



# ***Contact***

**Collective**

Spatial Biopolitics 2019/2020  
Group Project

May 2020, during the Pandemic

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## 90 Contact Info

# Foreword

**We** are a collective of researchers brought together in the Visual Cultures Department of Goldsmiths, University of London, exploring social space in a time of human capital and social distance.

**We** experienced this pandemic together as students, as carers, as workers, as immigrants, & we faced our fellow students leaving the country & returning to various time zones, lockdown restrictions, political tensions, and numerous personal crises – yet we continued reaching out to one another.

**We** speak as:  
researchers, artists, writers, internationals, art historians, curators, thinking activists, philosophy nerds.

Ece Ates/Hanna Ballon Carneiro/Yue Cao/Isabelle Cole/Kitty Edwards/  
Ewen Ma/Pelumi Odubanjo/InYoung Park/Kelly Rappleve/Cristina Ricci/  
Eran Sabaner Kalaora/Joohyun Song/Zachary Stamatakis/Yuhang Zhang

# Manifesto

As we compile voices, notes, thoughts, moments and images of life in social distance across this planet, 11 points of exploration frame our research:

- 1 Solidarity is built-in care- not sentimental care for the 'needy'- but rather through constant interaction as Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests. We must build the kind of communication and trust which allows communities to know that people will be there when they need them to be. We will continue to expose ourselves to shaming, doxxing, cancelling in order to reach out for what Jean-Luc Nancy calls this perilous friendship, to yearn for a better friendship than a network affiliation allows and to reach out in the hopes of radical 'care'. To encounter that whisper of chaos, that delighted, that random, that unexpected, that unpredictable, that logic-defying moment of contact.
- 2 Caring is horizontal connection instead of vertical exploitation and control of movement. It is able to alter the landscape of suffocated verticality and to bring spacing to each individual. Under this circumstance, caring can really open up a horizon space that resisting vertical forces implemented by capitalist infrastructure.
- 3 We will look at the new types of relationships between the social, professional and domestic operations, and study the new forms of social interaction and behaviour adopted by people during their isolation period. Social norms have been jeopardized by new social distancing rules. Beyond the specifics of what has changed and what will keep changing, we will question if our social behaviours will ever return to 'normal' and what the impact of this could be.
- 4 Social relations exists in space. Social space is produced by human relations, and underpinned by the social norms specific to that space. We will discuss new social norms produced under quarantine in relation to space, and specifically social relations that currently exist in the abstract habitat of the internet. We will investigate the shifts caused to public and private spaces following the lockdown due to the pandemic.
- 5 Like for Mark Fisher, the emptied scenery outside reminds us that our world may not be what it was, anymore. Not just in sci-fi backdrops, we find readily a sense of eeriness from the pandemic landscapes outside our windows, promoting questioning of agency and existence.

- 6 Intimacy can be achieved without human contact. It is primarily body and bodily connections with the other, and in that sense a virus and its contagion (or for many of us, the possibility of contagion) can actually denote a form of intimacy. We will discuss why people crave intimacy so much that they endeavour to come into physical contact with other human beings under the risks of contagion.
- 7 During the time of crisis, productivity reshuffles its usual characteristics and multiplies its meanings, since the capitalist-neoliberalist model of production: accumulation of products/problem solving. For many, social distance has deployed new forms of exploitations that feature verticality. For many, social distance means a constant barrage of information and working remotely that has eroded the distinction of middle air and personal spaces, it means more vertical and intense admin and surveillances (wake up and right to a Zoom meeting), aggravated workplace inequalities and squeezing, in name of 'state of exception'. Workplace repression, political depression and isolated anxiety are simultaneously pumped in one small space. We want to be Being, rather than seen through the lens of Human Capital. We will resist the capitalistic push to be productive as Byung-Chul Han explains to us.
- 8 We want to drift outside, between, with and throughout our algorithmed enclosures, in the direction of diagonal like Deleuze & Guattari calls us to do. Wendy Chun tells us the aim is to loiter in these spaces, to confuse the algorithm, to create absurd points of causality for their pre-determined futures and models. We will seek out surveys to skew them, inhabiting imagined alter-egos as we answer. We are full of contradictions, & will make our own projections, full of grey matter.
- 9 Disasters are not great equalizers. They affect vulnerable communities (namely the elderly, the working class, queers, immigrants, refugees) the most. We will not forget that under capitalist patriarchy, violence is a common occurrence for vulnerable communities.
- 10 Crisis is an excuse for governments to employ measures and new draconian legislatures to tighten surveillance, to isolate individual subjects and dismantle collective movements in the guise of "social distancing". The ineptitude and corruption of governments and institutions worldwide in the face of a global pandemic have brought to light the necessity of collective civil action to protect the most vulnerable.
- 11 We must not lose sight of the multiplicity of narratives and stories also taking place in conjunction with the current "global narrative" of the pandemic, especially when the already-precarious narratives of vulnerable societies and communities are in even more danger of being vanished.



captured image from video of kontakt collective manifesto  
posted on YouTube by 22 May 2020  
<https://youtu.be/QaQHkzuOPGo>

# Live Panel Discussion: Radical Care in the Pandemic

## Biographies of the speakers



Begüm Başdaş

Begüm received her PhD in Geography from the University of California Los Angeles (2007) and her MA in Art History from the University of California Riverside (2001). Her BA was in Sociology at Boğaziçi University, Turkey. She also worked full time as a human rights defender at Amnesty International Turkey. Begüm's current research is on human rights, gender, sexuality, and migration. She focuses on the re-construction of masculinities of refugee men as they move across European borders. She explores how Afghan refugee men through their everyday spatial practices build relations of care and solidarity in Lesbos island – Greece. Begüm is currently a researcher as a part of the Einstein Fellows group at Humboldt University in Berlin.



Safiya Robinson

Safiya Robinson is the founder and creator of sisterwoman vegan, and a self-taught vegan chef of British, Jamaican and African American descent, on a mission to bring new flavours to the vegan movement and showcase delicious, simple and creative plant based eating practices. sisterwoman vegan adopts an intersectional approach to veganism with recipes inspired by West Indian and African American flavours. sisterwoman vegan aims to encourage healing using plant based dishes inspired by the Black diaspora and our stories. Her work looks to provide a space to empower us all to think more critically about the food that we eat and repair our relationships with food that patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy have disrupted. Sisterwoman vegan has a holistic approach to food and wellness, considering a person's physical, mental and emotional health as well as the social structures and circumstances creating their environment.



Christine Pungong

Christine Pungong is a London-based artist, researcher and curator interested in psychogeography, spatial practice, black feminism and queerness. Her work is interested in the politics of food, decolonising, affection & intimacy, alternative families, blackness & care. She is currently working as a curatorial assistant on the V&A East project and is a member of the experimental arts collective Bare Minimum.



## Introduction to the Discussion



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streamed on YouTube by 20 May 2020  
<https://youtu.be/cD5L6Vijlp8>

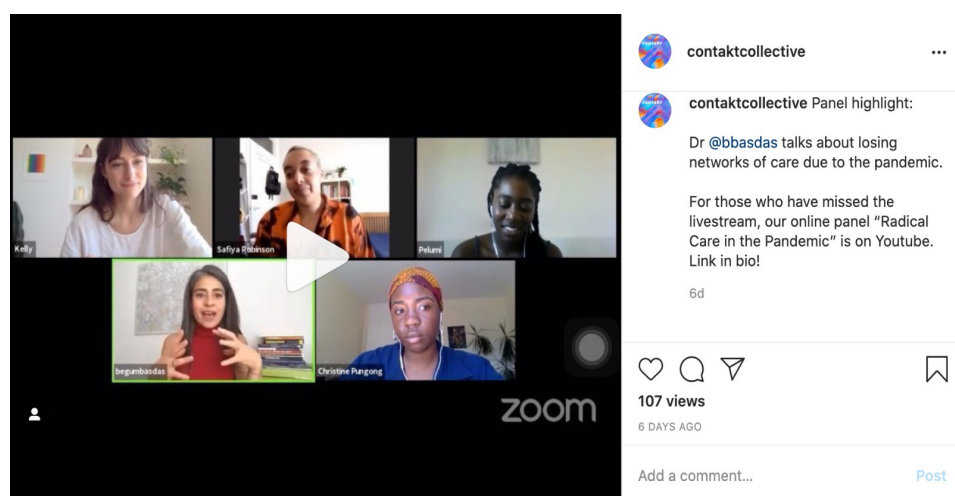
Thank you to everyone joining us today for our panel “Radical Care in the Pandemic”. Hello to those watching from YouTube live, my name is Kelly Rappleye and I am moderating our panel today with Pelumi on behalf of Kontakt Collective. The research group that we formed within the visual cultures department of Goldsmiths, University of London where we are all studying on the Contemporary Art Theory graduate program, within the Spatial Biopolitics module. We created Conakt as a collective because it was important to us to push against the neoliberal university which promotes competition and individualism and see if we could really think together, infect one another’s ideas, co-produce which many of us have never been able to do in the university.

As a collective, we experienced this pandemic together as students, as carers, as immigrants. We faced students leaving the country, returning to various time zones and lockdown restrictions and numerous personal crises. Yet we still managed to continue reaching out to one another and immediately something we were all reflecting on was ‘Care’. Before the pandemic, we were interested in ‘human capital’ and the forces that reduce human life to an individuals capacity to produce capital within conditions of scarcity.

Drawing from works such as Johanna Hedva’s Sick Woman Theory, Bell Hooks (Homeplace -site of Resistance, & Sarah Ahmed (Self-care is a warfare) we reflected on the capacity for ‘care’ to be a radical act of resistance; care for those bodies who are subjected to neglect and planned premature death; care for oneself and one another. Beyond this wellness market that sells self-care as an expensive indulgence. Can we reframe ‘care’ as a radical act and political act? How does the meaning of ‘care’ transform in this pandemic moment?

We are really excited to introduce our speakers today for this panel who practice in different fields and across different communities, but have really interesting parallels and commonalities around the intersections of ‘radical care’ and ‘social solidarity’. We have Safiya Robinson, a self-taught chef and food educator on intersectional vegan food practice. Dr. Begüm Başdaş who is a geographer and refugee rights advocate who has worked with Amnesty international in the EU and Greece as well as a researcher with a focus in gender and sexuality studies, and Christine Pungong who is an artist, researcher and curator interested in psychogeography, spatial practice, black feminism and queerness and a member of the experimental arts collective Bare Minimum Collective, which is how we became familiar with her work.

## Highlights from the Discussion



**Question to Begüm:** You work primarily with refugees and in a recent interview, you discuss the ineffectiveness of governments in taking action against the death of vulnerable groups. On this notion of vulnerability, Judith Butler talks about the two lessons learned from vulnerability. On the one hand it “describes a shared condition of social life, of interdependency,” on the other hand it “it names the greater likelihood of dying.” How do the pandemic and coronavirus affect the way other-ed bodies are perceived through this language of “vulnerability” and treated from what you’ve seen in the communities that you work with?

**Answer from Begüm:** For decades political philosophers and feminists queer theorists have repeatedly highlighted the fact that we live in a relational world. It is not about our self individual responsibility, because when we look at the whole consequences of what has been happening in migration camps in the refugee camps in Greece the Himes in Germany and elsewhere in different groups, people are experiencing the pandemic much more different than most of us do[...] So there is this perception that the other’s body in this case, migrant body the refugee body becomes the biological weapon.

**Question to Safiya:** It has now been made absolutely clear who really is essential to our society, whose labour is essential, & the importance of food and the labour that produces. Is there a chance that, especially in Western cultures and in urban centres people have been forced to reconnect with the idea that food does not magically appear in the grocery store. Is there a chance to raise a new consciousness from this moment around the agriculture and food supply chain and labour rights for those who make this happen?

