2019–2020 | *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 2 (1–2)

EDITORS' PREFACE: CARE IS A DEFIANT ACT

i. Remembering Forward

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3 Years…

The first issue of *Capacious* was released on July 28, 2017—three years to the day that I write this. There is a much longer story to tell here at another time. But, for now, the key details are: there was a bit of money left over from the Affect Theory: Worldings/Tensions/Futures conference in October 2015, and I was using it to create a website to house that conference's plenary talks along with a few interviews, graduate student profiles, miscellaneous art-theory intertwinings, etc. I'd hired a Millersville student to edit the videos and do some very basic web design.

At about the same time that this post-conference website was slowly coming together (March 2016), I was invited to give a presentation at a colloquium at Drew Theological School on affectivity and divinity. The first day of the colloquium was dedicated to graduate student presentations; the second speaker was Mathew Arthur. Mathew's talk on Indigenous knowledge-practices and affect was hands-down one of the best challenges to affect studies that I'd encountered in some time. Mel Chen (another of the invited keynotes) and I corralled Mathew almost

instantly after the panel wrapped up. This was someone who had something really going on *you could just tell*. Energies come off Mathew in waves, like the best vibes: instant felt-connection, generativity, a sense of intellectual curiosity and interpersonal grace. Besides a brilliant mind, Mathew is also, it turns out, a very gifted designer—web and otherwise—with an outsider sensibility that serves him well (at the time, the guy didn't even have a *proper academic degree* of any sort, ha!). Perfect.

There was something we could build together. I wasn't quite sure what as yet.

If I felt like I'd somehow swiped Mathew from Mel Chen, Wendy Truran was a gift passed along by Lisa Blackman. When I organized the #affectWTF conference in 2015, I'd asked both Heather Love and Lisa Blackman to join me as conference co-organizers and look over my shoulders, guiding me toward the right things and away from any silly missteps. A couple of months after the conference, Lisa pointed me to this absolutely stunning blogpost by a University of Illinois graduate student named Wendy Truran discussing all of the #affectWTF conference plenaries. I probably should've been embarrassed—after all, I'd been watching the plenary videos over and over, trying to figure out the best way to convey their contents only to find that Wendy had captured the whole thing in a single take—but I was too much in awe. I contacted Wendy and asked if we could use her writing as the connective tissue between the plenary videos. Yes! And I soon discovered that, beyond her unfailing capacity for bringing enhanced clarity to the most complex matters (usually with a sublime mix of hilarity and humility), Wendy also has a significant background in the publishing world—having worked as a senior publishing editor at SAGE (and prior to that at Routledge) before returning to school to work on her PhD. Perfect.

Maybe there was something beyond a post-conference website to build.

The third person to join the nucleus of our pre-*Capacious* crew was Bryan Behrenshausen. I have known Bryan since he was in his late teens. As a passionately theory-centric undergraduate in Millersville University's Communication and Theatre program and, for a while, my colleague in the department too, Bryan immerses himself in all things semiotic, cybernetic, and technological (especially videogames and vaporwave), affect (especially Spinoza, Deleuze & Guattari, and the collected work of Lawrence Grossberg), and intellectual prop-

erty/copyleft. Bryan is one of a handful of people who has actually co-written with Grossberg, and, at the 2015 #affectWTF conference, he was at Larry's side during his plenary presentation while also assisting with tech issues throughout the whole event. While working on his PhD at the University of North Carolina, Bryan was the managing editor at the journal *Cultural Studies* and joined the open source software company Red Hat. With his knowledge of the inner workings of an academic journal and various aspects of open access publishing, Bryan would be, well, a perfect complement to what Wendy and Mathew (and I) were already bringing.

The notion of starting a journal was now nudging its way much more distinctly into view. We knew that we could make something really unique and that we could manage the various parts of this operation from our respective and distinct capacities as a team. From July 28, 2017 to July 28, 2019 (Volume 1 nos. 1–4), this was the *Capacious* crew!

With this new issue, though, there is a change in the line-up. With increased duties at Red Hat and an adjunct teaching gig at Duke University, Bryan simply had too many other demands on his time and, so, we reluctantly released him from our *Capacious* clutches after the last issue. WE LOVE YOU, BRYAN! Oh, but we still consult with him (he even reviewed a submission earlier this year) and Bryan helped smooth the transition to his successor—Johnny Gainer. In 2015, Johnny was a senior in our Department of Communication and Theatre at Millersville, and he was my main tech-wizard for the #affectWTF conference. I still vividly remember the two of us loading everyone's PowerPoint presentations into the six conference rooms at the Ware Center the day before the conference began, already lightheaded with excitement over what was to come. Johnny has a total DIY-maker sensibility, loves testing out music and theories and gadgets that glitch and drone, and is insatiably curious about how things persist in their existence (see: his piece on sourdough starter). While Bryan is difficult to replace, Johnny—who finished his Masters degree at Villanova and is now teaching there part-time—is pretty damn perfect.

In just three years (a bit longer, counting the #affectWTF post-conference website),[1] we certainly feel as if *Capacious* (the journal) has made a dent in the world of affect studies, alongside the *Capacious* conference in 2018, the Society for the Study of Affect Summer School (#SSASS) in 2019, and our announcement (see the final pages of this issue) of a peer-reviewed open access academic press that will publish full-length books on affect inquiry—*Imbricate! Press.*

We'd like to say the future looks bright and perhaps it will be, but there's a couple of things to be said about this past year…

1 Year…

Totally by accident, issue no. 4 of *Capacious* came out the day before #SSASS kicked off and on the second anniversary of our inaugural issue: July 28, 2019. It will have taken us a bit over a year then, to get to Volume 2. This is a juggernaut of an issue, but, yeah, we would like to maintain a regular-sized two issues per year pace. (More than two per year would be fine too!) The passage of 365+ days can always feel like a very long time but, given recent events, the spacetime collapse of July 2019 into July 2020 feels we've now taken up residence on a different timeline, in another world.

There are practical production-related reasons why it has been a year between issues. For instance, one of the working rules at *Capacious* is that, because we are oriented first and foremost to fostering first publications by graduate students and early career researchers with lives already filled with deadlines and other pressures, we do not impose any strict deadline for revisions. We make general suggestions about the return of next drafts and periodically check in on submitters' general well-being, but we don't push. This has produced excellent final essays as folks work at a rate that suits them best, sometimes through more than a single set of revisions. But it also means that we usually have about an issue and a half of backlogged essays floating somewhere in-between revision and final acceptance. We have no plans to ever change our 'no pressure' ethos—particularly because our reviewers have been so gracious and generous and generative with their feedback. We work hard to be worthy of the title that some of our published essayists (and reviewers) have given us, that *Capacious* is a journal of 'care.'

But of course, the most significant factor affecting the operation of our journal over the past six-seven-eight months has been the global pandemic.[2] It's not going away anytime soon. In the pages to come, Mathew, Wendy, Johnny, and some of our contributors will address coronavirus directly. And in the ongoingness of Covid-19 and an increasingly ugly Presidential election season, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police has served as a necessary tipping point for Black Lives Matter to galvanize people like never before, not only in the United

States but around the world, to confront systemic racism in all of its most macro/micro-aggressive forms and colonialist formations. This is a most vital matter that cannot be allowed to go away anytime soon. Such forms of injustice and ongoing matters of alarm (and care) are among those concerns raised in this particular volume of *Capacious* and will absolutely persist into future issues.

