalued: only the corrupt *shingeki* and other commercialised enterprises delve into such ‘realistic’ nuances. Individual dreams or nightmares of groups within the collective stupor of the Japanese national imagination or subconscious provide two circles in this descending vortex. They can be seen as corresponding to the Angels under the Birds. It only remains for some Angels—deputised by the BTT—to stage a ‘thought experiment’ using Weiss’s play, as one dissects a corpse’s organs to find the cause of its demise, in order to envisage and perhaps exorcise a similar fate for oneself, and we have the three agential levels of *Dance of Angels*. Adding to this an ironic self-reflection in the lyric mode (rock songs) and epic mode (slogans projected on the screen) completes the whole Chinese-box structure of this play.

3.3. Final Questions for Satoh’s Play

Before the tour, the BTT “Prospectus 1970” (see Theatre) noted bitterly: “...we have crumpled, dusty plans for revolutions of varying proportions stuffed away in the secret corners of our minds. But we have been atomic-bombed and nothing changed. We have been occupied by a foreign army and nothing changed. We have organized demonstrations of literally millions of our citizens and nothing changed” (10). Japanese history after 1945 looked to them shipwrecked on the rock of a hugely inert popular imagination. Thence the central macro-metaphor of *dream*. In the interview with me, Satoh concluded:

"If one wanted to catch, if one could translate, the Japanese youth movement at the time, it would be a dream and not madness. Dream has no linear time, only a present: everything is simultaneous. As for me, when I directed the play, I found the Red Angel dreams most deeply. Weiss asks "Who is right?"; we ask "Who dreams most deeply?" At the time, we felt that dream and consciousness are not opposed concepts."

This thumbnail sketch of Japanese history 1945-70 in terms of an overwhelmingly stagnant popular imagination underlying any seemingly significant surface changes is confirmed in a scene of Satoh's *Nezumi Kozō* play, the predecessor to *Dance of the Angels*, alluding to Hiroshima with the ironical title of "Dream." All the major BTT ideologues agreed with this notion (cf. Tsuno, "Of Baths" 142-43, or Yamamoto, "World" 218). The dead end is conveyed by Fujimoto, when she notes that neither two atomic bombs nor "modernisation" have changed

"the dreaming habits of the Japanese people. It is for this reason that [BTT] drove so relentlessly through the 'causeway of dreams' toward an answer to the question of just exactly who we are [...] [Today], the fact that there was a war and the fact that it ended with the dropping of the atomic bomb have all but been forgotten. [...] For us, history is neither repetitive nor evolutionary [...] [It] only represents a bad dream soon to be forgotten. [...] [We] remain in eternal pursuit of our own, individual dreams. Then those dreams called nightmares are really dreams within a dream, and nothing has ever happened. But really?" (140-41)

Satoh's overarching metaphor of dream seems to me here to be oscillating between a characterisation of Japanese political ontology as such, and of the youth movement's general failure to awaken the people. It is thus a fairly loose epistemological metaphor—similar to Joyce's Stephen Dedalus exclaiming that history is a nightmare, but now without a possibility of waking up—rather than a rigid ontological denominator (for its tradition cf. Righter). Not by chance "dream" is also by far the most popular and abused word in Japanese popu-

lar sentimental songs (Minami 119), and probably also in the theatre, from Nō plays to *angura*.

The final question for Satoh was, then, whether the *kairos* or messianic time of a Revolution now sick unto death (the Red Angel) could be reconciled to the dreaming Japanese time of eternal return, the “*tennō* time [that] can organize both the depths and the surface of history” (Tsuno, “Interview”).

The vision of Weiss’s *Marat/Sade* (see Suvin, “Weiss’s”) is one of an arrested and at that epoch defeated revolution—though still supremely necessary and never quite given up for lost. The nihilist Sade directs the play in an asylum and the activist Marat sits in a bloody bathtub with skin disease; the bourgeoisie is in power and reason has failed to change reality. The revolution has failed because it was happening in a madhouse-cum-prison world, and we are left with a blend where a post-mortem psychodrama dominates over tenuous, if still existing, expectations of future revolt. Satoh took over Weiss’s thematics, expanded his syntactics of circles within a circle, but everted his semantics. As he put it: “our emotion for the Red Angel provides the main energy of the play; it is also a goodbye to the Red Angel” (Satoh, “Interview”). And further: “We tried to join the European concept of revolution as linear break to the concept of the circle from which they [the Angels] strive to be released; but nobody can be released.” Half a dozen years later, amid the failing of a greater political upheaval in a country of stronger ‘dreaminess’ than Germany or England, Satoh had even fewer certainties and lower hope than Weiss, but perhaps more experience and patience for a long analysis of such a waning. His summation was: “1970 was the year when the traditional Old Left in Japan expired. It was also [Satoh says he understands this now, in retrospect from 1987] the beginning of the end of the New Left” (ibid.).

4. IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION: A FINAL QUESTION FOR US

To conclude this survey, leaving it open for further discussion: the old Hegelian and Marxist problem of how to reconcile the arrow and the circle into the contradictory but not arrested spiral of historical

advancement towards humanisation remained before the Black Tent Theatre. The problem was inherent in this group's very constitution and whole development, in the form of the tension between the furthest horizon of Marxian self-government and the role of a charismatic leader.⁷ It remained with Peter Weiss too, from *The Investigation* through *Hölderlin* to his final *Aesthetics of Resistance*. And the problem remains for all of us between the violence and the performance of words: not as archive, but as assignment and horizon of work towards a self-production of embodied and efficacious subjecthood, personal and collective. In which, as Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach has it, there would be "a coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity."

This analysis thus needs arrives at the crucial problem of "Words and Violence" (the well-chosen title of the Leiden workshop on 1968 for which this essay was redone): the ruling Powers-that-Be, pivoting on the State apparatus, imply a huge and repetitive use of word formulae *insofar as the Word guides latent or patent Violence* (cf. Lefebvre 72 and *passim*). It is characteristic of such apparatuses in all of the many States in which revolts happened during the 1968 moment, that none has so far even attempted to publicly draw a fair and respectful account of them. Whoever wishes to contest them, must find new, liberating formulae in the wake of 1968 to spark the dissident imagination. At its best, the art of a Peter Weiss, Satoh Mākoto, or Akasegawa Genpei (as explained in the brilliant book by Marotti), is here a portable *exemplum* of how to avoid both brutality for its own sake—which would mean capitulating to the rulers' stance and dogmatism—and 'weak thought' words bereft of political force and power. The first avoidance seems to me best formulated in the slogan of the Chûkaku and Kakumaru factions: *hanteikokushugi*, *hansutārinshugi* (against imperialism and against Stalinism), which we should try to actualise for our times. Here the concept of counter-violence as legitimate self-defence might be the key one.

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IMAGE NOTES

Cover Image: Kôga Hirano. *The Dance of Angels who Burn Their Wings*. Poster (offset lithograph on paper), 1970. Image available at https://www.si.edu/object/dance-angels-who-burn-their-wings%3Aachndm_1995-104-2.

Figure 1: Kuro Tento (BTT) Stage image from 黒テント. Image available at <https://btt-tokyo.amebaownd.com/>.

Figure 2: Drawing of the relations of Satoh's play (D. Suvin).

Figure 3: The Dance of Angels who burn Their Own Wings: The Black Tent Theatre as it was arranged for the 1970 production in Goodman, David G. *Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods*. Sharpe, 1988, 290.

Figure 4: "The Birds dance before their King." Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*. Photograph n.d.

Figure 5: "Scene Six: Red Wind embraces Red Wind 6" Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*.

Figure 6: "Scene Seven: Angel Red is restrained by the Birds" Photo by Mikoshiba Shigeru in David G. Goodman. *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*. Cornell, 2010. Cover image credit: Mikoshiba Shigeru, *The Dance of Angels Who Burn Their Own Wings*.

NOTES

1. The play as written and performed is hereafter cited as *Dance of Angels* from the second translation by David G. Goodman in his 1988 book. It was written by four of the Center's playwrights, Satoh Makoto, Yamamoto Kiyokazu, Katō Tadashi, and Saitō Ren, but with an overall plan by the first two and with the lion's share of writing, final integration, performance direction, and a large number of rewritings by Satoh. The Kuro Tendo 68/71 theatre group is further referred to as BTT.

I do not propose here to enter into a discussion of the very frequent uses of prior texts in writing the play. They range from Lewis Carroll, Dostoevsky, and *Maldoror* to modern activist and rebellious writings, dramatic and other (LeRoi Jones's novel *Dante's Hell*, Brecht, Trotsky, etc.), as well as to Sartrean existentialism (well known in Japan and to Satoh's group—cf. Goodman, "Post-Shingeki") and contemporary poetry.