**Answer from Safiya:** Practically the care is like subsidized or cancelled random utilities, it is that people giving food like food packages. That’s what the care at the very practical and material level[...] With the food as care, it is about that I care about you enough to want to sustain you, I care about you enough to want to give you some joy. I think there’s a lot of joy comes from cooking, comes from creating something that you know will sustain you but will also sustain somebody else. I think a fundamental part of self-care is being able to cook and to nourish yourself. That is the way of bringing self-care to collective care.

**Question to Christine:** You wrote about psychogeography its translation to internet spaces & how black artists drew from the Situationists and Guy Debord’s theory of deriving to find new meanings within the psychospacial landscape of the internet. It is important to think about it at this moment when so many are indoors and online for the majority of their social and political life. Yet we know the social life of the internet is increasingly organized into algorithmic enclosures of people who act like them, think like them, but like them and that reinforce race and class disparities, where micro-targeting and data capture, keep people in smaller & smaller cells.

**Answer from Christine:** There is the chance on the Internet to create tight-knit communities and to resist the physical barriers that you might find in real space. For some reason, if there’s conflict, if there are architectural divides whatever in the physical world, the online, cyberspace gives us an opportunity to connect to people that we might not otherwise have opportunity to and that creates unique chances for solidarity. In terms of care in online spaces, something soft-touched at one point was asking questions and reaching out to people and finding out what it is that people need.

# Live Panel Discussion

## Imagining a New Art World



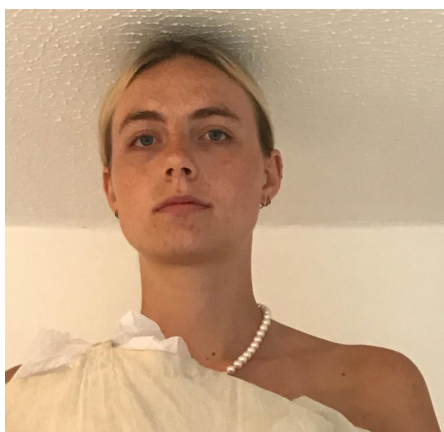
Emily Smith

Emily Smith is a gallery manager at Maximillian William, a London-based contemporary art gallery, where she manages international logistics, client relations, and exhibition design, among other projects. Her previous experience includes providing marketing strategy and project management to the Royal College of Surgeon's Museum and Plowden and Smith, as well as assisting private artists with developing their brands. Dedicated to the arts, Emily received her BA in Art History from George Mason University with a focus in Classical and Renaissance period art. She later received an MSc in Early Modern History from the University of Edinburgh and has recently graduated with distinction from Sotheby's Institute of Art with an MA in Art Business. Her dissertation analysed cross-promotional exhibitions between the Old Masters and Contemporary art sectors as part of a wider investigation into arts marketing. She is also a member of the Arts Marketing Association.



Wade Wallerstein

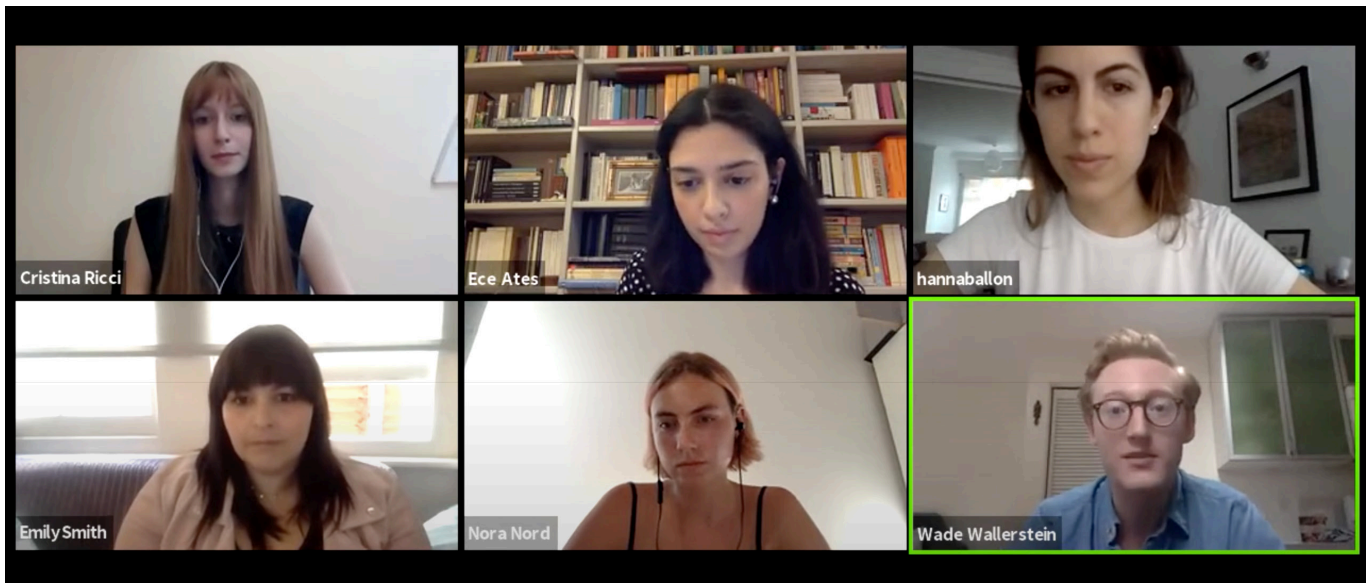
Wade Wallerstein is an anthropologist from the San Francisco Bay Area. His research centres around communication in virtual spaces and the relationship between digital visual culture and contemporary art. Wade is the founder and Director of Silicon Valet, a virtual parking lot for expanded internet art where he runs an exhibition platform and digital artist residency program. He is also co-Director of TRANSFER Gallery in Los Angeles, which is an exhibition space devoted to simulation and other computational art forms. Wade is a member of the UCL Multimedia Anthropology Laboratory, Clusterduck Research Network, and also serves as Technology & Events Curator at the Consulate of Canada in San Francisco.



Nora Nord

Nora Nord is a London-based visual artist. Her work weaves together sexuality and power, and her portraits sometimes incorporate interviews. Nord's most recent exhibition in her home "Porridge" made with Heather Glazzard reveals their oft misrepresented queer relationship through sculpture, still lifes and self-portraits. Nora Nord studied fashion communication at CSM in 2019.

## Introduction to the Discussion



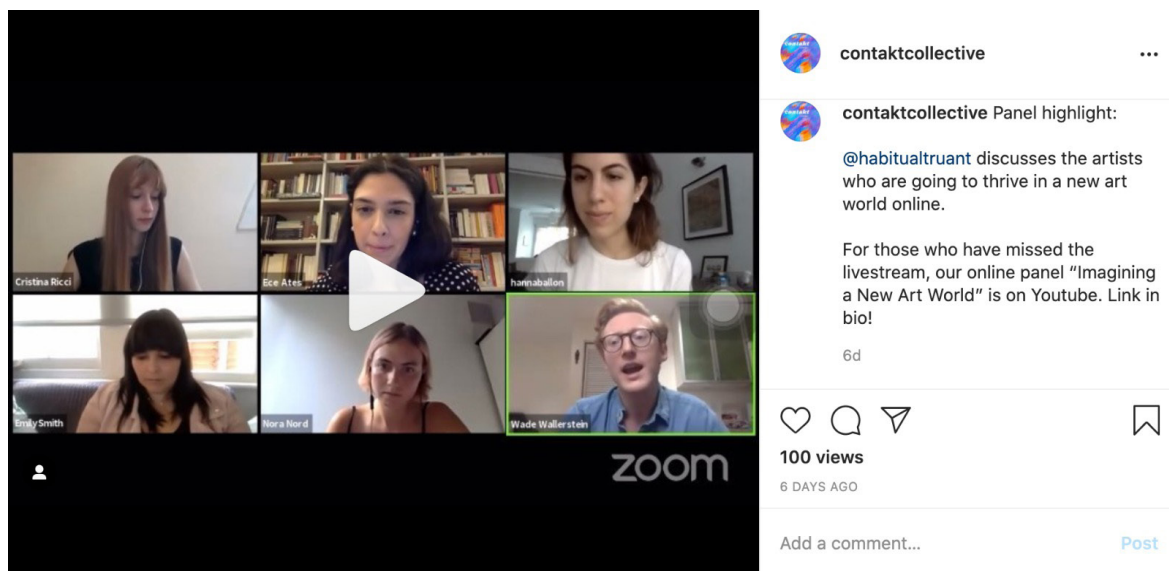
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streamed on YouTube by 20 May 2020  
<https://youtu.be/aP9MjapGOLQ>

Hi everyone and welcome to the second panel of today's live discussion titled 'Imagining a New Art World.' We had a great first panel titled 'Radical Care in the Pandemic' earlier, which you can find on our YouTube channel. I'm Cristina Ricci and will be moderating this panel with Ece Ates and Hanna Ballón. We are members of Kontakt Collective, a research group that we formed within the Visual Cultures Department at Goldsmiths, University of London exploring contact and social space in a time of human capital and social distance. Our theme emerged from various conversations and exchange of ideas in the Spatial Biopolitics module, part of the MA Contemporary Art Theory. We released a manifesto on our @kontakcollective Instagram page yesterday which hopefully provides a theoretical framework for our discussions.

As a collective, we experienced this pandemic together as students, as carers, as workers, as immigrants, & we faced our fellow students leaving the country & returning to various time zones, lockdown restrictions, political tensions, and numerous personal crises. Yet we continued reaching out to one another. Something we were reflecting on was how to engage and truly create 'contact' between art and audiences in a digital space, and how to re-imagine a post-COVID art world that is unrecognizable to the market-driven entrenchment of gendered and racialized exploitation that was the art world pre-COVID.

Having said that, we are really excited to introduce our three speakers for this panel, whose each area of expertise spans the 'art world' as such yet their different backgrounds can produce an interesting conversation around the radical and sudden transformation of public space and 'public' art engagement brought by the pandemic crisis. We have Wade Wallerstein, a digital anthropologist from the San Francisco Bay Area, whose research centres around communication in virtual spaces and the relationship between digital visual culture and contemporary art. Wade is the founder and director of Silicon Valet, a virtual parking lot for expanded internet art. Emily Smith, a gallery manager at Maximilian William, a London-based contemporary art gallery, where she manages international logistics, client relations, and exhibition design. Nora Nord, a London-based visual artist whose work weaves together sexuality and power, and her portraits sometimes incorporate interviews. We aim to have a 40-minute discussion followed by a 10-min Q&A from the audience, who can interact via the YouTube live chat.

## Highlights from the Discussion



**Question to Wade:** Wade, can you please tell us what is digital curation and why it is important?

**Answer from Wade:** Digital curation is the process of selecting and organizing and creating spaces for display online. Working with digital materials within their native material context to create these kinds of really rich phenomenological experiences for viewers across all different kinds of virtual spaces both public and private online and offline. And right now I think that digital curation is extremely important because just given that the amount of data and the amount of visual information that crosses over screens every day. I think digital curations are really important tool that we can use to organize and make sense of a kind of the deluge of content that is coming at us and it's way to kind of rearranged our virtual worlds in a way that allows us to access them in a more meaningful way and allows us to make sense of them in a time of chaos and confusion.

**Question to Nora:** In an interview from November last year, you talked about your most recent exhibition made with your partner Heather Glazzard and titled Porridge XXX, which revealed your often-misrepresented queer relationship through sculpture, still lives and self-portraits. It's interesting that you hosted it at your home in East London and wanted to demystify a queer domestic space & make it visible. In your words, "The work feels too personal for clinically white gallery walls. We're taking control of how the work is shown and how our images are seen." What do you feel about the gallery system in general, especially in a city like London?

**Answer from Nora:** To have that power over the space. The world of galleries, it's quite intimidating. How you are invited into spaces. It feels like there's a lot of barriers into that entry point and for workers, I think it is powerful and actually inviting people into your space. So you are taking back that power and that's what the whole project was about as well taking that power that we'd sort felt stripped away from us slowly.