The world feels like—and is— a far more wobbly and worrisome place than it was just one year ago. But there are also unprecedented opportunities for all kinds of viscerally-driven interventions, across multiple fronts, that can radically redraw the shape and substance of our shared existence. If one is looking for how affect studies figures into such moments, you might consider, as a couple of examples from this issue, the critical insights found in what can be learned (as alternative pedagogy) from retracing Cape Town's history of racial injustice through GIS mapping or what can be felt among comrades in the midst of a riot that simultaneously compels unfeeling the state. Here, and elsewhere in this issue, early career scholars (and a few established ones too) grapple with methods and practices for apprehending a particular phenomenon or event while also accounting for the potentials that are arrayed around it, potentials always yet to be fully realized (and often, yes, thwarted or diminished too).

"It is a poor sort of memory that only works backward," as the Queen remarks in Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland*. While this brief introduction to volume 2 has been mainly reflective, the hope is that the journal *Capacious* contributes to ways that we might also remember forward, toward one or several futures—a capaciousness that is not only about making space for new sets of encounters, but also about fabricating (more) time in its suspensions and blurrings, its poolings and unspoolings: bending time toward and around those future situations where hope feels more abundant, even more tangible than it does right now.

Endnotes

1. The #affectWTF website is absolutely worth visiting if you've not already checked it out at some point over the last few years: wtfaffect.com.

2. The coronavirus also necessitated the cancellation the 2020 #AffectMAPS conference planned for University of Kentucky in September 2020, organized so superbly by Jenny Rice. Sigh.

ii. Writing Pandemic Feels

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How to write out a pandemic? Lately, everything comes up short. Clipped, like a bad video edit or gasping for air but somehow drawn out too—every new scene or symptom ramping up a hypervigilance or getting ignored. Short fuse, short leash. The ambit for navigating movement gets slimmer. For some, quarantine is an opening up. For others, a dragging-on of debility. "In short supply" cues up abstractions like *the supply chain* or *enduring privation* and discriminates by making them real. Short on cash. Scrimping short ends. Pandemic short-circuits flows of goods, bads, and bodies. Its ethics are diffuse. Everywhere impinges. Time feels caught between aftermath and looming recurrence: impasse, interruption, repeat. Shared knowledge work goes online in choppy videochat intervals; sometimes it is alright to admit there's a relief to being out of sync.

But duration and scale are slippery units of analysis for the thresholds of lockdown: small indiscretions or bursts of longing, impulse buys, ad hocs and makings do, barreling on with business as usual, pacing, killing time, taking a tone, or negotiating blurred increments of care and neglect. Pandemic is about what is being animated and how it hits the body as a tangle of forces. What kinds of convergences show up unannounced or cultivate in slow burn. What is lurking at the fringes or welling up. What sticks, gets blocked out, or lingers—and how it all stacks up. Virality exceeds the biological. Yes, it circulates in epidemiological diagrams and rumors—but also as missed rent payments, anti/productivity memes, public moods and political optimisms, spreadsheets, distributed computing genomics, breakups, and drone photos of mass graves. It writes itself into place, even into the climate. There is a charged citationality to crisis. Too much to think and feel with. Every surface, every blue-gloved touch casting thought into action. Or drawing a blank.

I spend most of my time caught on whatever shape attending-to should take. Long-form seems a cruel luxury when everyone is short on retention. There is no emergent sociality in neurotypical calls to *pay attention!* that shut out the irrepressible scintillations—or contagions—of world (Manning 2018, 13-14). Re-

sisting frontal modes of attention (the university, the expert, the text or task at hand, the LCD screen), emergence asks for diverse qualities of attending: building an 'otherwise' by forever studying—without credit—amassing instead a debt to each other in the nurses' room, the squat, a backward glance, in bed (Moten & Harney 2010). I wonder how to write through this feeling of simultaneous overload and attenuation of genres, media objects, biopolitical pressures and categories, material infrastructures, and styles of knowing (from hard sciences to the pseudo, folk, armchair, or conspiratorial). What new kinds of literacies need to proliferate now? Especially when *social distancing* implies an asociality to the material fullness of the nonhuman world.

And, how to stay alive to the necessity of widespread intervention without reentrenching natural and social sciences' totalizing claims on the body in ways that don't neglect Indigenous and Afrofuturist technologies of ancestral and multispecies care, plant medicine, and ceremony? My science studies and new materialist training is to work para-epidemiologically, tracking viralities of nonhuman agency across nexuses of technology, relationship, and power. But writing this way requires relentless homework: staying with the analytic twists and turns by writing into ever-thicker gnarls of accountability and care (Dumit 2014, 350, 358). For me, this calls for writing with those interruptions and precarities that often elicit a rush of stories, starting in contaminating and indeterminate encounters at the interface of feminist technoscience and multispecies ethnography (Tsing 2015, 20, 37). I wonder, too, what other forms writing might take and whose genres of response might cipher this pandemic's onslaught of forces?

What to do, then, with the barely-there literacies of something on the verge of collapse? Never quite holding shape. Or those consolidations that slip beneath our tracking of more familiar geometries? We might try to work out some of the knots, get at the connective tissues (Haraway 1997, 130). At the same time, I want to be on the lookout for those imbrications that give the illusion of seamlessness—what labors, suffers, and dies behind the scenes (Reser 2020). To write this way rides out ordinaries, generating concepts by attuning to the atmospheres of everyday life (Stewart 2010). It takes the moment of rush as an incitement to compose affecting images that knead the intensities—or indifferences—of an unfolding scene and its always-rearticulating body politics (Berlant 2019). At the same time, writing 'shorts' necessitates connecting composition's atmospherics to capacity via disability studies—rooting knowledge work in the nonnegotiable value of bodily difference as fragments of *brilliant imperfection* (Clare 2017, xvii). What follows is a series of shorts, something like a lexicon, stitched up between other qualities of attending. A try at writing out pandemic.

Making Masks

These days, I write at the speed of sewing: cut, stitch, trim. Making DIY face masks as a small hack at worlding with a more tangible sense of care (fig. 1). Ten minutes apiece. Each made up of storied scraps: bedsheets and offcuts. No big theoretical intervention or painstaking tracing-out of relations: just frayed threads and a sense of assembling a shared intelligibility. DIY masks *might not work*. But my boyfriend and I cut and sew on the lone table in our basement apartment, taking turns with bad moods, meals, and university work to make masks for HIV+ and other immunocompromised friends. Three each in a Ziploc bag, with laser-printed instructions. *WASH BEFORE WEARING!* Put on clean. Take off carefully. Wash your hands. Civilizing imperatives that link queerness and misuse, colonialism and propriety (see Ahmed 2019). Good and bad feels and futurities are bound up in proximities to objects—and how they get passed around—in ways that jeopardize feminist, queer, and antiracist work (Ahmed 2009, 38–41, 50). But we risk each other with these gifts, relegating epidemiology's realist claims on the body to a wager of friendship, hijacking moral and methodological hygienes into messy capacities of trust.