I mentioned in a prior essay (see note 2 below) the excellent knowledge the Satoh group had of *Marat/Sade* (cf. the Yamamoto interview). However, I believe they much underrated that play's complexities and ambiguities, which I discuss at length in Suvin, "Weiss's." They mentioned Weiss's uncertainties, but for their own legitimate purposes they made out of him a strawman believing in predetermined Hegelian dialectics within linear history and "forc[ing] bourgeois consciousness and proletarian consciousness off to opposite extremities of history" (see section 1.1), which Weiss's agonising confrontation between Marat and Sade in my opinion cannot be made to bear. In other words, Satoh and his collaborators were political dissidents against the ruling culture and power but rather on the youth anarchist side within the spectrum of salvational politics.↵

2. It can be found in Suvin, "Satoh's." However, this essay was edited without consulting me: in particular, the whole system of notes and reference has been changed, with many mistakes in names and titles. Outside of this aspect, that publication should now be considered superseded.↵
3. Senda, in whose school Satoh trained, went between the wars through the Proletarian Theatre movement and its repression; he became a not uncritical supporter of BTT. I had the privilege to meet and discuss with him often those years in Tokyo, cf. Suvin "Brief."↵

4. Cf. Yamamoto, "Letter." On music in the European youth protest movement (heavily influenced by US products) see Detlef Siegfried in Klimke-Scharloth eds. 57-70. It was consubstantial with independent spending money of a young generation with extended education years, and in a permanent quandary between 'authenticity' and culture-industry consumerism.

Brandon makes an interesting claim for the Japanese avant-garde theatre's use of imagery and techniques from *nō*, *kyōgen*, *bunraku*, and *kabuki*, but I would say these were strictly subordinated to their purposes.←

5. It seems Satoh himself had not read Benjamin until 1971 (Goodman, "Satoh" 355-56), when he recognised the kinship. However, at least two of Satoh's most intimate collaborators, Yamamoto Kiyokazu and Tsuno Kaitarō, had read Benjamin by 1969; the authors' collective had used for *Dance of Angels* Benjamin's reflections in "On the Critique of Violence" which Yamamoto had read ("Interview"). No doubt, Satoh's early exposure to Christianity (Goodman, "Satoh" 92-95) had also thoroughly familiarised him with the concept of angels, known to the Japanese primarily through the commercial adoption of Christmas, and Benjamin as source remains somewhat hypothetical and of dwindling importance in comparison to the undoubted Satoh-Benjamin convergence in salvational politics. However, the coincidence of an Angel/Wind link within an analogical, though not identical, preoccupation with history and catastrophe in Benjamin and Satoh seems too strong for chance.

As to the Hells Angels, in Satoh's play they had little in common with the historical US gang, one of whose favourite occupation was to beat up Blacks, except their motorcycles and a rebellion against the existing order; the rest is a fantasy derived from the Marlon Brando 1953 movie *The Wild One* and its cultural fallout in the 'outlaw biker' filiation of the 1950s-1960s (see "Outlaw").←

6. Everybody writing on *Dance of Angels* owes a central debt to David G. Goodman, who not only translated it but provided both permanently valid elucidations and a sophisticated interpretive hypothesis for it. I owe him a particular debt for generously supplying me with materials on and Japanese contacts for the play. In all matters concerning the BTT and the post-*shingeki* movement, Goodman is a *sine quo non*. Further, he was qualitatively better informed than I, being both a Japanol-

ogist and a member of the BTT collective at that time. I accept most of his interpretation, but differ from it in a few fundamental points, so that I allot a partly different final meaning to the play. However, it should be clear that a critical dialogue is not a repudiation.