**Question to Emily:** Emily, do you think with so many young galleries struggling at the moment, is a collaboration between them an option? To be it by sharing spaces, virtual or non-virtual. For example, David Zwirner has had an initiative called Platform, a collaborative online exhibition that showcases works by selected small galleries on the mega-dealers established platform. Could this be viable?

**Answer from Emily:** I think that there's so much under the surface that's like floating underneath these mega galleries that I do think that they have a bit of responsibility to partner make you know make partnerships like things that don't really take away from what they're doing obviously I mean they have a business themselves[...] But it's definitely something especially in these times that needs to be looked at more closely as a future kind of bridge.

# Glossary

- Body** a structure/organism of human or non-human being with an outwardness; a focal point of intimacy/carnality/care/contagion or anaesthesia/metamorphosis/seduction/battering, and mortality
- Border** a limit that dictates the beginning of the end of a geographic space or an object; even the implication that two or more things are close or next to each other
- Brain** a centre of the nervous system, have not taken form as that of a modern human being until 3000 years ago. Apparently not capable enough to understand and address virus who was around 1.5 billion years ago
- Capitalism** a prevalent world cognition/worlding machine which organises itself by production, exploitation and division, and which downplays connection, community and caring
- City** text/pattern/stratum which is growingly difficult to decode
- Contact** the state of physical touching; the action of communicating; yielding their payoff in moments of crisis; a chance encounter between members of different communities that transverses social network enclosures
- Cosmos** a vast where we are and we can only encounter trivial minor imprints and traces in it
- Crisis** that which enables the time of the network and differentiates information, that which keeps users addicted to their habitats
- Detention** the process whereby a state or private citizen lawfully holds a person by removing his or her freedom or liberty at that time
- Disinformation** false or misleading information that is spread deliberately to deceive

- Eerie** it is produced when something is absent and fundamentally tied up with questions of an agency; it questions existence and non-existence
- Flesh** nexus of contagion, carnality and death; a spot where one welcomes the damage and enjoys devouring himself as an ouroboros
- Human Capital** an accumulation strategy; a territory of cultural and political manoeuvre which is subjected to scientific, social, and economic surveillance
- Immunisation** a defensive response in the face of risk from others
- Larval** from the term *larva*, the Latin word for mask, larval is the condition of infinitely recurring masking
- Network** the “social imaginary of neoliberalism” which connects individuals while keeping them eternally separated and allows for the capture of social actions
- Piazza** urban living room characteristic of Italian towns; it originates from the Greek *agora*
- Prison** a facility in which inmates are forcibly confined and denied a variety of freedoms under the authority of the state
- Private Space** where we think of ourselves as being in our comfort zone (home), wherein our spatial behaviour is shaped by the safety and privacy of our own rooms
- Public Space** a space to which everyone has free access without any kind of restriction, where many different actions and events take place that allows people to come together as a community
- Science Fiction** its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come
- Self** an orifical-residual structure which indulges in reproducing its own images from time to time
- Social Distance** keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home; the distance between people resulting from differences in social class, organisational level, age, gender, and other social groupings
- Social Norms** it is what people see as to be approved or disapproved by others and what cause them to act in a certain manner
- Social Space** it is produced by societies according to the spatial practices that exist within the society; the space within social distance and out of personal distance

**Survival** the state or fact of continuing to live or exist, typically in spite of an accident, ordeal, or difficult circumstances

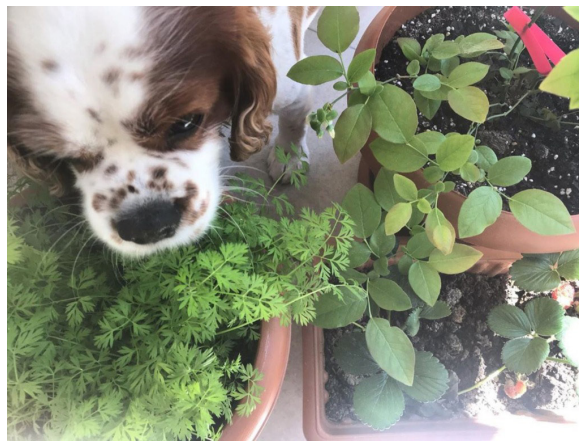
**Symbolosis** symbol + symbiosis, theatre, theatre of the cruelty of symbiosis, not towards co-existence, but co-exhaustion and mortality

**Vulnerability** a shared state in social space; interdependency to each other + our great likelihood to die, it makes us like performative and resilient at the same time

**Weird** a reconstruction; something which does not belong and reminds us that our world is not the world we think it is

**World** a realm that was constructed and lived by all life; at present, a pandemic targeting part of the realm's residents urges them to rethink their biased understandings of the realm





 **kontaktcollective**  
Alsancak, Izmir

 **kontaktcollective** It is okay not to be productive during social distancing. I, like many others, watched many tv series and movies by now. But maybe clean that drawer that you've been throwing everything. Or it's the time to change for summer clothes. Or you already have enough work and just wanna lie.  
I found out to be most empowered when returning back to nature. Although I can't leave my apartment, I have been gardening in my balcony.

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MAY 9

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# Essays

## Caring for Others:

### Conditions of Refugees during the Pandemic

One lesson the Coronavirus has taught us is that disasters are not great “equalizers”. Contrary to the rhetoric of the mainstream media, the pandemic has shown the discrepancies between the people who have access to healthcare, and the people who do not. While wealthy celebrities were too busy posting Instagram videos of themselves singing the lyrics “Imagine no possessions” from their mansions, a clumsy move that deservedly got a lot of backlash, marginalized communities were hit by the virus the most.<sup>1</sup> The differences in how people social distance reveals to us the ways in which privilege plays a major role in who survives pandemics. Coronavirus, like most disasters, primarily targets communities that have the least access to healthcare. Statistics reveal to us that the working class, the homeless, POC and queer communities have disproportionately higher death rates.<sup>2</sup> In a recent interview, Judith Butler discusses the two lessons learned from vulnerability. On the one hand, vulnerability “describes a shared condition of social life, of interdependency,” on the other hand it “it names the greater likelihood of dying.”<sup>3</sup> Butler’s words remind us that, although the pandemic reveals the interdependency of the human condition, it also exposes the disparities between the worth of human lives. As this pandemic has led governments to close off its borders, and popularized nationalist rhetoric, the focus of this essay will be the stateless, the refugees, and the asylum seekers. Having no access to basic infrastructures, these groups face a higher likelihood of exposure to the virus. Citing Dr. Begüm Başdaş’s reportage of refugees in Greek camps, as well as Mona Hatoum’s performance work on displacement, this essay will attempt to uncover the conditions of refugees under political and economic disasters. Then, it will briefly discuss ways of taking care of groups that are woefully neglected by governments.

<sup>1</sup> Taylor Rivers and Isador Graham, “Gal Gadot’s Celebrity ‘Imagine’ Video Is Just Too Cringe,” Vice (blog), March 19, 2020. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3a8yey/gal-gadots-celebrity-imagine-video-is-just-too-criinge](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3a8yey/gal-gadots-celebrity-imagine-video-is-just-too-criinge).

<sup>2</sup> “Black Britons Face ‘twice the Risk’ of Virus Death,” BBC News, May 7, 2020, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52574931>.

<sup>3</sup> George Yancy, “Judith Butler: Mourning Is a Political Act Amid the Pandemic and Its Disparities,” Truthout, April 30, 2020. <https://truthout.org/articles/judith-butler-mourning-is-a-political-act-amid-the-pandemic-and-its-disparities/>.

<sup>4</sup> Paul B. Preciado, “Learning from the Virus,” *Artforum*, June 2020.

Under neoliberal and racist policies enacted by governments, borders were already sites of violence before the pandemic. In his recent article in *Artforum*, Paul B. Preciado mentions the ways in which governments have turned to necro-political devices to guard their borders. He explains that the destruction of Europe started with the construction of an “immune European community” that closed its borders to migrants and foreigners.<sup>4</sup> With the pandemic, nationalist rhetoric by governments amplified, and tighter

measures to control borders were enacted. Travel restrictions, immigration bans, and new customs policies make it impossible for refugees to seek new homes. Dr. Begüm Başdaş elaborates on how the pandemic affected the status of asylum seekers by discussing the recent tensions on the Turkish-Greek border. As Başdaş explains, the government of Greece was planning on returning ten thousand asylum seekers to Turkey before the outbreak. Due to the coronavirus, Turkey does not accept non-Turkish citizens to enter the country. Unable to move to either countries, the asylum seekers are now stuck in refugee camps, and their citizenship status remains unknown.<sup>5</sup> During disasters, it is expected of governments to take care of its citizens, by providing healthcare and economic relief packages. Today, citizenship plays a major role in how we quantify the impact of the virus, as we rely on data from each nation in order to record the number of new cases. Governments are also the primary actors in battling the virus, as they provide healthcare and economic relief packages to their citizens. When stateless, refugees are denied their basic rights. The Greek government claims the responsibility for the refugees at the camps, but as Başdaş comments the refugees are living under deplorable conditions. Moreover, due to “health risks” NGOs have less access to the camps, meaning the refugees are in a more vulnerable state than before.<sup>6</sup> Başdaş’s reportage exposes the failings of the European Union in taking care of vulnerable communities.

5 Begüm Başdaş, “Refugees Are Part of Our Future,” Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung, April 16, 2020, <https://www.bim.hu-berlin.de/de/aktuelles/2020/04/16/refugees-are-part-of-our-future/>.

6 Başdaş.

Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian artist whose practice embodies the themes of exile, displacement, and homelessness perhaps speaks to the conditions of refugees the most. Hatoum herself was affected by two types of political exile in her life. Her parents had to move from Haifa to Beirut due to Israeli occupation in the 1940s before Hatoum was born. As a Palestinian refugee Hatoum was not given Lebanese citizenship, a policy that remains unchanged today. Later in her college years, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) broke out when she was in London. She found herself stranded in the United Kingdom, unable to return to her family home in Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> Borrowing from Derrida’s theories, Eleni Tzeplis argues that Hatoum’s experience in exile results in her having a “disorder of identity” which in return, allows her to make complex statements regarding belonging.<sup>8</sup> She then performs a close reading of Hatoum’s performance work *The Negotiating Table* (1983), which finds the artist laying down blindfolded and in a body bag while audio recordings of Western politicians and news reports about peace negotiations play in the background. Tzeplis describes her experience of viewing the performance in a private foundation in Athens, at a time when Greek people suffered tremendous economic hardships. She compares the image of Hatoum’s body to a homeless person lying on the street, commenting on how both bodies cross the boundaries between the human and the “non-human.”<sup>9</sup> While the comparison is commendable in terms of highlighting the condition of bodies when exposed to political sufferings, it misses the mark by overlooking Hatoum’s point about statelessness. Hatoum’s body represents the people who fall victim of a conversation that excludes and silences them. The body

7 Elena Tzeplis, “Vulnerable Corporealities and Precarious Belongings in Mona Hatoum’s Art,” in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Duke University Press, 2016), 147, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373490-008>.

8 Tzeplis.

9 Tzeplis, 154.

is merely an object for political bargaining. It could perhaps be argued that the current political climate in Greece makes a more accurate comparison. Due to the flaws of the EU-Turkey deal, refugees are stuck in a political negotiation process that ultimately treats them as political leverage rather than subjects in need of shelter. The politics of coronavirus further heightens the silencing of refugees.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Zeynep Gambetti and Letícia Sabsay (Duke University Press, 2016), 21, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373490-002>.

<sup>11</sup> Preciado, "Learning from the Virus."

<sup>12</sup> Radical Care in the Pandemic -PANEL, accessed May 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD5L6Vijp8&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>13</sup> Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory," *Mask Magazine*, accessed May 24, 2020, <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.