Figure 1. DIY masks from fabric scraps and instructions, Mathew Arthur, 2020

How masks are taken up matters. Because care is speculative—as a theory and in practice: an affective mode that intervenes in how things *could be* (de la Bellacasa 2017, 66). Sewing masks, in this sense, is decolonial making: a guesswork of materializing ordinary relations of justice (Papadopoulos 2018, 18). But stitching together scraps for friends is gambling with specificities that hurt, speculatives that might kill. Maybe masks cite the loaded relationality of knowledge work, their authors never quite relieved of what their offerings might compose. What can theories and practices of care do when their object is out of control? Counterfeit N95 masks leaked into supply chains (Kavilanz 2020). Two black men, faces half-covered, kicked out of Walmart (Jan 2020). Centers for Disease Control debating t-shirt cotton or terrycloth (CDC 2020). Micrometre-scale particle negotiations felt on the skin as fear or safety. SARS throwback anti-Asian public transit racisms (Larsson 2020; Tai 2020). Medical workers with mask fatigue, pressure sores, or no PPE at all (Noble 2020). A blue-state senator wearing his 3M mask upside down—then, a republican with a gas mask (Guse 2020; Arciga 2020). And the pedagogy of feeling one's own breath as an invisible threat.

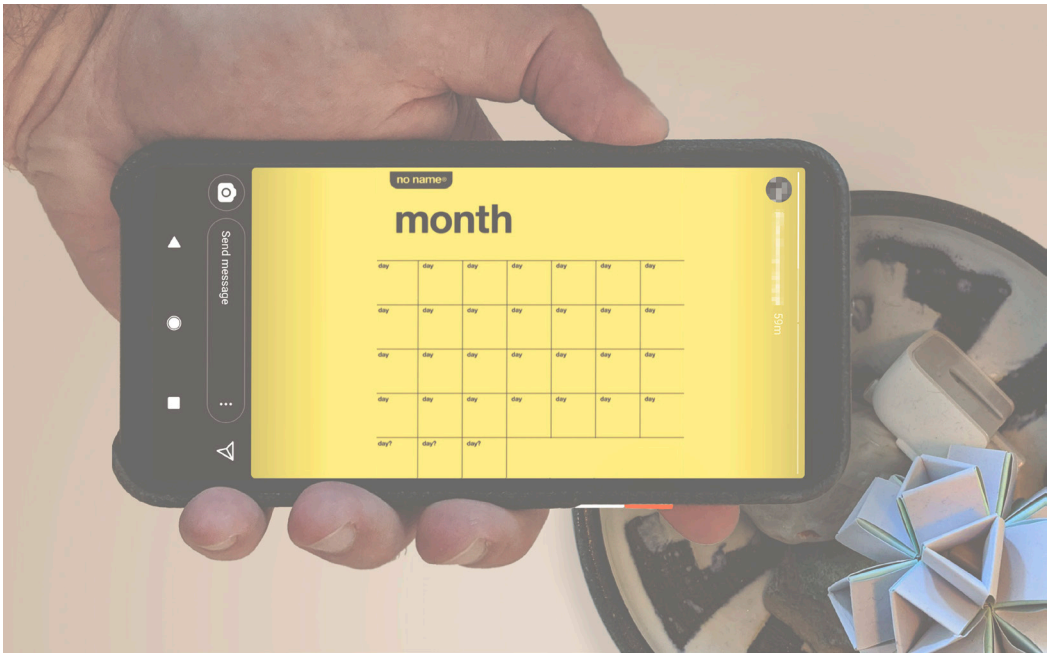

Figure 2. no name® (a Canadian grocery brand) #blursday meme, @ehcanadamemes, 2020

#blursday

Time feels weird. *The last two weeks have been a strange ten years* (Colbert in Quan 2020). #blursday is pandemic coming into form as a feeling of time trending on Twitter (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 109). It stretches out the present with scope-creeping domesticities, hangovers, professionalisms, streaming video, and oversleep. Days collapse into a dark-mode user interface, online shopping cart grid, anxious infographic, or COVID-19 meme (fig. 2). The screen's aberrant movements organize sensorimotor flows, conjuring the failure of time as time itself (Deleuze 1989, 36). Linking movement, temporality, and subject-making troubles eugenic notions of time as a prognosis of life spans and phases (Puar 2009). It shows that allegiance to a mainstream version of time—even #blursday—naturalizes the non-innocence of technology, ingrains a politics of mobility, and exposes some bodies to potential injury (Samuels 2017). I pull away from my phone, ask my boyfriend *what day is it?* The lag between question and answer is our own queer temporality, the loadedness of being out of sync. *Thursday*, he says. The day Amazon warehouse workers walk out (Ha 2020).

Doomscrolling

Doomscrolling is compulsive swiping through pandemic-related headlines, graphs, and tweets. It is an urge that practices the body into dystopian feeling: an affective becoming-indebted to the way things are through gesture—or a bad news world interfacing the body as a tic (eg. Seigworth 2016). Doomscrolling is killing time as an investment in feeling on top of things—a feedback loop of testing for encroachment. *How close, how long, how much, how bad?* Again. It mistakes use patterns, forms of connectivity, and attentional modes for reality as a symptom of its own debt.

Skype *Bioinsecurites*

In the first weeks of pandemic, we meet online to read Neel Ahuja's *Bioinsecurities* together (fig. 3). Ten in the morning in Vancouver, one o'clock in Lancaster, and six at night in Berlin. Two of us co-edit an affect studies journal, some of us met at Freie Universität for Affective Societies's "Power of Immersion" spring school, others are Harawayan theorists, black studies scholars, performance artists, free

school educators in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, mentors, and friends. We read aloud through pixelation, timezones, and choreographed mic-muting to cultivate attention from unmooredness. Pausing between sections, we animate the text's interstices by registering a collective mood, layering on local COVID-19 happenings, or indexing disruptions to colonial configurings of species life (like recent rail blockades across Canada to protest a no-consent pipeline on unceded Wet'suwet'en lands). Our voices stumble over histories of the biopolitical policing of state, species, and body borders; politics that hitch hope to bodily vulnerability and game gendered or racialized fears of infection and species contact; and technologies hatched to manage biological processes. Every so often, the Skype connection glitches out into compression artifacts—distorted faces and robot voices surfacing the soft and hardware underneath.

Figure 3. *Bioinsecurites* reading group Skype hangout with Neel Ahuja, Mathew Arthur, 2020

As it translates affecting forces into information at the join of life, nonlife, and death (Haraway 1991, 161-164), pandemic relies on code and connectivity, too: public health demographies and databases, genome mapping computing infrastructures, surveillance and emergency services networks, or supply chain management algorithms. We sense out both Ahuja's text and Skype as linking bodies, institutions, media, and technologies in articulating disease interventions that

wrangle circulating forces and forms of species contact (2016, 195). Our improvised meetings likewise condense deadly circulations: the mass-mobilizations of minerals or day laborers and sprawling landscapes of displacement and ruin that make up the screens, circuits, wifi towers, and server farms that afford our connectivity (eg. Mbembe 2020). We read to get a grip on pandemic, meanwhile training our own capacities for connection into yet another imperial form of species life.

Unintentional ASMR

Crisis is not without production value. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's health officer, gives a daily video briefing in hushed tones. *With her voice, this virus thing doesn't seem that upsetting* (William-Ross 2020). Not unlike a BBC *Planet Earth II* timelapse of fungi blooming and bioluminescing in the dark: the eerie unfolding is kept in check by the narrator's awestruck calm. Henry is fast becoming a cult figure in YouTube ASMR circles, alongside quarantine mukbang (a Korean portmanteau of "eating" and "broadcast") and soft-spoken Coronavirus testing roleplay videos. A genre of YouTube or TikTok video and real-life situation, ASMR exploits sound's capacity to render atmospheres and associations (Gallagher 2016), eliciting a tingling sensation in the scalp or spine in response to auditory-tactile stimuli.