In that vein, I cannot accept his encompassing horizon of Satoh as a Japanese variant of Judaic eschatology, which underlies also all of Goodman's interpretations of this play (for example "Satoh" 265-73 and 359-60). I do not fully share the major premise and I fully disbelieve the minor premise of his syllogism that, since the Birds are *kami* (deities), therefore their King is the Judeo-Christian God or Jehovah ("Notes" 44-45). This interpretation does not seem to follow either logically or historically, even were we to agree the Birds are *kami*: the King of the *kami* (itself a heterodox notion) could at least as well be the Sun Goddess, or indeed the *tennō* as her incarnation. In fact, if one accepts Benjamin's sharp opposition between God and Myth, in which mythical power sets laws and boundaries while divine power destroys them, in which mythical power functions as blood power for its own sake while divine power functions as "clean" power for the sake of that which is living (59-60)—then this play's universe is a mythical and not a divine one. What is more, the Birds' undoubted *kami* analogies (on that tradition cf. Raz 10-16 and passim) do not seem primary or even economical within the play: the metaphor of play as shamanic ritual has clear limits. Goodman's main argument is itself based on inserting this play into Satoh's complete oeuvre and biography, where however the immediate predecessor and seed of *Dance of Angels*, *Nezumi Kozō the Rat* would clearly speak against it, since the play develops as an opposition between the people (sewer-rats) below and tennoism hoodwinking them to return above ground: the metaphor of play as shamanic ritual has clear limits. Satoh's and Tsuno's notion of a deep "tennō time" dominating Japanese masses is almost certainly based on Yoshimoto Taka'aki's writing from 1966 about postwar political "illusions" (*gisei*), such as rationalism, individualism, or democracy, and in particular that the masses' original form of existence (*taishū no genzō*) was symbolised by the Emperor.↵

7. Cf. the rather scathing memories described by Yoshida Hideko (she played Corday), who was traumatised by the directing. I have no way of knowing what the majority of BTT members thought. The self-government idea was well known to the youth revolt—if not through Marx, then at least through the work of Hani Gorō on territorial units (see Tsurumi 151). In fact, if we do not count 'roof organisations' di-

rected from above, such as the Rōen (Workers' Theatre), the Kuro Ten-to tour of this play was the first self-governing theatre tour in Japanese history.⁴

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Rebecca Carlson est anthropologue des médias et professeure associée à l'université Toyo au Japon, au département des sciences et des arts de l'information. Son intérêt actuel pour les frontières et les limites de la science et de la médecine est né d'un intérêt parallèle pour les frontières qui façonnent la circulation des jeux vidéo et de leurs fans. Actuellement, elle étudie la bioinformatique et les efforts visant à mondialiser la recherche scientifique biomédicale au Japon, avec le soutien de la subvention pour la recherche scientifique de la Société japonaise pour la promotion de la science.

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Donatella holds a PhD from the University of Copenhagen and is former Affiliate of the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. She has managed the Arabic speaking community for the international organization Creative Commons from 2007 until 2013. In 2012 she co-founded the website *SyriaUntold*, recipient of the Digital Communities award at Ars Electronica 2014. She

has curated several international art exhibitions and film programs on Syria. She is author and editor of a wide range of books and essays on Arab media and networked technologies. *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria* (Pluto Press, 2018) is her latest monograph. Shot Theory is her most recent essay.

Donatella Della Ratta Donatella Della Ratta est une ethnographe des médias, écrivaine, artiste et conservatrice spécialisée dans les médias numériques et les technologies en réseau, et plus particulièrement dans le monde arabe. Elle est professeure associée de communications et d'études des médias à l'université John Cabot de Rome. Donatella est titulaire d'un doctorat de l'université de Copenhague et a été affiliée au Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society de l'université de Harvard. Elle a géré la communauté arabophone pour l'organisation internationale Creative Commons de 2007 à 2013. En 2012, elle a cofondé le site web SyriaUntold, lauréat du prix des communautés numériques à Ars Electronica 2014. Elle a été commissaire de plusieurs expositions d'art internationales et de programmes cinématographiques sur la Syrie. Elle est auteur et éditrice d'un large éventail de livres et d'essais sur les médias arabes et les technologies en réseau. *Shooting a Revolution : Visual Media and Warfare in Syria* (Pluto Press, 2018) est sa dernière monographie. Shot Theory est son essai le plus récent..

Polina Golovátina-Mora is Associate Professor in Film and Media in Education in the Faculty of Teacher Education at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology – NTNU. Polina holds a PhD in History with emphasis in historiography and research methodology. Her research is informed by posthumanist feminism and critical pedagogy, and focuses on qualitative, art-based, and sensorial research methodology and pedagogy. Polina's research at different moments has covered an intersection between narratives, language, and power, the monstrous as a reflection of current societal issues, theoretical alternatives to traditional views of the nation-state, urban artistic practices, nature and elements in folklore and their social and environmental meanings, as well as questions of memory and creativity. She has published articles and book chapters in Russian, English, and Spanish.