Judith Butler claims that the body has a dependent relationship to infrastructures, which she defines as "environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance."<sup>10</sup> The body is vulnerable to the failings of these infrastructures. Butler argues that such vulnerability can be mobilized for the purposes of resistance. With coronavirus, the attention of governments has shifted from refugees to their own marginalized citizens. The coronavirus revealed the real cracks in infrastructures within Western nations. Those who were already facing economic hardships or did not have access to adequate healthcare systems are now in greater danger. Moreover, self-isolation redefines the relationship between the body and the environment. Preciado defines strict quarantining measures a type of border on its own right, declaring "Lesbos now starts at your doorstep."<sup>11</sup> This shift of attention is heightened by the lack of access to refugee-camps by non-governmental groups. Under such measures, how will refugees mobilize their vulnerability? In a panel discussion organized by our collective, Dr. Begüm Başdaş laments that the "[global] networks of care we have established with the ones we do not see...this whole pandemic has pushed us into isolationism, of closing the territories on a governmental scale."<sup>12</sup> There is not a clear answer on how refugees can resist the failings of infrastructures, and this issue certainly precedes coronavirus (although coronavirus makes it more emergent). That said, caretaking or more precisely, caretaking the other can be seen as a legitimate answer. As Johanna Hedva's writing on Sick Woman Theory states "the most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself."<sup>13</sup> Coronavirus limits caretaking to national boundaries, yet it also allows the potentials to empathize with the other, to understand our interdependency to each other. Thus, caretaking can become a legitimate way of mobilizing vulnerabilities exposed by the virus. Thinking of ways to rebuild global networks of care appears to be fundamental.

Mona Hatoum's performance took place in 1983, at the height of the Lebanese Civil War. It was staged in Athens almost 30 years later, in 2012. Today, thinking in relation to the refugees at the borders of Europe, the performance still holds its relevance. Under a neoliberal world order, different communities around the world will perpetually face tremendous economic and social sufferings, exposing their vulnerabilities. The pandemic led nations to tighten their borders and those who do not have the privilege to have citizenships are now forced to battle the pandemic under deplorable conditions. Yet, the pandemic has also shown us that even under the security of citizenship, many communities lack the necessary support from governments to survive

disasters. The marginalized citizens of Western nations face the risk of containment more, due to racialized and gendered governmental policies that favour the more privileged. Following the model of Judith Butler, it could be argued that infrastructural failings expose the vulnerabilities one needs for resistance. As this essay has demonstrated, the pandemic has caused failings of infrastructures, exposing the vulnerabilities of both natural born citizens and refugees. It has also allowed different communities to face similar kinds of hardships. Under such conditions, a greater solidarity can be built from caretaking, and vulnerability can be mobilized. This type of caretaking requires the agency of both participants, so that subjecthood is not violated by political negotiations.

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London, United Kingdom

 **contactcollective** Has anyone given much thought on the importance of having a balcony?

This is probably the one thing I will remember from these quarantine days: not having one to enjoy the countless weeks of sun with +20° degrees.

That said, it has rained for the past 48 hours and temperatures have dropped - I think London has gone back to its usual weather

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# Larval Terror: Perpetuating Disinformation

1 Nandita Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside', E-International Relations, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/11/14/larval-terror-and-the-digital-dark-side/>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

In *Larval Terror in the Digital Darkside*, Nandita Biswas Mellamphy defines larval as the 'condition of infinitely recurring masking'.<sup>1</sup> This realisation often inflicts a feeling of terror and discomfort. Eyes themselves mask, what you see is a façade, which simultaneously hides, showing that even when seeing there is simultaneously masking.<sup>2</sup> This uncomfortable notion of perpetual masking creates a sense of unease and mistrust. Due to its very nature, larval terror can never be thoroughly proven. It is a state in which you may sense something, perhaps feel something, but can never truly 'identify, quantify or qualify.'<sup>3</sup> 'Larval terror' is the resulting feeling when confronted with the recursivity of the larval condition. In the time of the global COVID-19 pandemic, deliberate masking and misinformation have increased. It has become harder to differentiate between friend and enemy, as those in charge partake in larval terror tactics. The line between war and peace has become blurred as this undercover threat spreads across the globe. In this anxious time where disinformation is ready to be believed, governments are using fear to justify actions with ulterior motives, conflating larval terror further.

What is so unnerving about larval terror is its ambiguous nature, the unknown identity of its perpetrators and the weaponisation of the resulting insecurity. It is hugely effective as a form of military sabotage. A direct attack means there is a specific, deliberate, direct enemy. Whereas an attack that can be mistaken as a fault, an accident, is discriminant and difficult to marshal against. Larval warfare does not present itself, it does not want to be found; in its very nature, it cloaks itself. This surreptitious advantage is one of the reasons why it has become a key feature of modern warfare. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been an increase in detrimental disinformation shared by governmental organisations. There has been a surge in purposefully 'misleading information, outright lies and wrong things', but due to the nature of these kinds of attacks, it is difficult to identify who the enemy is.<sup>4</sup> Governments are one of the main contributors to larval terror. They perpetuate fear and paranoia in order to draw support for counterterrorist measures, which normally involve indiscriminate covert and unlawful surveillance of individuals and populations; themselves indulging in acts of larval terrorism.

4 Jennifer Rankin, 'Russian Media "Spreading COVID-19 Disinformation"', The Guardian, March 18, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/18/russian-media-spreading-COVID-19-disinformation>.



The larval terrorist is not an individual, but is better understood as a network of larval forces that is able to weaponise its polymorphous nature. The concept of a larval terrorist then becomes weaponised and used by governments and corporations to warrant their own actions and interests. An example of larval terror being used to justify government action can be seen with President Reagan and Colonel Gaddafi. Most evidence pointed towards Syria being behind the 1985 terror attacks on Rome and Vienna but Reagan attributed them to Gaddafi. Fear and uncertainty were being spread by political figures and the media. Reagan had been having difficulties with Libya and was facing a lot of internal pressure, so Gaddafi was the perfect culprit, it gave Reagan the reason he needed to invade Libya.<sup>5</sup> The invasion proceeded due to a combination of fear, the unknown, feelings of insecurity and alternative covert motives. The UK government has recently been called out by Statistician Sir Adrian Smith of the Royal Society, for not being transparent about the motives behind its decision making in response to COVID-19, after MPs continue to reason that they are doing 'what the scientists' tell them to do.<sup>6</sup> The Royal Society has warned ministers not to exclusively attribute their decisions about coronavirus to the advice of scientists, as the decisions are ultimately political. The government is using science to mask its responses to negate their responsibility/blame, their opacity also hides any additional motives.

5 Adam Curtis - HyperNormalisation, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p04b183c/adam-curtis-hypernormalisation>.

6 'Has the Government Really Followed the Science? Ask Sir Adrian Smith', The Article, May 19, 2020, <https://www.the-article.com/has-the-government-really-followed-the-science-ask-sir-adrian-smith>.

Mellamphy theorises that the larval terrorist is not an 'individual,' this aligns with political theorist Carl Schmitt's theory on war and, specifically, the political enemy. Schmitt states that the enemy cannot be an individual, but only a group.<sup>7</sup> Individuals may die but the enemy may live on or the enemy may die and individuals survive.

7 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Carl Schmitt's theory of the necessary distinction of friend and enemy has been the foundation of modern war theory, and law. Mellamphy writes:

according to Schmitt, the political activity by which states named and identified their enemy established the geopolitical architectonic necessary to regulate warfare in the international arena. The political logic of naming one's *justis hostis* or 'equal and just enemy' determined and directed the international military and legal mechanisms governing and limiting warfare.<sup>8</sup>

8 Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside'.

This conceptualisation of enemy and the subsequent declarations of war that follow essentially developed to form the basis for the established international laws on the warfare of today. But, if a war takes place larvally, it is not declared and it circumvents the laws and regulations of warfare; policing and marshal law have a lot fewer constraints.

Many identify 'good' and 'evil' with the terms 'friend' and 'enemy'. Schmitt states that friend and enemy do not relate to good or evil. It is the ethical that

is based on a distinction between the morally good and the morally bad, as the economical on a distinction between the lucrative and the unlucrative, and the aesthetic is based on a distinction between the beautiful and the ugly. The political distinction between friend and enemy is not reducible to these other distinctions or any other distinction, though ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are often used by governing bodies as a marker for people to jointly identify with and as a way of creating collectiveness by in turn vilifying the other/enemy, as Donald Trump often does.<sup>9</sup> Schmitt states that self-identifying with ‘good’ and the curation of ‘other’ as ‘evil’ is fundamental when engaging in warfare.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Why It Matters When Trump Calls Opponents Evil - CNN Video, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2019/03/28/reality-check-donald-trump-political-opponents-evil-sot-vpx-avlon-newday.cnn>.

<sup>10</sup> Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside'.

When concealment, insecurity and uncertainty become weapons of war, then it becomes hard to distinguish between ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’. Although ‘the terrorist’ is considered the enemy within the war on terror, the reality of warfare is more complex. Mellamphy believes that operations can no longer be based on the identity of the enemy. She states that the globalisation of terrorism “transgresses the logic of the enemy according to which ‘war’ and ‘the enemy’ can be defined by normative political criteria alone”.<sup>11</sup> Mellamphy is theorising that due to the progressively convoluted and global nature of terrorism, relying on the logic of the Schmittian ‘enemy’ is no longer enough. According to the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), terrorism is the most serious threat facing the U.S. today. And to fight this modern terrorism there needs to be a new criteria, a criteria that can deal with the ‘collections of people loosely organised in shadowy networks that are difficult to identify and define’.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> 'DARAPA60\_publication-No-Ads.Pdf,' accessed May 25, 2020, [https://www.darpa.mil/attachments/DARAPA60\\_publication-no-ads.pdf](https://www.darpa.mil/attachments/DARAPA60_publication-no-ads.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside'.

Mellamphy references ‘the endomilitarization of peace’ in her explanation of Larval terror.<sup>13</sup> She is referring to the recent blurring between wartime and peacetime, the protrusion of militarisation into civilian territory, both physically and ideologically. The distinctions between civilian and terrorist are becoming harder to identify, and the weaponisation of this overlap is becoming more common.

I see an interesting link between endomilitarization and Thomas Hobbes’ theory of war. Hobbes theorises that we are in a continuous state of war. He states that due to the almost equal nature of man we are continuously grappling with the idea and state of war. This is because the weaker man is not so weak that he would obviously lose, and so cannot completely abandon the idea of uprising. And the stronger man knows he is not so strong that he would obviously win, and so he tries to keep war at bay by projecting the willingness to engage in war. Foucault argues, and I to some extent agree, that Hobbes is in fact a theorist of peace, not war, or at least an in between state.<sup>14</sup> Hobbes’ theory lays out a state of war that is normalised and every-day, as I think endomilitarization has become. We live in the ‘fog of peace’ where war becomes omnipresent and inhuman, and larval warfare wears a cloth of hyper banality (as is its nature).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault et al., 'Society Must Be Defended' Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76, 1st Picador pbk. ed (New York: Picador, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside'.

While both Hobbes' state and the state of endomilitarization operate in an overlap of war and peace. I recognise that the larval terrorist purposefully perpetuates and uses the endomilitarization state of peace/war to their advantage and 'engages in the production of internal decay and decadence, the ultimate effect of which is to dissolve the State's institutions and institutionalised values', with the aim to 'render them fragile, porous, and thus open to insurrection.'<sup>16</sup> Larval warfare seeks to amplify uncertainty, until peace and war overlap entirely so it can covertly bring the state down from the inside. This tactic shifts the attention of the State and its instruments of policing onto citizens rather than outside forces, as the difference between them becomes ambivalent.