I watch whispered nail art tutorials and rustling product unboxings or towel folding videos to manage anxiety. A coping strategy for capitalism, by capitalism. ASMR slows my catastrophic thinking, but not without suspicion that a pedagogy is snuck in with voice and gesture. Henry's shushed modulations conflate the viscerally felt with big data epidemiological approaches and big-box economic concerns. Feeling better *rings true*. Voice soothes with pitch, pacing, tone—but also in numbers, risk management tactics, and a stable sense of world. I wonder about other health atmospherics, too: feelings of sterility, a missed call, bedside trustiness, Dr. Google, the spa-like, fad diets, dollar store aromatherapy diffusers, lingering smells of bleach or chlorine, metal, the color white, or soft chafings of a paper gown. What exclusionary worlds do they lodge in the body, inflected as a reassuring diagnostic?

Neologisms

There it is, a thing that will be repeated (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 32). Quaranteens, quaranteams, quarantinis. Coming of age indoors. The people you live with (or would choose to) in lockdown. Day drinking. Neologisms happen when words are not enough and still in high demand. They get at the emergent sharedness of unstable materialities and feels: living arrangements, anxieties, cliques, retoolings, jokes, perceived injustices. Neologisms are freshly minted and attributional, they loosely assemble people, fads, objects, genres, events, machines, or epochs into form as a capacity of noticing. They can become force-guiding imperatives, but mostly they entrain: as happens when a new-to-you thing is suddenly *everywhere*. Even as a provocation or reclaiming, any neologism is ultimately self-defeating. As the name sticks and gets mainstreamed, it loses its queer aptitude.

Genre Flailing[1]

Early in the pandemic, Soderbergh's *Contagion* (with Gwyneth Paltrow as patient zero) and Netflix' own *Tiger King* (featuring gay polygamist zookeeper-turned-felon, Joe Exotic; fig. 4) are trending. Incel hackers are Zoom-bombing online classrooms with Pornhub screenshots (eg. Paul 2020). Fans are making mash-ups of Grimes' "You'll Miss Me When I'm Not Around"—from her climate change album, *Miss Anthropocene*—and everyone's favorite quarantine video game, Animal Crossing (Khan 2020; Wasylak 2020). Trump's word-salad pandemic briefings beat out *The Bachelor* in ratings and Trudeau's *speaking moistly* spawns autotuned remixes (Haring 2020; Estima 2020). Pandemic is a genre flail and a heightening of crisis as genre (Berlant 2018; 2011, 7). Genre flailing attests to the ordinariness of pandemic—the usual litanies of spectacle, shock, escapism, hand-wringing, burlesquing, policy promises, careerism, and PR spins (2018, 157). Then, the biowarfare conspiracies, technodystopias, and ecofacisms: *Corona is the cure, humans are the disease!* (Hesman Saey 2020; Hudson 2020; Han 2020). Genre habituates the experience of an unfolding situation. It can stunt the possibility of an event taking shape otherwise (Berlant 2011, 6). Literary genres and genres of life are fused in what capacities of feeling, perceiving, making, and connecting they prime—what affections they cultivate (eg. Hickey-Moody 2013, 88). Another genre of pandemic's ordinariness is domesticity. Binge-watching *Tiger King's* underworld tale of big cat breeding. Making Instagrammable sourdough (Goode 2020). Having a cheat day. Tidying up, *I'll get to that later*. Flail.

Figure 4. Watching *Tiger King* on Netflix

Pandemic Maps

Every couple of hours, I check the Johns Hopkins University pandemic map (fig. 5). COVID-19 shows up as hyperrealist datafications and mappings of life and death that swap bodily vicissitudes for data aggregates and models. In pandemic, a realist map has its charm. Maps gain realism in historical condensations of scientific ways of looking—but also by harnessing bodies to circulating patterns of desire or terror. They mobilize health or suffering to intersect with animate socialities and economic agendas (Mattern 2018, 20). In the first days of pandemic, checking the map was a matter of thresholding: not blowing things out of proportion, getting serious. The JHU map works proportionally, a dataviz tactic that pins data to geography using symbols to quantify scale. When scales are too extreme, some symbols become illegible. Problems of scale break literacies. As pandemic maps splice species contact and material liveliness into regulatory apparatuses and governable borders, literacy becomes a matter of life and death (eg. Snaza 2019).

Infrastructural Affect

Health system overloads, airline shutdowns, internet data overages and outages, supply chains snags, slaughterhouse closures, bureaucratic backlogs, empty streets—infrastructure gets noticed when it breaks (Star 1999, 382). Infrastructure is relational (380). It connects and moves. It embodies standardizations and classificatory habits: species configurings, a version of the body, medical grades, credentials, forms of mobility, plugs, wires, product ratings, and certifications. There is a pedagogy to what scaffolds us. Infrastructures and communities of practice are mutually shaped by convention (381). And all of these are at the mercy of what hardened material capacities have come before: undersea internet conduits, for example, that follow colonial spice and slave trade routes (382; Starosielski 2015). Infrastructures train bodies into forms of sovereignty (eg. Knox 2017, 373)—but they also have the capacity to affect a new politics of togetherness (367).

Figure 5. Checking the JHU Center for Systems Science and Engineering pandemic map

"Money Means Nothing"

From the surrounds of Italy's collective PTSD, theorist Franco Berardi announces, *money means nothing*. Leaning into outbreak's capitalist glitch means merely surrendering to the microflows of production-interrupting critters—like the virus—to find renewed pleasure in the long-denied mortality that makes us feel alive (2020). But capital is just another genre in crisis. There are other affectivities of debt. Confagricoltura—a large-scale Italian agribusiness lobby—has petitioned the government to flex the *Decreto Flussi* or "flows decree" immigration loophole to allow for an influx of hundreds of thousands of precarious non-EU agricultural workers (Fortuna 2020). Here in Canada, temporary foreign workers are "excluded" from travel bans (Canadian Press 2020). Injustice is a matter of how the planet is *made fruitful*; eating and killing cannot be hygienically uncoupled (Latour 2020; Haraway 2008). Meanwhile, HelloFresh's stocks soar and precarious DoorDash and UberEats gig economy workers deliver takeout with no protective gear (Glickman 2020; Webb 2020). Health capitalisms amp up orthorexias: linking plant-based diets, immunity, and social media visual cultures (McCarthy 2020). But jerry-rigging an anticapitalist otherwise from viral ruin will necessitate changes both ethological and affective, a revisioning of *the biological* that cultivates other tastes—opens to new attachments—both alimentary and theoretical (eg. Probyn 1999).

Plantationocene

Plantationocene is an epochal genre—an alternative to anthropocene—that links money and slave agricultures in the historical and ongoing global relocation and forced labor of plants, animals, microbes, and people (Haraway et al. 2016). Plantation agricultures are a pandemic-friendly means to configure species life. They set up *deadly discontinuities*: genocide, dispossession, captivity, exploitation, and extraction. With no regard for intergenerational patterns of care, agricultures of scale consolidate some players and kill off others (Haraway in Mitman 2019; Haraway 2016, 137). Plantationocene is not a timespan—it is an attention span, a term that burnishes transformative possibilities of historical and future noticing. It knots appetite, violence, and theory.