Polina Golovátina-Mora est professeure associée en cinéma et médias dans l'éducation à la faculté de formation des enseignants de l'Université norvégienne des sciences et technologies - NTNU. Polina est titulaire d'un doctorat en histoire, avec une spécialisation en historiographie et en méthodologie de la recherche. Ses recherches s'inspirent du féminisme posthumaniste et de la pédagogie critique, et se concentrent sur la méthodologie et la pédagogie de la recherche qualitative, artistique et sensorielle. À différents moments, les recherches de Polina ont porté sur l'intersection entre les récits, le langage et le pouvoir, le monstrueux en tant que reflet des problèmes sociétaux actuels, les alternatives théoriques aux vues traditionnelles de l'État-nation, les pratiques artistiques urbaines, la nature et les éléments du folklore et leurs significations sociales et environnementales, ainsi que les questions de mémoire et de créativité. Elle a publié des articles et des chapitres de livres en russe, en anglais et en espagnol.

Dan Harris is an international expert in creativity studies combining critical theory and creative practice methods. Harris also writes and researches on performance, gender, and diversity. Harris is the series creator and editor of *Creativity, Education and the Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan), has authored over 100 articles/book chapters and 17 books, in addition to public productions of plays, films, and spoken word performances, and has won over \$2.9 million in competitive research funding since 2010. Harris is currently an Australian Research Council Future Fellow, RMIT Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, and the Director of *Creative Agency* research lab.

Dan Harris est un expert international en matière d'études de la créativité, combinant théorie critique et méthodes de pratique créative. Il écrit et mène également des recherches sur la performance, le genre et la diversité. Il est le créateur et l'éditeur de la série *Creativity, Education and the Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan). Il est l'auteur de plus de 100 articles/chapitres de livres et de 17 ouvrages, en plus de productions publiques de pièces de théâtre, de films et de performances orales, et il a obtenu plus de 2,9 millions de dollars de subventions de recherche depuis 2010. M. Harris est actuellement membre de l'Aus-

tralian Research Council, chercheur principal du vice-chancelier du RMIT et directeur du laboratoire de recherche de la Creative Agency.

Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Luka is Assistant Professor, University of Toronto and an award-winning producer of digital content for television, exhibition, and digital platforms. Luka examines co-creative production and dissemination in arts, culture, and media, including creative hubs and networks in Canada, UK, USA, and Australia. M.E. is a founding co-lead for the Critical Digital Methods Institute at University of Toronto Scarborough, and policy co-lead for Archive/Counter-Archive, a national partnership involving 27 universities and cultural organizations in activating audiovisual archives created by Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), the Black community, and People of Colour, womxn, LGBT2Q+ and immigrant communities. Luka has published in academic journals and books, and is completing a solo manuscript, *A(rtspots) to ZeD: Digitizing Arts Documentary in Canada*, and a collaborative manuscript, *Dirty Methods: Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies for Research*. More information can be found at <https://www.uts.utoronto.ca/acm/mary-elizabeth-luka>

Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Luka est professeure adjointe à l'Université de Toronto et productrice primée de contenu numérique pour la télévision, les expositions et les plateformes numériques. Luka étudie la production et la diffusion co-créatives dans les arts, la culture et les médias, y compris les centres et réseaux créatifs au Canada, au Royaume-Uni, aux États-Unis et en Australie. M.E. est co-directrice fondatrice du Critical Digital Methods Institute à l'Université de Toronto Scarborough, et co-directrice des politiques pour Archive/Counter-Archive, un partenariat national impliquant 27 universités et organisations culturelles dans l'activation des archives audiovisuelles créées par les peuples autochtones (Premières nations, Métis, Inuits), la communauté noire et les personnes de couleur, les femmes, les communautés LGBT2Q+ et les immigrants. Luka a publié des articles dans des revues et des livres universitaires, et termine un manuscrit solo, *A(rtspots) to ZeD : Digitizing Arts Documentary in Canada*, et un manuscrit collectif, *Dirty Methods : Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies for Research*. Pour de plus amples renseigne-

ments, veuillez consulter le site <https://www.uts.utoronto.ca/acm/mary-elizabeth-luka>.