16 Ibid.

Pro-kremlin outlets have accused others of exaggerating the threat of the Coronavirus and deliberately triggering mass panic. The irony is that they are pushing that agender themselves by deliberately spreading conspiracy theories and false information with the intention to aggravate the west by sowing chaos and fear, and specifically a loss in confidence in health systems.<sup>17</sup>

17 Bruce Sterling, 'Meanwhile, in Coronavirus Disinformation,' Wired, March 5, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/beyond-the-beyond/2020/03/meanwhile-coronavirus-disinformation/>.

Mellamphy posits that 'larval terror is chiefly an affective state in which we may sense something—we may *feel* it viscerally—that we can't *identify, quantify or qualify*.'<sup>18</sup> Fear, insecurity, existential risk—these are all key mobilisers in the global apparatus of war on terror. Political institutions take advantage of this fear and use it to qualify the use of further military action. Dread and nausea become a vehicle for governance. I think it is interesting that governmental larval warfare is generally implemented under the guise of needed security. The strong use their weaknesses/insecurity as a reason to use further military action. Fear perpetuated by the government and media primes civilians for the acceptance of covert action and discourse of 'just trust us'. Many authoritarian countries have been using the pandemic to further own interests, China is using the pandemic to abandon environmental regulations.<sup>19</sup> Despite anger over China's early efforts to cover up the virus, countries are now looking to follow China as a way out of the pandemic, but the wrong lessons are being learnt. It was not the authoritarian state that helped reduce the death toll, it was grass-roots organisations, the large medical community and world class research community. Other areas of Asia have fared so well because of vigorous testing in South Korea, mass mask stockpiles in Taiwan, but it is the dictatorial aspect that many countries seem to be replicating.<sup>20</sup> In the UK, laws for emergency powers to tackle COVID-19 have been rushed through with no Commons vote, to be instated for a two year period without review. The laws include easier detention of people in mental hospitals, and the ability to detain immigrants for an undefined length of time. The state of crisis/shock doctrine has also allowed the US government to push through pro-corporate policies that are leaving people even more divided, and less protected. The heavily protested Keystone pipeline has been granted, giving fossil fuel companies what they have long wanted despite the current glut of oil, helped by the decision to make civil disobedience a felony.<sup>21</sup> Trump has also passed

18 Mellamphy, 'Larval Terror and the Digital Darkside'.

19 Capitalism Is The Disease: Mike Davis on the Coronavirus Crisis, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOp9G5hoQnM>.

20 "Coronavirus Capitalism": Naomi Klein's Case for Transformative Change Amid Coronavirus Pandemic, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFqNA-Ex1Im4>.

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22 'US Laws Passed by Donald Trump While Most People Were Distracted | Metro News', accessed 25 May 2020, <https://metro.co.uk/2017/05/31/laws-that-have-been-quietly-passed-in-the-us-while-everyone-was-distracted-6674392/>.

23 Shaun Walker, Central, and eastern Europe correspondent, 'Concerns over Polish Government Tightening Abortion Laws during COVID-19 Crisis', *The Guardian*, April 14, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/14/concerns-over-polish-government-tightening-abortion-laws-during-COVID-19-crisis>.

24 'Why Conspiracy Theories Have Become the Most Influential Art Form of Our Time,' *artnet news*, May 11, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/why-conspiracy-theories-have-become-the-most-influential-art-form-of-our-time-part-i-1854738>.

25 Rankin, 'Russian Media "Spreading COVID-19 Disinformation".'

a bill defunding Planned Parenthood, and repealed a law that stopped states from forcing benefit claimants to take drug tests before being allowed to access benefits.<sup>22</sup> And under the haze of the pandemic the polish government is tightening abortion laws.<sup>23</sup>

Fredric Jameson, in his 1992 book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, proposes that 'high-tech globalised capitalism has made the world more difficult for the average person to feel as if they adequately understand it.'<sup>24</sup> This has primed global audiences to more readily accept larval threats, particularly in this anxious time. Jameson writes about how conspiracy theories offer understanding to global complex issues, 'a narrative structure capable of reuniting the minimal basic components: potentiality infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility.' Theories and narratives that make the world seem knowable, to give meaning to the uncontrollable circumstances people find themselves in. With this new perceived understanding comes a sense of power, and an unwarranted intellectual responsibility to teach others of this knowledge. Fuelled by a lack of clarity from governing bodies, the spectators voice their theories. Russia has taken advantage of the current influx of conspiracy theories and disinformation and, rather than creating its own disinformation, is amplifying theories already in circulation. Theories like, the virus is a biological weapon made by the US, or China, depending on whom you ask. Russia is promoting both theories. This piggybacking allows them to mask their responsibility further, as they are just reporting what is already circulating, making it much harder to categorically assert their involvement in the covert attempts to damage the west.<sup>25</sup>

I think governmental involvement in larval terror has perpetuated the larval terror situation. Their surveillance seems to muddy the distinction between friend and enemy further, for instance monitoring global friends; suggesting they are also potential enemies, or attributing a virus to a specific country/race. In this climate, differences, cultural differences, are no longer celebrated, they become 'other'. By provoking paranoia and pitting citizen against citizen the culture of larval terror is extended.

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
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 **kontaktcollective**  
London, United Kingdom

 **kontaktcollective** When did we decide we all had to produce amidst a global pandemic?  
When the classes went online  
When the furlough notices came in  
When the events were cancelled  
When the gigs dried up  
When the fear began to grow  
When people started dying, testing, triaging  
When frontline workers, carers, food providers, and the essential-all-alongers pleaded and protested for PPE

When did we decide we had to be our best selves? To thrive in a mind-numbing resilience

To make a schedule, to write that

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MAY 4

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# Detention as Death:

## The Case for prisons during the Pandemic

For years in the UK, prisons have remained overcrowded and underfunded breeding grounds for abuse, mental health decline, and even more so a spread of crime. Filled to its brim of expendable bodies who have been outcast from the standard operations of society, a spread of any diseases within such a compact space would be an avoidable catastrophe for the modern world. As the global pandemic reaches its peak, and countries begin to assess their actions over the course of the pandemic, we as a society must arguably begin to evaluate what different levels of survival means for different peoples, communities, and conditionings. With the sweeping scandal surrounding the overwhelming number of COVID-19 deaths in care homes, revealing the many inadequacies and failings of the structures of the health and care provision, one must assess the other sectors of which such violent inequality lies, and where certain bodies are considered more disposable than another's. Where neoliberal policy has validated a policy of organised abandonments, organised austerity, and organised state violence, spaces such as prisons reveal a certain level of organised abandonment which has now resulted in the losses of thousands of lives on British soil alone.

In an essay written by abolitionist, activist, and academic Angela Davis, she argues that “homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”<sup>1</sup> Looking to the sexist and racial underpinnings which permeate the particular prison industrial complex of America, Davis draws on her own and the other experiences of her friends and comrades to highlight the relationships between privatisation and the ever increasing numbers of prisoners, whilst making case for the categorizations of the ‘criminal’ as punishment to those who have failed to survive under modern day capitalism. Whilst acknowledging that some of these people are indeed violent and do actually need some form of interventional help- Davis argues that in terms of the victims of capitalism, such as the poor and the conned who’s crimes include shoplifting, begging, eliciting sex and consuming ‘illegals’, these are the people who make up the overwhelming majority of the US prison population, making clear the issue of this system that needs to be overturned.

<sup>1</sup> Begum, Yasmin Why British private prisons are peak (and at breaking point) (GalDem, 2016) Available Online <https://gal-dem.com/private-prisons-breaking-point/>



In the case of Britain, not only has the prison population doubled within the last 20 years (now being the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe, now according to Wikipedia at 83,618), but we now live in a country with a rate of incarceration only second in the world to the US, with a notable proportion of this percentage being filled by young, working class, black men. Although he does not speak of the race aspect to such 20th century formations of prison systems, Foucault does mount the connection in his seminal text *Discipline and Punishment*, between the gradual transition from centralized power to democratic rule, and the changes in how societies punish their criminals. Providing a detailed account of the global transition from capital punishment to imprisonment, Foucault explains to us how total control over criminals and strict discipline conditioned the substitution of physical chastisement with psychological punishment. Where Foucault's writings are important in tracing such development, I find the work of Davis here much more relative to the scenario we now find ourselves in today. Davis points her finger at the inhumane subjugation of prisoners in which they are used as modern day slaves under the labour of manufacturing cheap, mass goods; and asylum seekers, immigrants and the domestic black population are criminalised by default. Here in Britain, it is evident that those who suffer most at the hands of capitalisms drive to work or die, are often the first to lose their lives as evident in rates such as that of the NHS workers.

Furthermore, unlike Davis, Foucault was never strictly what we would now term a 'prison abolitionist'- someone who actively sought to address the lack of presence of vital systems of certain communities, making the case that the real objective is not to purely to be rid of the actual buildings which we call prisons, but moreso abolishing the conditions in which prison became the solution to society's problems. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the famous American abolitionist, much like Davis, asks us to think not only of how a future without prisons would deal with what we term as 'violet offenders', but moreso how we resolve inequalities, and provide people with the resources they will need for the long term much before the hypothetical moment of when, as Gilmore puts it, they "mess up."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kushner, Rachel Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change your mind (NyTimes, 2019) Available Online <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html>

The prison is not a natural result of law and order, but it has indeed become the norm and default of how we seemingly get our societies back in order, literally cleaning the mess on our streets. These spaces, despite the claims of many, simply are not and have never been intended to aid rehabilitation nor evaluate remorse, as this simply cannot work under the umbrella of punishment. These spaces serve to create criminality, and have control over those who enter such a paradigm who often rarely escape. Control is what the upper echelon of society gain in return, and for those inside the system, survival can be there only goal. The words become all the more real in relation to the global panic we now witness to today, in which the pandemic could be identified as a portal. Not only has it forced us to break with the past and imagine the world anew, but we are now forced to think more of our bodies as

a collective, rather than as individuals, as we see human lives be reduced to a digit throughout the world.



For the prisoners of today, they not only live terrified by their conditions which they are subjugated to, but they now must campaign for their own rights to social distance, a privilege that they cannot be granted as a result of the overcrowding of such space. When some have spoken about the conditions of prisons in the midst of COVID-19, questions often hark back to that of hygiene, overcrowding, and lack of access to healthcare for those within the system. We see shocking images such as that of the inmates of El Salvador's Izalco prison in San Salvador, which highlight the complex situation faced by many south American prisons where many politicians hold some of the country's most 'dangerous' gang and cartel members. This particular image pervaded not only my own mind, but of many journalists alike who have commented on the harrowing and inhumane snapshot of bodies being pressed against bodies, with men stripped half naked, with only some wearing facemasks which one can arguably question the effect of. Within the image we see at least a hundred bodies placed on the floor, and although we cannot see the rest of the landscape, it feels somewhat endless as we readers look upon what can only be a demeaning experience for these countless men. Under international human rights standards, the authorities should ensure that prisoners' living conditions include access to appropriate light and ventilation, open air and physical exercise, hygiene, and adequate personal space.<sup>3</sup> However, we know this is not often the case, with many prisoner accounts often discrediting this. Many prisoners are forced to share cells due to inadequate spacing, and as punishment often spend Indefinite and prolonged periods in solitary confinement. Here in Britain, accounts say that prisoners are now being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day as a means to contain the spread of the virus, and that with a majority of prisons facing indefinite lockdowns, this will include an end to social visits, education, and workshops, which could be in place for another year.

<sup>3</sup> El Salvador: Inhumane Prison Lockdown Treatment (HumanRightsWatch, 2020) Available Online <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/29/el-salvador-inhumane-prison-lockdown-treatment>

Certain sectors of the world have brought to light the systematic problems of confinement, the conditions of social space, and how care is measured by what many do or do not have access to. Where we are told to constantly wash our hands to prevent the spread of such diseases, do we ever think about the fact that universal access to clean water does not yet exist, not merely in the so called 'third world', but even as far as Flint Michigan in the US to see that for many, their already lack of clean running water in their homes is the biggest killer of them all.