Figure 6. Fermenting raisin yeast for sourdough, Mathew Arthur, 2020

Species Jump

Huanan Seafood Market, bat, pangolin, virus, human, Nadia the COVID-19-infected tiger at the Bronx Zoo (Knibb 2020)—the pandemic imaginary thrums with species anxieties. Species is not always the right unit of expression (Tsing 2015, 162). It is a term that relies on borders, muzzling Indigenous diplomacies of nonhuman encounter as feeling and knowing (TallBear 2015, 234). Still, it points at the relentlessly particular (Haraway 2018, 164) and frames the threat of what passes between us. Species jumps happen, though, all the time. But how to embody the risks? What contour or texture does feeling take? Activating the queer potentials of species contact is a training in capacities and feels: accompanyings, companionships, tones of regard, manners of touch (164; see also Wendy's piece on touch in the concluding section). The point is not to domesticate—in lockdown everyone is planting seeds, baking bread. Instead, we might practice the risks of togetherness. We might look for confusions of human and nonhuman capacity, for a sense of messiness that disrupts sanitizing colonial force (Arthur &

Jentink 2019, 153), crafting species pedagogies of compost or fermentation (fig. 6) that stir up alternative economies of labor and attention, richer citationalities, and a queerer sense of scale and duration (see Johnny's piece in the following section). Over and over, we might write out the patchy unknowabilities of difference, threading together feels and attentions toward a new pace of life together.

Endnotes

1. See Berlant, L. Genre Flailing. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*. 1 (2), pp. 156-162.

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iii. Fermenting Relations

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Hand dipped in starter, Jean-Luc Gallic, 2020

Lately, I find myself sharing space with a newly-formed co-inhabitant. Just out of reach from any direct sunlight, we cross-contaminate and intimately touch. Here lie bubbling connections, violent fermentations, and sticky compounds. Usually, I never fully get the culture off my fingers—instead I let it dry and cake on for the next handwashing. Over the past few weeks, the gooey culture seems healthier, stronger, and more alive in my presence. Its ultimate fate guided by my anxieties and excitements while living with the pandemic.

Since the onset of the global pandemic, sourdough bread baking has exploded in popularity with Google searches for "bread" hitting an all-time high in March 2020 (McCarron 2020). Like wild yeast, the popularity seems to have saturated the air of the world-at-home and given rise to a flood of social media posts and articles illuminating active starters and Instagrammable loaves. In fact, so many

have returned to and adopted this form of ancient baking that along with the shortages of fresh produce, toilet paper, and sanitizer, active yeast has begun to disappear from grocery store shelves (Makalintal 2020). These shortages surrounding food security and its overall infrastructure can be seen as relational (see Mathew's piece in the previous section) as acts of *stocking-up* and *settling-into* domesticity—in quarantine—meet with feverish anxieties concerning the unseen virus and troubling biopolitics. Essential workers strike for better PPE while rallies to "re-open the country" occur (Jaafari 2020). State-controlled initiatives develop self-policing, over-policing during mass protests, and growing fears of one's own breath (see Mathew's piece in the previous section) are felt during chants of "I can't breathe."

While keeping bodies *in* and *isolated* is essential to efforts bent on slowing the spread of COVID-19, agency over these movements is not equal—with some forced indoors while others out into the streets (Arnold 2020). Fears of the unseen, between each other and our things, causes us to begin to develop a "numbness" towards rearrangements, haphazard barriers, and boundaries built between one another (Wołodźko 2020). With an increased awareness of the things around us and the simultaneous asociality that comes with being physically distant, what is it about these emergent spaces that can be and should be amplified? Can the re-organization of human/nonhuman meetings—with sticky things like sourdough starter—challenge the heightened attention turns toward the *unseen* under the pandemic?

We get home, disrobe for the virus, disrobe from the protest. Shower. Wash our hands. The house is silent (given what just happened): long gazes, exhausted routines. I remember the dough left out to rise, I mindlessly start kneading it to prepare for a bake. Wait, did I wash my hands again? I check between my fingers for the distinct orange powdered residue that is left from tear-gas. The fiery taste is still in my mouth. I knead, feeling the dough, repeatedly turning it over without looking.

To counter the coziness stemming from settling into the pandemic, this short thread hopes to add to the attunements sewn into Mathew's piece *Writing Pandemic Feels*. Here, I hope to draw attention to the trend of sourdough bread baking in order to tease out the messy, volatile interruptions that come with touching, eating, and tasting the unseen—the microscopic bits we encounter while being home in our daily lives. Taking the increased interest in sourdough bread baking seriously will require a critical look at the microbial elements of sourdough

starters and the messy, speculative work that comes with making *through* amateur bio-art as an active labor of care during the pandemic. Possibly, through attuning to these alternative labors and working-with the lack of control felt with fermentation, the microbial, and the contaminated, a potential for new knowledges and connections can emerge from ambiguities as boundaries between human/nonhuman start to fall apart. These knowledges challenge colonial configurations and anxieties concerning microbial species so that we may discover our own agencies in connecting with one another even in isolation (see Mathew's piece in the previous section).

Most days my sourdough starter can be found sitting, fermenting its composition of flour, water, salt, and yeast. However, it is never just sitting. When combined, this mixture bursts and expands on a microscopic scale—the yeast and glucose (from the flour) meet to form carbon dioxide, raising the concoction into bubbles of sticky goo (Dunn 2018). Gently pushing against its top to make itself known, daily burpings help it release tension. These small moments of communication and repetitive visits lead to a mutual caring for the starter—fulfilling intimate connections while in isolation. Care in this regard can be giving, but it can also be a violent disturbance to its being—cutting, ripping, and removing of large amounts of starter is done continuously and infinitely to feed and grow the culture. Shortly before going into quarantine, I acquired my starter for sourdough bread from a friend who offered recommendations for maintenance and care. This friend had acquired starter fragments, an ancestor to my starter, from someone else. Through the passing down of portions, these starters were cut from previous starters that may have been maintained for years elsewhere.

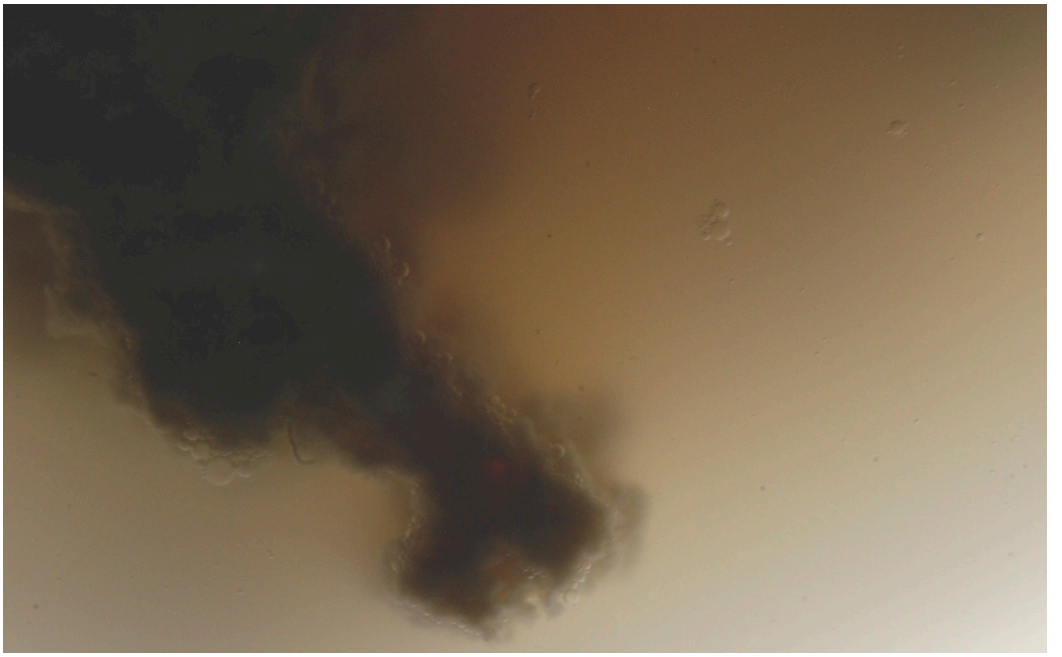
The culture of yeast is everywhere in my home. Confined to jars, stuck to floors, sitting out on the table, crumbs in the bed. Sometimes the contents of the jar seem to change in hue, sometimes I cannot tell if there is anything different about it at all. Today, bubbling and bouncing, the gaseous contents have burst out of the lid, running down the sides and pooling on the surrounding counter. I too am eager to escape, to open up, to feel things and be messy again. I accidentally get starter on my hand. It is sticky. It tastes surprisingly good.