Annette N. Markham is Professor at RMIT University and Co-Director of the *Digital Ethnography Research Centre* in Melbourne, Australia, and Professor (MSO, on leave) of Information Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark. She has a long history of studying identity practices in digitally saturated contexts and is an internationally recognized scholar of innovative and ethical practice in digital research and design. Her work focuses on facilitating more creative, adaptive, and ethical practice for social research by disrupting the vocabularies around method. She founded the Future Making Research Consortium and has facilitated dozens of arts-based experiments and seminars to build data and digital literacy through critical pedagogy. Her work can be found in multiple academic books and journals. More information and links to publications can be found at annettemarkham.com

Annette N. Markham est professeure à l'Université RMIT et codirectrice du Digital Ethnography Research Centre à Melbourne, en Australie, et professeure (MSO, en congé) en études de l'information à l'Université d'Aarhus, au Danemark. Elle étudie depuis longtemps les pratiques identitaires dans des contextes de saturation numérique et est une spécialiste internationalement reconnue des pratiques innovantes et éthiques dans la recherche et la conception numériques. Son travail vise à faciliter une pratique plus créative, adaptative et éthique de la recherche sociale en bouleversant les vocabulaires méthodologiques. Elle a fondé le Future Making Research Consortium et a animé des dizaines d'expériences et de séminaires basés sur l'art pour développer la culture des données et du numérique par le biais d'une pédagogie critique. Ses travaux figurent dans de nombreux ouvrages et revues universitaires. Vous trouverez de plus amples informations et des liens vers des publications à l'adresse <annettemarkham.com>.

Mary-Rose McLaren is an Associate Professor in the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Melbourne, and course chair of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. She teaches

within the arts-based, literacy, and movement units. Her background is in History, Drama, and Education, and her research interests lie at the intersection of these, combining practice, pedagogy, and performance. She uses Drama as a pedagogical tool in all her teaching, and works with colleagues to extend the influence and impact of embodied learning across courses in Higher Education. Mary-Rose is also involved in community theatre as a writer, actor, and director with a special interest in intergenerational engagement. She has a strong interest in using applied theatre to bring about socially-just change.

Mary-Rose McLaren est professeure associée au College of Arts and Education de l'Université de Victoria, à Melbourne, et responsable du programme de licence en éducation de la petite enfance. Elle enseigne dans les unités basées sur les arts, la littérature et le mouvement. Elle a une formation en histoire, en théâtre et en éducation, et ses intérêts de recherche se situent à l'intersection de ces disciplines, combinant pratique, pédagogie et performance. Elle utilise le théâtre comme outil pédagogique dans tous ses cours et travaille avec des collègues pour étendre l'influence et l'impact de l'apprentissage corporel dans les cours de l'enseignement supérieur. Mary-Rose est également impliquée dans le théâtre communautaire en tant qu'auteure, autrice et directrice, avec un intérêt particulier pour l'engagement intergénérationnel. Elle s'intéresse particulièrement à l'utilisation du théâtre appliqué pour susciter des changements socialement justes.

Veronica Mitchell (PhD) is a Research Associate in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape and a facilitator in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Her physiotherapy background and her experiences in human rights education led to her interest in exploring the medical curriculum and the force it has on students' becoming. Her teaching and research focus is related to obstetric violence in birthing facilities. Using a posthumanism perspective, arts-based methodologies such as drawings and performances have enriched the students' engagement. She promotes the production of Open Educational Resources (OER) as a sharing of knowledge for the public good. Her publications include a research blog, authored websites, and journal papers.

Veronica Mitchell (PhD) est associée de recherche au département des études sur les femmes et le genre de l'université de Western Cape et animatrice au département d'obstétrique et de gynécologie de l'université du Cap, en Afrique du Sud. Sa formation de physiothérapeute et ses expériences en matière d'éducation aux droits de l'homme l'ont amenée à s'intéresser au programme d'études médicales et à la force qu'il exerce sur le devenir des étudiants. Son enseignement et ses recherches portent sur la violence obstétricale dans les centres d'accouchement. Dans une perspective posthumaniste, des méthodologies basées sur les arts, comme les dessins et les performances, ont enrichi l'engagement des étudiants. Elle encourage la production de ressources éducatives libres (REL) en tant que partage des connaissances pour le bien public. Ses publications comprennent un blog de recherche, des sites web et des articles de journaux.