Where countries such as Iran have taken to task releasing some of their prisoners during the crisis who are considered 'low risk', we stumble upon another problem of categorization, and how we as a society define what is violent/ non- violent, sympathetic/ non-sympathetic. Although I perceive such steps as positive in ensuring the safety of few prisoners, this discussion should not be merely about the 'few' being protected by law and solidarity, but the many. With a lot of the population unable to visit family and friends, we must consider the implications of such action on the social and mental well-beings of the individuals involved. It is of course not possible to say all prisoners should be released into society by immediate effect, but we must consider ways in such astonishing rates of incarceration could be reduced to create a safer environment for inmates and staff alike. Under such unprecedented times, we must be willing to take unprecedented action in the form of united solidarity and care for all sectors of society alike.

Mass incarceration is a failed solution to social economic and behavioural issues, and as we enter this 'new world' in which policing and surveillance will be evermore sold to us as a totality and future beneficial to the way we live, we must consider what the future of criminalisation will look like in this current and post-COVID world. We must now more than ever recognise that such politics and modes of governing are grounded in the struggle over life and death, and as a collective work to undo the formations and frameworks that have allowed the abandonment of communities to withstand till today.

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**kontaktcollective**  
Bebek , Istanbul



**kontaktcollective** It's 26 degrees outside and I left the house for the first time in weeks. Recreational spaces are still closed off to the public (including the walking path along the Bosphorus) but my dad found us a hidden spot where we can enjoy the view.

We all live in different places but I encourage you to find your own hidden spot. It certainly made my day much better, and I promise it'll make yours too 🍷🌊

2w



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## Alone, together: Searching for contact

*The contemporary subject—still reeling from the unshakeable feeling that all they’ve ever known is crisis— is now faced with the reality of their first global catastrophe: **pandemic**. Here “we” are—alone, together. Alone, together is the nature of the network. Alone, together is the nature of the pandemic. Are we very much together in how alone we are?*

In a form that epitomizes the communication networks of contemporary sociality, a recent poem-by-tweet had a moment of cultural virality in mid-April of 2020, at the height of European and American public lockdown. Published by the twitter handle “@jessica\_salfia”, the tweet reads, “This poem is called “First lines of emails I’ve received while quarantining. 4:43 PM · Apr 11, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone.”<sup>1</sup> The work contains 9 stanzas of 4-line verses, each reportedly compiled from e-mail subject lines received to the authors inbox. Each stanza concludes with the repetition of the words, “*As you know, many people are struggling.*”<sup>2</sup> A lone, singular-line verse brings the poem to a solemn end; “*This is not normal.*”<sup>3</sup> The poem highlights how the banal language of advertising jargon, political slogans, food bloggers, clickbait news stories, listicles, and motivational brand messaging are so familiar to the habitual e-mail user that they become nearly imperceptible. The juxtaposition of the branding messages from the ‘public’ realm of the internet culture economy, with the repeated message that warns of the catastrophic effects of the mass pandemic at hand, reveals how the e-mail subject line, as a discursive form, is able to adapt with harrowing efficiency to envelop any scale of crisis into the banality of its mode of information-transfer. This strikingly illuminates the habitual nature of user-engagement with the infrastructure of mass, network communication, and its levelling of all content and meaning to the same reduced form of “information.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Jessica Salfia, “The First Lines of E-Mails I’ve Received While Quarantining,” Twitter, Twitter.Com, April 11, 2020, [https://twitter.com/jessica\\_salfia/status/1249000027198033922?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1249000027198033922%7Ctwgr%5E&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fbooks%2F2020%2Fapr%2F12%2Fpoem-constructed-from-emails-during-quarantine-goes-viral](https://twitter.com/jessica_salfia/status/1249000027198033922?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1249000027198033922%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fbooks%2F2020%2Fapr%2F12%2Fpoem-constructed-from-emails-during-quarantine-goes-viral).

2 Salfia.

3 Salfia.

4 Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).



Jessica Salfia  
@jessica\_salfia



This poem is called "First lines of emails I've received while quarantining."

4:43 PM · Apr 11, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

49.4K Retweets 171K Likes



5 Salfia, "The First Lines of E-Mails I've Received While Quarantining."

Figure 1. Tweet published by Twitter user @jessica\_salfia.<sup>5</sup>

#### The First Lines of Emails I've Received While Quarantining

In these uncertain times  
as we navigate the new normal,  
Are you willing to share your ideas and solutions?  
As you know, many people are struggling.

I know you are up against it:  
the digital landscape.  
We share your concerns.  
As you know, many people are struggling.

We hope this note finds you and your family safe.  
We've never seen anything like this before.  
Here are 25 Distance Learning Tips!  
As you know, many people are struggling.

Feeling Fiesta today? Happy Taco Tuesday!  
Calories don't count during a pandemic.  
Grocers report flour shortages as more people are baking than ever!  
As you know, many people are struggling.

Count your blessings. Share your blessings.  
Get Free Curb-side pick up or ship to your house!  
Chicken! Lemon! Artichokes!  
As you know, many people are struggling.

How are you inspiring greatness today?  
We have a cure for your cabin fever.  
Pandemic dial-in town hall TONIGHT!  
As you know, many people are struggling.

Mother's Day looks a little different this year.  
You're invited to shop all jeans for 50% off!  
Yes, buy 1, get 1 free!  
As you know, many people are struggling.

Call us to discuss a loan extension without penalty.  
ACT NOW: tell Congress Charters should Not Line their Pockets During the  
COVID crisis.  
Now shipping facemasks as recommended by the CDC.  
As you know, many people are struggling.

This is not normal.

6 Salfia.

Figure 2. Poem 'First lines of emails I've received while quarantining' published by Twitter user @jessica\_salfia.<sup>6</sup>



7 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. (New York: NYU Press, 1999). 112.

8 Samuel R. Delany. 111.

9 Samuel R. Delany. 111.

10 Samuel R. Delany. 111.

11 Samuel R. Delany. 118.

12 Samuel R. Delany.

13 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2016).

14 Chun. 17.

15 Chun.

16 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. 122.

17 Samuel R. Delany. 112.

18 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. 74.

19 Chun. 74-75.

20 Chun. 75.

21 Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. 18.

22 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. 75.

In *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*<sup>7</sup>, author and literary philosopher Samuel R. Delany contends that, when critical analysis is aimed at perceiving slight transfers at the “level of discourse”<sup>8</sup>, they will reveal concurrent shifts in the “social practices and institutions,” which either allow or disallow for “interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will.”<sup>9</sup> The widespread social desire to seek out this contact is the measure for “life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant,”<sup>10</sup> within capitalist societies. The critical point from which to begin such an analysis is the “rhetorical collision; the sign that discursive collision has occurred, is that the former meaning has been forgotten and the careless reader, not alert to the details of the changed social context, reads the older rhetorical figure as if it were the newer.”<sup>11</sup>

To take up this analytic framework offered by Delany in 1999 today means contending with the absolutely dizzying rate of cultural output in which network culture takes up its own meta-discourse, and “rhetorical collisions”<sup>12</sup> as cultural content—from memes, to the ‘retweet’, to Tik-Tok dances—as exemplified in the viral Twitter poem above (Figure 1 & 2). New media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun takes up a structural analysis of the internet as a social institution in *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016).<sup>13</sup> Chun points to the “social imaginary” of the network as the “cognitive mapping of neoliberalism”<sup>14</sup> in its formation of a singular-plural subject who is always individualized, yet always addressed in relation to the mass through the logics of affiliations which are perpetually captured.<sup>15</sup> Within Chun’s network analysis, there are traces of Delany’s contact. Both theorists call for a public space in which a spontaneous encounter with the other can occur that transverses one’s privatized network relations, and travels *between* “nets.”<sup>16</sup> In order to use the “superstructure to impinge on infrastructure,”<sup>17</sup> as Delany calls upon discourse to do, Chun weaves a compelling argument for the ways in which the network, as the predominant social infrastructure of the internet, subjugates users’ at the level of habits, through the dynamics of crisis and update, or “habit + crisis = update”<sup>18</sup>. Crisis serves as “new media’s critical difference. New media has found its value, its punctuating device. Crises promise to move the banal to the crucial by offering the experience of something like responsibility; (crises) enable connection and demand response.”<sup>19</sup> Chun delineates how state and corporate interests partner to sell a false promise of security and private safety through user identification, the technologies which, the actual hardware that enables information-sharing is inherently insecure, “leaky.”<sup>20</sup> This contradictory notion of safety sustains an environment in which constant crises are inevitable, enabling the acceptance of imposed tracking and capture techniques. Crisis is also what allows for any communication to take place in the ceaseless stream of information-sharing on the internet, which reduces all content to the same register of encoded information.<sup>21</sup> The “real-time” nature of network information-exchange is what gives any content relevancy or importance, from the text thread to the inbox notification, each “real-time” interaction is a crisis of urgency.<sup>22</sup> In such a temporality, “to be is to be updated;” the update continually reacts to the

23 Chun. 2.

24 Chun. 75.

25 Chun. 104.

26 Chun. 120.

27 Chun.

28 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*.

stream of crises, bringing structural changes to the internet environment, so users are perpetually adapting their habits to these small, imperceptible shifts in the social *milieu*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, infrastructure of social networks is perceived in network-subjects' psyche at the level of habit, rendering relation of addiction to ones' habitat, to the social *milieu*.<sup>24</sup> The network logics of data capture use micro-targeting to not only predict or pre-empt user behavior, but to use past behaviour to prescribe future behaviour.<sup>25</sup> Thus, ones captured actions are used to define a static, homogenizing set of likes, preferences, tastes, wants, and desires, and to organize social networks into siphoned enclosures of these mirrored subjects, in "loosely gated neighbourhoods of likeness and difference."<sup>26</sup> With the public spaces of the internet enclosed into networks of "private subjects acting in public", Chun asks, "How might we occupy networks differently? How can we fight for a space in which one can be vulnerable and not attacked?"<sup>27</sup> How—I would add—can we fight for an internet space which enables "Contact"?<sup>28</sup>

In an evaluation of how network subjects can escape algorithmic enclosures, Chun considers public acts of self-exposure taken by certain groups in the 2010s on social media networks. From young teen victims of bullying, to undocumented activist groups in the U.S., these groups inhabited the habitual forms of YouTube videos to create communal acts, within and despite the individualized network structure. She points to their use of form and language, in holding placard-cards in front of their faces with written narratives of their singular experiences, to demonstrate how these network subjects employed the habitual infrastructure of the communication of social networks in order to subvert the network. Through continuity, repetition, and sameness of seemingly disparate actors, the poignant written placards attempt to reach out of their individuated subjecthood, through the act of writing which, "Touches upon bodies along the absolute limit. —Jean Luc Nancy."<sup>29</sup> Despite the confinement of the individuated singular subjectivity of the network subject, the mass call of network communication takes the form of the "singular-plural", allowing these subjects to enact the plural, the communal, and find the other. Subjects continue to risk shame, pain, and threat to reach out for Nancy's perilous friendship, "a moment of both terror and hope: a moment of hosting without meaning to and of being hostage to one another."<sup>30</sup> The networked subject's ability to inhabit the repetitional nature of "habitual new media" to demonstrate *care*, becomes the radical act that can overcome the logics of capture and affiliation. As Chun asserts, "Caring actions also threaten to overwhelm the network and spread viruses and spam. The desire for intimacy and its dangers, is perhaps what is wonderful and productive about the internet as well."<sup>31</sup> This treacherous desire to escape the algorithmic enclosures of the network, to *care* and take care, is how *contact* may bloom. Chun's analysis of how users reach out of their enclosures echoes Delany's insistence that "contact is often at its most spectacularly beneficial when it occurs between members of different communities. That is why I maintain that interclass contact is even more important than intraclass contact."<sup>32</sup>

29 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. 160. Quote from Jean-Luc Nancy: "Writing touches upon bodies along the absolute limit separating the sense of the one from the skin and nerves of the other. Nothing gets through, which is why it touches."