Through each contact, the microbial composition of the starter is changed: an assemblage of bits and pieces from before dictates what future state it will be in tomorrow. What is unique to sourdough, and to the fermentation process, is this ability for a continuing evolution through its feedback and transient nature;

passing from person to person, imprinting memories of what worked and what did not (Hey 2017). Different baking methods brought to the meeting with fermented sourdough alongside improvised tricks (that just so happen to pay off) open potentials for knowledge production that reflect what Maya Hey calls *making-do.* Making-do with this assemblage, amassing both the starters' histories and the bakers', is as much an experimental and sensual research method as it is a learned practice of paying attention to the "ambient conditions" that surround our daily lives (Hey 2017, 86). If your house feels a bit too cold, or if the air quality has changed with the humidity outside, you must adapt along with the material conditions that guide your starter. The gaseous openings that glue the bread together get all over you as *you* get all over it. Slowly, you knead the dough with your hands instead of a mixer, the body gauging and weighing shapes and pressures like a measuring tool (Dunn 2018). Pulling, tucking, feeling its "skin" over and over.

Making-do with your starter, you begin to develop your own sensibilities of care: an ethical way of touching the dough that is as unconscious as it is conscious (Sutton 2006, 314). So much of the starter imprints on us. The microbiome of the hands of those who bake often tend to be closer to the biomes of the loaves they cook than the biomes of a human (Reese & Madden 2020). An interface between hand and dough, the mixing of microbiomes connects as a lingering in-between space, a split moment of chance and underlying influence. Maybe you forgot to wash your hands again? Maybe the filter for the tap was left unchanged? Small interruptions, unconscious decisions made in the middle of the night when you are too tired to bake, these are so often the factors that influence your breads.

This agitation to concepts of the human and nonhuman as boundaried is a fundamental reconfiguration, an always-developing spatial realm of confusion to where our bodies might begin and end amongst the microbial, amongst the virus (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). When you build on shifting memories and speculative recommendations, always looking for potential adjustments for better growth, and never knowing for sure if the starter is pleased, you give room to biological transitions and affective capacities. An affective potential arises in the overlooked richness that comes with shifting privileges over the anthropocentric narrative (Bennett 2001) and towards the histories and labors held in all microbiomes—human, baker, dough, or otherwise. Slowly, you learn how to handle the sticky mass, adding more flour when needed, feeling for shorter intervals of kneading when the dough is wet, ditching the timer, instead adding a sample taste to your sensual/temporal map.



Starter float test, Jean-Luc Gallic, 2020

Mold has grown on top of my starter. I skim it off and stir in a handful of fresh flour to feed it. No time to worry, like a wound for something I must bake this week to get my mind and hands into something.

Sourdough bread is a blending—a chimera of sorts—that thrives on a necessary contamination, a necessary vulnerability. In this sense, experimenting with the concept of contamination during fermentation adds another potential to the DIY ethics of bio-art, a potential of risk, of anxiety, and of fear that attaches itself to the objects at hand: microbes, viruses, disease. Amidst the global pandemic, fear has been established through the declaration of boundaries as affective designations that—in order to be reproduced or reconfigured—require openings, leaks, and floods (Ahmed 2004). These shifting configurations are met with genre flailing (Berlant 2018). We rush to make sense of the anxieties and insecurities surrounding Zoom privacy leaks, of a favorite celebrity catching COVID, of yet another infectious cruise ship in limbo. The "pandemic imaginary" of fear continuously expands and time blurs (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). In contrast, the mandate to stay at home is pitched as a patriotic and active duty against border anxieties during crisis, against any unplanned cross-contamination

with an invisible *other*. Working with the starter gives us unconscious moments of breaking these boundaries of constructed fear—daily repetition with the fermenting starter is risky but also sediments in daily life as a regularity. To fully become a body, we experiment with the limits and capacities of the starter as it experiments with us. Bits of family members, strangers, animalia, and ourselves are devoured through the daily bread. In 2011, exploring the limits of infection, a woman used her own vaginal yeast as the active agent in a sourdough starter (Rees 2015). In 2019, Seamus Blackley (creator of Xbox) extracted ancient yeast (found embedded in an Egyptian clay bowl) to develop a 4,000-year-old starter (Machemer 2006). These risks, in exploring the limits of sourdough baking as a bio-art, also extend the limits of what it means to exist with a body amongst other affective things.

Is getting take-out safe? Should I use plastic face shields or cloth masks? Can singing project aerosols further than speaking? Risk follows an attunement with all bodies that might come in contact with—and create potential transformations through—our objects, human or not. Between one another, we are interfaced with speculative risks (DIY masks, homemade hand-sanitizer) treading in active futures of *what could be* but also in what could kill (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). The microbial elements that make sharing our bread potentially dangerous—unseen instigators of fear—are the same agents that have many touting sourdough as a "superfood" well-suited to COVID-19, as the sourdough microbiome adds infection-fighting healthy flora to the gut (Counihan & Van Esterikn 2012). Similarly, during the 1854 Cholera outbreak, those who drank more beer had a better chance of fighting off the virus; the microbiome found in their gut was stronger (Dunn 2018). As uncertainty about the spread of COVID-19 circulates, repairing and refocusing our conceptions of 'the biological' is urgently important. As paranoia fuels shared narratives, extractive powers hope to capitalize off our widespread isolation.

Another repetition, another day in quarantine. Today, I nervously open its top, exposing it, always surprised by the 'pop!' sound that it makes, always waiting for the final explosion to end the experiment all together.

Working with sourdough is an active realm of attuning to underlying forces, a trust in tasting and eating bits of shared histories, fears, and desires. On this intimate level, being aware that we are never alone and *never have been*—due to

the microbiome that pervades us—can help to nuance responsibilities toward a productive politics of care, one that requires a reevaluation of our nonhuman counterparts. To do this requires that we consider the "behind the scenes" labors of our everyday life as an ethics of care (see Mathew's piece in the previous section). This thread hopes to push the trend of sourdough bread baking further, to create/to offer/to present an active force against the fear of the microscopic and the food/sustenance shortages outside of us. Time spent with a starter's microbiome can get snagged on openings, a potential for peeking inside our infrastructure, an infrastructure that is increasingly black-boxed. We must stay with these forms of interruption in fermentation, a potential to uncover knowledges that disregard borders during a time when so much is being closed off or shut down.