Corinna Peterken is an Assistant Professor in Teacher Education (Early Childhood) at Brigham Young University in the McKay School of Education, Provo, Utah, USA. She is an artist/academic who uses qualitative and arts-based methodologies from postmodern, feminist, and critical perspectives. Her research includes learning with materials through photography, collage, quilting, weaving, found objects, and fiber, as well as walking and being in places to explore connections that are pedagogical. In her teaching Corinna is passionate about arts-based practice as a means to support all children's learning and well-being. Her work in early childhood and teacher education advocates for learning in relation with materials, places, bodies, and the arts.

Corinna Peterken est professeur adjoint en formation des enseignants (petite enfance) à l'université Brigham Young, à la McKay School of Education, à Provo, Utah, États-Unis. Elle est une artiste/universitaire qui utilise des méthodologies qualitatives et basées sur les arts dans une perspective postmoderne, féministe et critique. Ses recherches comprennent l'apprentissage avec des matériaux par le biais de la photographie, du collage, du matelassage, du tissage, des objets trouvés et de la fibre, ainsi que la marche et la présence dans des lieux pour explorer des connexions pédagogiques. Dans son enseignement, Corinna est passionnée par la pratique artistique comme

moyen de soutenir l'apprentissage et le bien-être de tous les enfants. Son travail dans le domaine de la petite enfance et de la formation des enseignants plaide pour un apprentissage en relation avec les matériaux, les lieux, les corps et les arts.

Kim Snepvangers is an Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Art & Design, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, and an Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education, Southern Cross University, QLD, Australia. Kim is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA), and an award-winning educational leader in professional practice in creative ecologies across art, design, and media. Kim has co-edited three books and over 20 book chapters and journal publications that have been recognized in the wider professional context nationally and internationally. Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaborators and Cultural Mentors on exhibition projects engages her history with dissensus to challenge dominance of progress narratives in settler colonial contexts. Her research engages visualisation with creative ecologies, critically reflective frameworks, and embodied pedagogies. She has extensive research experience in developing transitional educative spaces between academic, creative, and professional practice.

Kim Snepvangers est professeur associé adjoint à l'école d'art et de design de l'université de New South Wales à Sydney et professeur adjoint à la faculté d'éducation de l'université Southern Cross à QLD en Australie. Kim est membre principal de l'Académie de l'enseignement supérieur (PFHEA) et leader éducatif primé dans la pratique professionnelle des écologies créatives dans les domaines de l'art, du design et des médias. Kim a coédité trois livres et plus de 20 chapitres de livres et publications de journaux qui ont été reconnus dans un contexte professionnel plus large au niveau national et international. Le travail avec des collaborateurs aborigènes et insulaires du détroit de Torres et des mentors culturels sur des projets d'exposition fait appel à son histoire avec le dissensus pour contester la domination des récits de progrès dans les contextes coloniaux. Ses recherches associent la visualisation aux écologies créatives, aux cadres de réflexion critique et aux pédagogies incarnées. Elle possède une vaste expérience de recherche dans le développement d'espaces éducatifs

transitoires entre les pratiques universitaires, créatives et professionnelles.

Anne Soronen, PhD, is a media scholar who works as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Unit of Social Research at Tampere University, Finland. She is also Docent in Media Studies at the University of Turku. Her research interests include intimacies of digital work, everyday media cultures, creative industries, and ethnographic methods. Currently Soronen explores Finnish creative workers' agency and presence on social media platforms in the project *Intimacy in Data-Driven Culture* <https://www.dataintimacy.fi/en/>. Previously, she has studied temporal practices in media work, emotional labour in magazine work, and gender performatives on lifestyle television. She has also taught in Communication Studies at the University of Vaasa. Soronen has published articles and book chapters on journalistic work, affectivity of media texts, and user experiences of domestic technologies.

Anne Soronen, PhD, est une spécialiste des médias qui travaille comme chercheuse postdoctorale à l'unité de recherche sociale de l'université de Tampere, en Finlande. Elle est également docteure en études des médias à l'université de Turku. Ses recherches portent sur l'intimité du travail numérique, les cultures médiatiques quotidiennes, les industries créatives et les méthodes ethnographiques. Actuellement, Soronen explore l'agence et la présence des travailleurs créatifs finlandais sur les plateformes de médias sociaux dans le cadre du projet *Intimacy in Data-Driven Culture* (<https://www.dataintimacy.fi/en/>). Auparavant, elle a étudié les pratiques temporelles dans le travail médiatique, le travail émotionnel dans les magazines et les performances de genre dans les émissions de télévision. Elle a également enseigné les études de communication à l'université de Vaasa. Soronen a publié des articles et des chapitres de livres sur le travail journalistique, l'affectivité des textes médiatiques et les expériences des utilisateurs des technologies domestiques.