30 Chun. 127.

31 Chun. 160.

32 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. 127. Footnote.

Contact differs from the emergence of community within the given class stratifications of capitalism. It is, instead, the transversal of members of different communities, networks, encountering one another. Chun maintains the possibility of finding Jean-Luc Nancy's "inoperative community" and conceptualizes of a public space for "interclass contact"<sup>33</sup> online; a space for the opening of closed groups, which creates the opportunity for osmosis. Delany speaks to the conditions necessary for a public space to enable favour for social contact. He provides an example from Jane Jacobs 1961 study, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,<sup>34</sup> which points to the deprivation of infrastructure needed for the provision of "human services" (ie. bathrooms, food) in public parks, that led to a feeling of threat for mothers who lived close to the park, enabling them privileged resources and access. This threat caused "the feel of the park becomes exclusive and snobbish—and uncomfortable (and inconvenient) for mothers who, in carriage, dress, race, or class, do not fit a rigid social pattern."<sup>35</sup> When public space experiences imposed conditions of impoverishment and risk, access to the public spaces becomes more privatized, creating "anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy"<sup>36</sup> spaces. Like Delany, Chun demands a public space, on the Internet, which is ephemeral and open to the overlapping of flows and interactions between, with, and through different networks. She calls upon network users to claim this space through the act of "loitering", to use the networks' own capacity for engagement to engage en-masse, to overcome its enclosures. Chun writes: "To loiter online, we would have to create technologies that acknowledge, rather than make invisible, the multitude of exchanges that take place around us—technologies that refuse the illusory boundary between audience and spectacle, author and character. Loitering is ephemeral: it inhabits the present. It can also transform 'open' private spaces into truly public ones."<sup>37</sup> In this moment under conditions of lockdown, self-isolation, stay-at-home orders, shelter-in-place, quarantine, social distancing, and exponentially increased engagement with the sociality of the network online, Delany and Chun provoke network subjects to seek out how to "inhabit networks differently", to seek out contact, to loiter, and take acts of mass care.

33 Samuel R. Delany.

34 Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961.

35 Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 127.

36 Samuel R. Delany, 127.

37 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, 160.

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 **contactcollective**  
London, United Kingdom

 **contactcollective** "We are all in this together." I don't think we are. I don't think key workers think we are. I don't think those forced to risk themselves and their families lives for their livelihood, feel like we are. The pandemic crisis is exacerbating preexisting inequalities, not levelling them. I hope that today's heroes recognise their power and society is forced to give them more than a round of applause.

1w

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# The Imbalances Caused to the Rhythm of Social Life During the Days of the Pandemic: The New Operation of Balconies in Italy and Greece

<sup>1</sup> William Gibson, "The March Factory," in *Pattern Recognition* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

William Gibson's phrase "we have no future because our present is too volatile" could not have been more appropriate when most European countries started to go into lockdown in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus crisis that affected everyone at a global level.<sup>1</sup> Among the various aspects of daily life, the social is the one which seems to be afflicted most deeply: rather than being turned inside out, it can be said it was actually turned outside in.

<sup>2</sup> Donatella Polizzi, "The Piazza: Not just an architectural concept but a historical, social, and cultural concept," *Wall Street International Magazine*, last modified October 14, 2019, <https://wsimag.com/culture/57069-the-piazza>.

When people are forced to stay home, with the exception of going outside for work-, health-, and need-related reasons, they are detached from coming into contact with others outside their household. Under these circumstances, the social space of the *piazza*, or square, in Italian and Greek cities has dramatically shifted during the period of the pandemic. Considered a significant element of both cultures, on the one hand it is viewed as "an open air, urban living room" representing Italy's identity, and on the other it acts as a central point for community gatherings.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Henri Lefebvre, "Openings and Conclusions," in *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 404.

History, architecture, and social relations intertwine in the *piazza*/square, and a feeling of belonging to a community surrounds the space. At the same time, this urban space is not just a container where life unfolds; it is a milieu where individuals relate to one another through a system of exchange. In other words, it is in and through this spatial underpinning that social relations can occur; it is their mode of existence.<sup>3</sup> The *piazza*/square is a very important social space in people's lives, as it is a central meeting point for all. They work as places for people to gather and discuss everything and anything, from important matters such as politics to mere gossip; children of nearby neighbourhoods will all meet after school and play until the sun goes down; people walk their dogs; speeches are given by political leaders for their pre-election campaign; festivals and concerts take place. A popular habit in Italian towns is that of walking back and forth in the *corso*, or main street, on Sundays. In this form of sociality, it is the feeling of contact and time spent with another person that generates such concrete abstractions. With the current situation of the planet under a state of emergency due to the pandemic, all *piazze*/squares have transformed from spaces of social interaction, belonging, and community, to empty lifeless danger zones from which people are encouraged to stay away from in fear of contracting or spreading the virus.

Contact and the square, as a social space where all people from different classes and races come together, are examined by American science fiction author and literary critic Samuel R. Delany. His book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, compiles two separate essays on the disappearance of the 'old,' early twentieth century Times Square along with the social relations that formed there, due to the process of gentrification that occurred in the 1980s. In the latter piece, "...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red," Delany analyses 'contact' and 'networking,' as two modes of social net practice that make, generate, create, and sediment discourses.<sup>4</sup> According to the various examples he uses, contact can spark from situations of everyday life, like a conversation that starts while queuing at the supermarket, or small talk with workers one encounters while running errands. In addition to these verbal forms of communication, Delany also stresses the importance of physical contact, of touch and intercourse, referencing the casual sex that took place in public restrooms, peepshows, and sex clubs among others before the city of New York opted for a major urban redevelopment, resulting in a political and legal cleansing of social relations. With the closure of these spaces, people who used to frequent them were forced to move into private spaces, where the lack of the same relaxed atmosphere left an overflowing desire for interclass spaces of encounter, or contact.<sup>5</sup> Decades later, people now face the same feeling of loss, but the solution to forming social relations is virtual. Once again, social space is removed, only this time contact is replaced by online networking.

4 Samuel R. Delany, "...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red," in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 123.

5 Delany, "...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red," 126-127. Delany adopts the term and concept of 'contact' from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs. The latter interprets it as an urban phenomenon that is supported by a strong connection between private and public, where living spaces and commercial spaces intertwine. Although agreeing with her, Delany adds that urban contact is at its most valuable when it happens between people of different communities.

6 Michele Lancione and AbdouMalik Simone, "Bio-austerity and Solidarity in the COVID-19 Space of Emergency - Episode One," *Society and Space*, last modified March 19, 2020, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/bio-austerity-and-solidarity-in-the-COVID-19-space-of-emergency>.

Networking is something practiced by all during the lockdown as in many cases it constitutes the only way one can come into contact with one's family and friends, since many people find themselves isolated alone, often in a foreign country. In the situation of a pandemic, bodies are threatened and avoiding social proximity can make the difference between life and death. As a result, a sense of the urban and public sociality is being reshaped, which sees a retreat from busy to empty streets in order to seek refuge in the safety of individual abodes.<sup>6</sup> It is, in a sense, as if the *plazas*/squares as the physical social planes of the public space have been transported from the landscape of the city to the immaterial architecture of the digital realm.

While we are experiencing this unprecedented condition of isolation, a couple of questions arise: How do people stay in contact with each other when the outside environment is banned from access and they are confined within the interior of the household? Keeping in mind that social distancing and lockdown measures happened almost overnight, thus preventing most people living abroad from flying back home, can their temporary lodgings be classed as their home?

With the containment of life solely within the domestic, we have the overlapping of work, leisure and the private. Suddenly the private becomes automatically more public, as online meetings, conferences, classes and business take place within each individual's private space. There is an infection,

an infiltration even, of the public realm within that of the private. In a time of global pandemic, with a deadly infection traveling with great speed through the population of the planet, individuals are also in danger of having their inner sanctum, their privacy infiltrated by the realm of the public. To use a more Oldenburgian language, the third and second place are infecting the first.<sup>7</sup> Although this infiltration of the social realm and the workplace within the private space of each individual is merely upon a digital level and not a total intrusion, it nonetheless poses a threat to the ecosystem of their inner sanctum.

7 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2005)

This constant online presence characterised by our networked age has enabled us to stay in touch with family, friends, and colleagues while respecting social distancing rules. Nonetheless, it has also negatively impacted our lives, which resulted in the increasing issue of what Joanna Sugden refers to as “Zoom fatigue,” caused by the fact that we can be contacted any time of the day from anywhere in the world.<sup>8</sup> This on-screen relationship is not the same as when physically meeting for a cup of coffee, for instance, and can be quite draining: rather than looking someone directly in the eye, you are either directing your gaze at their image or at the camera. Similarly, some people who did not want to relinquish their after-work drinks have chosen a day in the week and assigned it a theme (e.g. quiz night; game night) but it obviously does not give them the same buzz as going out and being face to face with someone, hence they are not getting the same social stimulation.

8 “How to fight off “Zoom fatigue”,” YouTube video, 6:31, posted by “CBS News,” May 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zDbHB0MG6Y>. That said, we (Contakt Collective) also adopted Zoom for weekly meetings and as the main platform for our panel discussions, live streamed on YouTube on May 20, 2020.

Through this reprogramming of our relationship to domestic space, balconies, gardens, and terraces are considered luxuries for the good life under quarantine.<sup>9</sup> With the removal of the *piazza*/square in a time of social isolation, it can be argued that there has been a shift of the social space from the *piazza*/square to the balcony, with the latter becoming the public space of each individual’s private life. Besides enabling people to enjoy longer hours under the spring sun, balconies have been employed as a medium for reaching out to and morally comforting neighbours. Additionally, this transformation has enabled them to acquire most of the *piazze*/squares attributes. A suitable example that confirms what has just been stated is when, in an act to keep up the morale during widespread death and social lockdown, Italians started singing from their balconies across the country. From Milan and Rome to Siena and Naples, videos started circulating on social media: men, women, and children of all ages are shown supporting one another in an interclass social exchange. This reaction to the lockdown demonstrates how people can – metaphorically speaking – come together in solidarity by vocally sharing national anthems and folk songs, sometimes accompanied by playing instruments and DJ sets. In Greece, during the Saturday night before Easter Sunday, the people of Athens held a candlelit vigil on their balconies, which is something that would have normally taken place – if not for the pandemic and the restrictions of the lockdown – in the squares right outside every neighbourhood church. This phenomenon illustrates perfectly

9 Eduardo Castillo Vinuesa et al., “Parasite Architecture,” *Quarantology: Hyperfunctional Logics for the Quarantined City*, accessed May 5, 2020, <http://quarantology.com/>.



the strong attempt of the people of Athens to create the sense of belonging and community that the lockdown restrictions have removed from their daily routines.

Following the arrival of an invisible enemy, our capacity to be in public has been altered and we had to adapt to a new organisation of life. A notion of inhabitation takes on a new meaning, one where work, leisure and the private converge. During this time, we observe many attempts of people to socialise, not only through the World Wide Web but also in physical form, by transforming, in a sense, their balconies into public spaces from which to come into contact with the rest of the planet's locked-in population.

It shall be very interesting to observe the outcome of the post-COVID world, not only within the private realm of every single individual's existence but also the reshaping and shifts in the mechanism of the public sphere of human existence. The current situation of living during the pandemic has generated new data which architects and designers are currently adopting and using as parameters with which to design a new way of living; a way of resuming reality by eliminating the threat as much as possible. A strong example of overcoming the spread of the virus in public spaces such as *piazze* is the installation *StoDistante* in the town of Vicchio, near Florence, by the Italian architectural practice Caret Studio, who installed a grid of white cubes on the floor of Piazza Giotto in order to encourage social distancing.<sup>10</sup> By painting cubes with white paint placed 1.8 meters apart from each other, they hope to dictate the distance one person must keep from the next in order to avoid the spread of the virus. It is safe to say that this situation has made us all rethink the way in which we formerly lived and given us a reason to imagine a post-COVID reshaped world.