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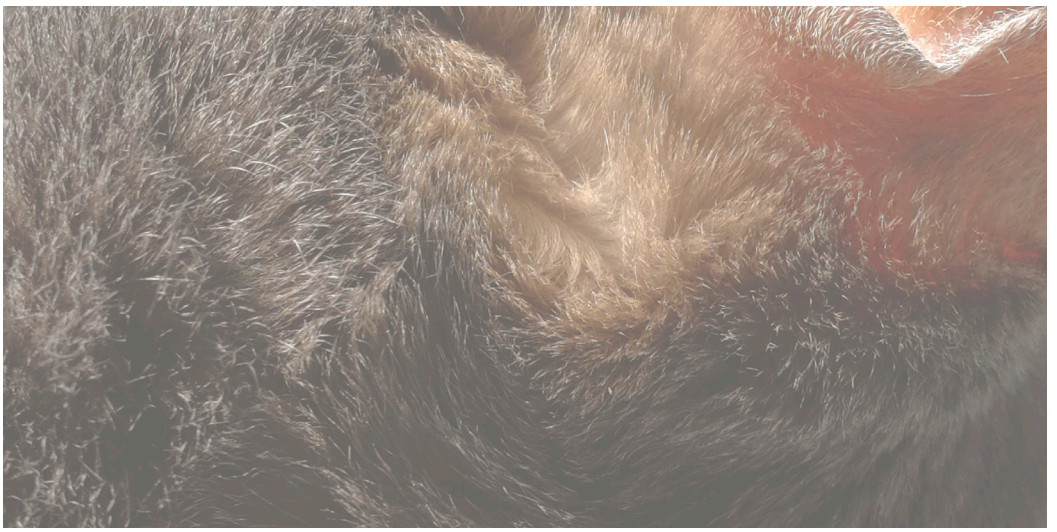

Ear, Wendy Truran, 2020

iv. Surviving Touch

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"These fragments I have shored against my ruin"
The Waste Land, T. S. Eliot

There is so much death,
I am not sure how to live.

There is so much loss,
I am not sure how to begin.

There is so much hurt,
I am not sure how
to cradle your pain.

I cannot intellectualize this crisis.

I cannot live in my head—
that is no safe place.

Colossal bronze statue of Constantine I: Capitoline Museum, Rome, Wendy Truran, 2016

Cleverness in Quarantine

I cannot do cleverness in quarantine. My friend finds calm in collectively reading cleverness. I am glad. He finds community and comfort in theory, and in voices, and in minds. I am comforted that he is comforted, but his comfort is not mine.

I can't clever right now. Certainly not the kind of clever the academy demands: the critique, the articulate outrage, the intellectualizing, the performance of objectivity, the claims to knowing (more than), the expectation to do and to produce evermore 'now that you are home and aren't doing anything.'

No.

Who's Zooming Who?

Being in contact is not the same thing as being in touch.

To touch is to make visceral contact: affective, it doesn't have to be physical, but it must be *something*.

Colossal statue of Constantine: right hand, Capitoline Museum, Rome, Wendy Truran, 2016

"TOUCH ME. SOFT EYES. SOFT SOFT SOFT HAND. I AM LONELY HERE. O, TOUCH ME SOON, NOW. WHAT IS THAT WORD KNOWN TO ALL MEN? I AM QUIET HERE ALONE. SAD TOO. TOUCH, TOUCH ME."

Ulysses, James Joyce

Attuning to Suffering

On a zoom call a Black storyteller tells a story. She tells us that the lack of touch (physical and emotional) has led her to wish she was no longer alive.

"COVID and the lockdown have drastically affected me in that area, because there is no touch or quality when you live alone."

She voices her pain, her suffering, her nearness to unbeing: "I don't know how to accurately explain to you… the desperation, the grief, the emptiness of not being touched"

…but we feel the flesh of her words…

"also I don't know how to describe what it feels like when you get that first warm body that is touching you."

Her rescuer is not human.

She lives and she creates from her brush with non-being.

I cannot embrace you,
but I can hold your precious corpus cradled in my open earpalms.[1]

We are Creatures

Comfort like rhythm, a deep hum, slow sway side-to-side-to-side
slidepushscrape against our sidefaces—greetings, affections,
transmissions
Buried in soft silky existence, such pulsing, purring, pure vitality
Trilling, brrrbbing, touch and tenderness

We are Creatures, Wendy Truran, 2020

I am saved
Under the soft-warmth-weight of hummmmming pulsation my racing,
frightened heart slows
Pelt-scent softness
Healing
Unified
Assembled
I deep-know, in my bones and in my blood that we creatures *are*

Porosity of creatureliness
they are not mine—we are *us*
and *ours*

Brothers, Wendy Truran, 2020

Fern (left) and green pepper (right), Atlanta, Wendy Truran, 2020

I Surround Myself with Living Things

To remind myself that I am a living thing.
To encounter the fact that non-human thriving might mean human extinction.
To acknowledge that human cruelty is pernicious.
To feel in my marrow that life persists.

Solanum lycopersicum

I don't see them grow – they change in leaps and bound, surging into themselves. So unapologetic, glorious, jubilant, never questioning their right to exist or to shine their jewels into our faces. I steal their fruits though. I colonize the plant, taking their fruit. Is it really a kinship when you steal? No matter how lovingly or appreciatively—whiteness, again. I am sorry—but not sorry enough to not care for them. Care can be cruel. I touch leaves, pluck taut rubies. I am punched by a peppery surprise that makes me gasp with pleasure. I do not know the words that will express the scent of tomatoes. I need them in a different way than for food or energy. I plant myself into the earth with their roots, touch-smell fresh dirt—so clean and pure. I tend them, they offer me joy as they flourish. Attachment to life, an existence, reminding me of life as I shy from death. Red treasures ripped from their homes and transplanted for my selfish benefit. It is an old story, an old-new story. I spend summer tending and I seek to cultivate a better justice. There is no individual: assemble, march, scream, survive, grow again.

I hear myself think—I am never in the place I should be. I never feel I am in the right place. When I came to this country, I started digging in the dirt for the first time, I wanted a little garden. I do not feel rooted in America. Like an orchid, I am epiphytic. I live here, my tendrils extend and increase, but I grow in a medium I was not meant for, there is always transplant shock. But then again, we all grow in a land we were not meant for. This earth is not ours, it never was. I surround myself with living things not to escape from death, or rage, or injustice, but to stay with death and rage and injustice.

My Tomatoes, Wendy Truran, 2020

[Fragments from]
The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

When despair of the world grows in me
…
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds
I come into the peace of wild things
…
I come into the presence of still water.
…
For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Fragile

I watch the birds being alive.

Orchids, Atlanta Botanical Gardens
Wendy Truran, 2018

HUMMINGBIRD……magic
magic
magical
magic perfection hope joy wonder.

It's so fragile, it'll be killed, it'll be hurt, how can something so fragile and beautiful live in this world? It *is* alive though. It is alive and I feel touched by joy because it exists.

Sometimes I can hardly bear how beautiful and precious life is.
Sometimes I can't bear how despicable we humans are.

CARE for others can be a radical act, a political statement,
a queering of consumption.

Care is a defiant **ACT** against the death drive "you might get me, YOU shit, but you won't get every living thing"

Holding Paws with Argento, Wendy Truran, 2020

I hope
My care is tender hope. My garden is growing hope.
My cultivation of love in the face of fuckery is wild, desperate, indelible, demanding, **HOPE.**

Crafting Colour

I add the ‘u’ to color because I am making for others.

I give them my imperfect offerings.

Scraps, Kathleen Royston, 2020

I am compelled to create, crafting to repudiate covid, imperfect, unsellable, playful, pleasurable making—the antithesis of academic production.