Darko Suvin is Professor Emeritus of McGill University and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He has written many books and hun-

dreds of essays in the area of utopian and science fiction, comparative literature, dramaturgy, theory of literature, theatre, and cultural theory. His most recent work is *Disputing the Deluge: Collected 21st-Century Writings on Utopia, Narration, and Survival* (Bloomsbury 2021) edited by Hugh O'Connell.

Darko Suvin est professeur émérite de l'Université McGill et membre de la Société royale du Canada. Il a écrit de nombreux livres et des centaines d'essais dans le domaine de l'utopie et de la science-fiction, de la littérature comparée, de la dramaturgie, de la théorie de la littérature, du théâtre et de la théorie culturelle. Son ouvrage le plus récent est *Disputing the Deluge : Collected 21st-Century Writings on Utopia, Narration, and Survival* (Bloomsbury 2021) édité par Hugh O'Connell.

Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg is an Assistant Professor of media and communication research in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Her scientific research interests centre on multiliteracies for social and digital participation and datafication. Recent research projects include nonuse of social media; datafication and experiences of vulnerability; digital self-performance in videostreaming cultures; bots and the experience of social presence; and data-driven AI solutions for health and well-being. She also has long experience teaching in academic positions in the fields of the interactive narration, concept design, ethnographic methods, visual communication, data journalism, and investigative journalism. Before her academic career, Talvitie-Lamberg's artistic work on interactive film and concept design was awarded both nationally and internationally. She also actively appears in the media as an expert on digital inclusion issues. She has published articles and book chapters on topics including confessional digital communication, datafication, surveillance practices, and AI deployment in organizations.

Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg est professeure adjointe de recherche sur les médias et la communication à la faculté des sciences sociales et humaines de l'université de Jyväskylä en Finlande. Ses intérêts de recherche scientifique portent sur les pratiques de multi littératies

pour la participation sociale et numérique et la datafication. Ses projets de recherche récents portent notamment sur la non-utilisation des médias sociaux, la datafication et les expériences de vulnérabilité, l'auto-performance numérique dans les cultures de vidéostreaming, les robots et l'expérience de la présence sociale, ainsi que les solutions d'IA axées sur les données pour la santé et le bien-être. Elle a également une longue expérience dans l'enseignement où elle a occupé des postes universitaires dans les domaines de la narration interactive, du concept design, des méthodes ethnographiques, de la communication visuelle, du journalisme de données et du journalisme d'investigation. Avant sa carrière universitaire, le travail artistique de Talvitie-Lamberg sur la conception de films interactifs et le concept design a été récompensé au niveau national et international. Elle apparaît aussi activement dans les médias en tant qu'experte des questions d'inclusion numérique. Elle a publié des articles et des chapitres de livres sur des sujets tels que la communication numérique professionnelle, la datafication, les pratiques de surveillance et le déploiement de l'IA dans les organisations.

Andy Fischer Wright is a doctoral student in the Radio-Television-Film department at the University of Texas at Austin. Andy completed his BA with a double major with honours in Media Studies and English & World Literature from Pitzer College. In Spring 2020, he completed his master's thesis on the sociocultural implications of push notifications. Andy's research interests include continued work with push notifications, digital media, and cultural studies more broadly, and anything to do with the intimate collision between everyday life and information technology.

Andy Fischer Wright est étudiant en doctorat au département Radio-Télévision-Cinéma de l'Université du Texas à Austin. Andy a obtenu sa licence avec une double majeure avec mention en études des médias et en anglais et littérature mondiale au Pitzer College. Au printemps 2020, il a terminé son mémoire de master sur les implications socioculturelles des notifications push. Les intérêts de recherche d'Andy comprennent la poursuite des travaux sur les notifications push, les médias numériques et les études culturelles de ma-

nière plus générale, ainsi que tout ce qui a trait à la collision intime
entre la vie quotidienne et les technologies de l'information