I am ravenous in my need for beauty and colour. I luxuriate in pigments; the vibrancy drowns my anxiety.

My friend creates colour. Tactile colour. She mixes it and stirs it in pots and pours it on texture. She shares her gift and I can touch colour, weave strands together and move colour through my fingers. Her colours soothe my heartaches, synaesthetic ASMR I strokescroll the images that calm me through colourtouch.

She helped me to make colour one time—it filled me with joy. For once, the vision in my bodymind came out into the world and it was beautiful.[2]

Beauty helps me feel alive. Beauty helps me stay alive.

Beauty reminds me what being alive is for.

It saves lives.

I always hope.

"the tongue, organ of taste, is also, as flesh, the medium of touch,"
—Christopher Long

Tasting Touch

We die if we don't taste. No other sense is as vital.

Aristotle thought taste was a form of touch, the foundation of all sentient life.

I channel my anxiety into the alchemy of baking and cocktails.

I make and taste, tongue pleasure through pastries.

I deliver tasty treats to those I cannot touch but who are within reach.
I hope to sweeten a moment for them. To remind them of pleasure and connections.
I hope they are touched enough to feel.

"sensation, after all, is not simply a matter of knowledge but also of pleasure"
—Pascal Massie

Spawn of Fantasies
Silting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage

"Song to Joannes," Mina Loy

Dale Chihuly, *Chihuly Through the Looking Glass*,
Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Wendy Truran, 2011

Toothsome Language

Making tasty words. I love to experience words with bite and texture. Texture is a toothsome word, *textura*, you bite into the 'x' and spit out sound with the 't', to end with a buttery smooth 'urrrr.'

My favorite swearword is a lovely word to say—it starts with a compression of the lips and then a ballooning breath, low—lulling into a lullaby of lll's halfway—BREATHE IN BIG O, then a phlegmy back-throat clearing, harsh-sounding, uvula waggling scrape towards the susseration of a sssssssssssssss to close.[3]

I want to understand otherwise. I want to include the touch-taste of words in our comprehension and communication of affect. Language can be textured and felicitous, we can sense language for pleasure and not make sense of it always.

Meaning can move us, change us, shift us—"I am touched by your words" but how do we read feelingly?[4] Language makes impressions upon our bodyminds, most often leaving scars.

Why do the bruises of language linger and its caresses land so lightly?

I don't want to lose language because it can be lush. It can tongue our imagination into combinations other than thought.

Ich fühl mich traurigsorgeangsttrauer.

Survival

Dale Chihuly, *Chihuly Through the Looking Glass*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Wendy Truran, 2011

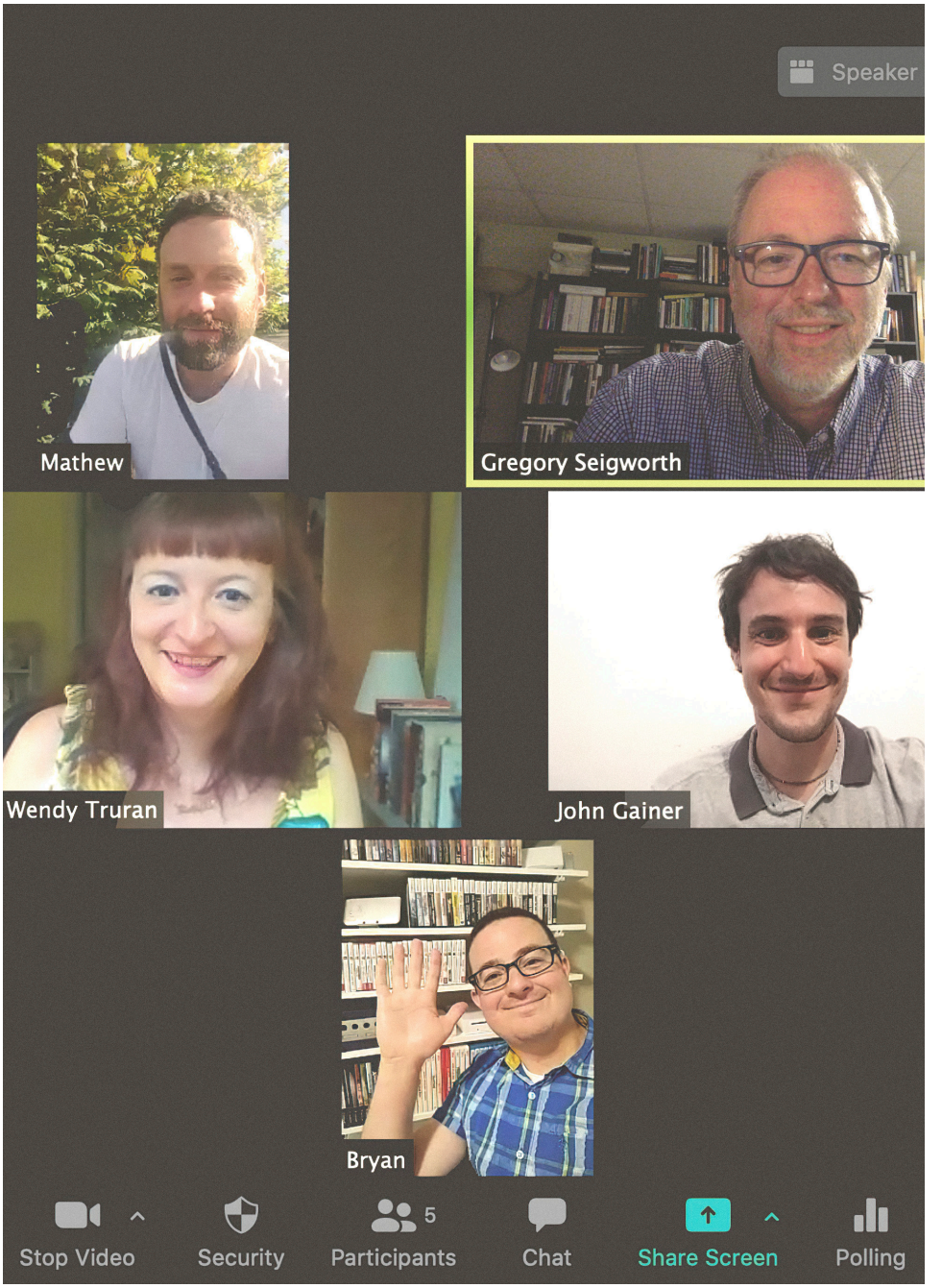
Endnotes

1. You can listen to Courtney Cook tell her story, “A Cat Named Cake,” in the Transformative Narratives Audio archive ” (forthcoming Fall 2020) https://sdie.gatech.edu/transformative-narratives/audio-stories

2. To see the colors my friend creates and the one I helped to create see Republica Unicornia https://republicaunicornia.com/collections/yarn/products/empress-wendy-bfl-sock-yarn

3. Uvula is another tasty word to chew on and the flesh sack itself helps us say it (uvula: oo-voo-la; you-vu-la; uvu-la). The uvula is the dangling punchbag at the back of your throat that spottily slips food into your oesophagus (such a pretty-looking word) and keeps food out of your nose. It also helps us produce complex speech sounds.

4. For more on reading feelingly see Vicki Mahaffey and Wendy J. Truran, “Feeling Ulysses: An Address to the Cyclopean Reader.” *Ulysses: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Philip Kitcher Oxford University Press, 2020.



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