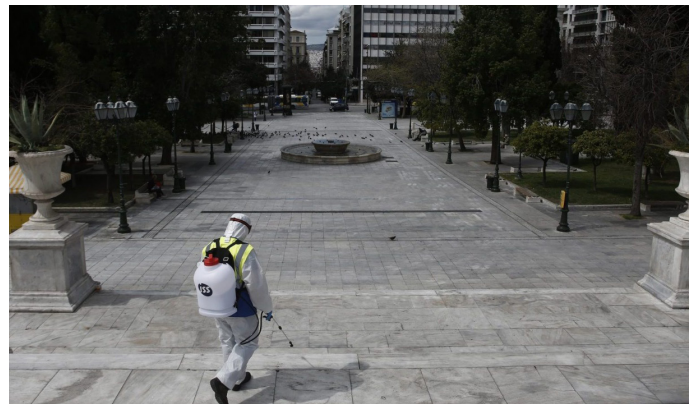
<sup>10</sup> Natashah Hitti, "Caret Studio installs gridded social-distancing system inside Italian piazza," Dezeen, last modified May 12, 2020, <https://www.dezeen.com/2020/05/12/caret-studio-social-distancing-stodistante-installation-vicchio/>.



Caret Studio, *StoDistante* installation in Piazza Giotto, Vicchio, Italy  
Photo by Caret Studio



Piazza di Spagna in Rome, Italy  
Before lockdown, photo by John J Young  
During lockdown, photo by Stefano Montesi/Corbis via Getty Image



Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece  
Before lockdown, photo by C Messier  
During lockdown, photo by EPA-EFE/YANNIS KOLESIDIS



Italians singing patriotic and folk songs from their balconies during lockdown  
Photo by Reuters



Candlelit vigil on the Saturday before Easter during lockdown  
Athens, Greece  
Photo by Tatiana Bolari/Eurokinissi

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 **kontaktcollective** Brixton ...

 **kontaktcollective** When the stark white painted figures first arrived in our small neighborhood park, a palpable air of anxiety accompanied them. Suddenly- a hypothetical, friendly distance taken as a suggested, common gesture between two fellow members of the public was transformed into a visualized mandate. The moment your mind wandered off and into the foliage & soothed into a brief moment of 'normal'- the images sprung out to remind us to stay alert - check to left & to your right, monitor your distance. Our daily run became a surreal, video-game experience of avoiding passerby and planning a route around errant wanderers up ahead. Until, seemingly just as suddenly- the painted figures grew muted under

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MAY 12

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## Cyberspace as Social Space

Social network sites like Facebook, Instagram, Skype and Zoom have existed long before social distancing. Since the early 2000's social networking has become a crucial part of our lives and continues to expand its spaces of usage. I personally grew up with the rise of cyberspace, while as a kid I played 'club penguin' and used 'myspace' to interact with my friends, as a teenager I was keener to online spaces like 'Facebook', 'Skype' and 'WhatsApp'. The progression in technological appliances paved the way for social network to produce a cyber ecosystem that has an immense effect on human life as well. During social distancing, as we limit our contact interactions with human beings, we become more and more impatient for any kind of relations. The decrease of production of social spaces formed by human relations, caused the usage of spaces formed by human and computer relations. Then, is cyberspace a physical space, equal to parks, museums, or even cities? And how do we form the social space in internet?

To understand the notion of cyberspace as a physical social space we must first delve into Henri Lefebvre's theorem of production of social space in his book *The Production of Space*. Interestingly, the year Lefebvre published his book, 1974 was the year that the phrase 'Internet' was first used. Through his book, Lefebvre notes "Every space is social space"<sup>1</sup>, today we don't see internet and computer as mere tools, a 'search engine', but virtual geography, or cyberspace that harbors series of relations, then it is natural to call the internet a social space. As it is comprehensible from the title, "(social) space is a (social) product."<sup>2</sup> While in our urban life we might see space as an enclosed land, an architectural form or a mode of nature it is not just this. Lefebvre argues that the economic production of space has been overlooked by goods and services,<sup>3</sup> thus he not only defines space as social relations but also, bases his idea of economy on analysis of space. The production of cyberspace is also based on forming social relations, citing Mike Crang, Phil Crang and Jon May from their book *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*, "No technology can come into being without its socialization; and this socialization is an ongoing process of throughout the circuits linking technological production, distribution and usage."<sup>4</sup> The production of any kind of space is dependent on socialization; both in spatial and economic production. Maybe one of the most

1 Lefebvre, Henri. "the Production of Space" p. 26

2 Ibid.27

3 Molotch, Harvey. "The Space of Lefebvre", p.888

4 Crang, Mike. & Crang, Phil. & May, Jon. "Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations"

used social spaces amongst human beings is Facebook, it has about 2.6 billion active users, the space itself allows people from different parts of the world to connect and interact with each other. It is indubitable that advertising is the main source of revenue as socialization is the key to maintain cyberspaces. But what exactly is the economic production in a cyberspace?

Lefebvre establishes his theory of space based on Marxism. Therefore, labor, human beings and nature take a great part in it. In the equation of object and production, Lefebvre states that human or rather the body is derived from the space itself. “Before *producing* effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space...”<sup>5</sup> The human body is a threefold machine that not only produces a space but also social relations and economic profits. To understand the relations of social space, and its affiliations to cyberspace we must analyze the body’s relationship with itself and one another in creating this threefold production. Lefebvre initiates that, to produce a space, first a body appears, second came the discourse. Then, from my understanding of social networks, a body is similar to activating an account or being online. As we have discussed in the ‘Imagining a New Art World’ panel, it is all about being seen, not as a physical presence but an online presence. The NetArt artist Michael Noll has a different perspective to forming Net relations. Citing Noll, “In the computer, man has created not just an inanimate tool but an intellectual and active creative partner.”<sup>6</sup> Noll observes that humans can produce relations with machines and computers as they are producing with each other; therefore, one human being is effectual to produce a social space.

5 Lefebvre, Henri. “the Production of Space” p.170

6 Noll, A. Michael, “The Digital Computer as a Creative Medium” p. 89

Lefebvre delineates a space isn’t like a “frame or a container”<sup>7</sup> that waits to be filled in. Contrary, a social space is formed with “encounter, assembly and simultaneity”<sup>8</sup>. It is easy to understand this equation with any kind of physical space such as an art gallery; the viewer enters the room has its first *encounter*, which initiates the body to think and act on it. Two or more viewers that saw the work of art *assemblies* and discuss the work, form relations between each other. And this act happens *simultaneously* with one another. Although it might be harder for us to grasp, the production of virtual geographies is similar to any other space; a social network like Instagram has the same components as the art gallery; it creates the initial *encounter* between the different accounts with the discover page, forms an *assembly* by live-stories or ability to comment to pictures and generates *simultaneity* with its broad platform.

7 Lefebvre, Henri. “the production of Space” p.95

8 Ibid.101

Our relations with cyberspaces developed with the manufacture of the computer and it continues to grow. Just like any other social space, to produce a social space we have to form social relations. What makes relations formed in the cyberspace so unique is the intertwined structure of internet. The question is will technological relations ever replace human relations? During the pandemic it was evident that we understood the importance of such social



spaces even more and even appreciated them as physical space rather than abstract. But human interactions are still a crucial part of our lives and seems like it will continue to be.

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 **contactcollective** Bebek Sahili, Istanbul ...

 **contactcollective** It's day 52 of social distancing for me, and I can't even walk in my own neighborhood. Recreational spaces are closed to the public, and the gov is taking intense measures (i.e. days-long curfews) in order to reopen the economy as soon as possible. At least I can enjoy the view 🌊

3w

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MAY 5

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# How have social norms been jeopardized by new social distancing rules and how are they impacting people's behaviour?

1 Derrick Bryson. "How the Coronavirus Pandemic Unfolded: a Timeline." New York Times, May 26, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-timeline.html>.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Lucia Del Carpio. "Social Norms During the Pandemic." Video, 5:04, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb_logo).

It was on December 31st 2019 when the government of Wuhan, China revealed that dozens of their citizens were being treated for a type of pneumonia which origins were unknown.<sup>1</sup> A few days after this announcement a new virus was identified by Chinese scientists and information that it had infected dozens of individuals in Asia was released.<sup>2</sup> Although there was no concrete evidence at the time on the rapid spread of the virus among humans, China announced that they were monitoring the situation in order to prevent an outbreak from happening.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, by mid-January, the virus had spread outside mainland China to Thailand and Japan and by January 20th the United States reported its first case of COVID-19, the first case outside of Asia. Three days later, the Chinese government closed off the city of Wuhan; they cancelled any kind of access into the and out of the city and all transportation within it, by then 17 people had died and more than 570 others had been infected worldwide.<sup>4</sup> To date (May 25th 2020) there have been 5,491,449 reported cases of COVID-19 around the world out of which, sadly, 346,357 of them have ended in deaths. Given that there is no cure available nor a vaccine to combat this pandemic, over 75 countries, 4 billion people, are or have been under some kind of<sup>5</sup> social distancing rules with the purpose to contain the spread of the virus until a scientific breakthrough occurs. These new social distancing norms have caused us to realize how quickly new patterns of behaviour can be built as they have been put into action by almost everyone immediately. For many individuals today – only three months after the social distancing norms were established – it is not rare to feel indignation upon seeing a supermarket worker not wearing a facemask and/or gloves nor to be outraged at the sight of a group of individuals who do not seem to be part of the same household standing less than six feet apart. Although sympathizing with those feelings is no cause for a shock today, what does come as a shock is the speed with which this has all become the new normal, and what is a matter of concern is the uncertainty of how these new social norms have impacted society, and what impact will they have in the generations to come. The positive and negative outcomes from these new social norms will be explored and the impact they might have in the future.

6 Jay J. Van Bavel, Baicker, K., Boggio, P.S. et al. Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, 460–471 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0884-z>

7 Aline Holzwarth. "Social Norms Can Spread Like A Virus." *Forbes*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alineholzwarth/2020/04/03/social-norms-can-spread-like-a-virus/#3c07f6226e11>

8 Jay J. Van Bavel, Baicker, K., Boggio, P.S. et al. Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, 460–471 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0884-z>

9 Ibid

10 Lucia Del Carpio. "Social Norms During the Pandemic." Video, 8:06, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb_logo).

11 Jay J. Van Bavel, Baicker, K., Boggio, P.S. et al. Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, 460–471 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0884-z>

What are social norms? It is what people perceive as to be approved or disapproved by others – their society.<sup>6</sup> People's behaviour is strongly influenced by social norms and they respond not only to what other individuals do but also to what other individuals desire. As Jamil Zaki – Stanford University psychology professor with a research interest in cognitive and neural bases of social behaviour – notes, behaviour can be contagious; individuals take cues from others so to understand what is accepted socially hence to adapt their behaviour in order to fit in.<sup>7</sup> Individuals are especially alert in times of uncertainty to behavioural cues from others thus, it does not come as a surprise that people are rapidly catching up to the development of new social norms around social distancing. Social networks of all kinds – family, friend groups, social media influencers (from celebrity's to politicians to the NHS) – can intensify the spread of behaviours that may come as both harmful and beneficial to certain demographics of people during a pandemic like this one;<sup>8</sup> the influential power of social norms can lead to the spread of certain kinds of behaviour through the network to friends, friends' friends and even friends' friends<sup>9</sup> be it positive or negative in nature.

Plenty of positive outcomes have arisen as a result of the new social norms that have developed mainly a feeling of "we are all working towards a common good" which has sometimes lead to people with different backgrounds and beliefs to connect through a set of social norms in common. Their individual and collective interests have aligned to a certain extent henceforth, there's cooperation among diverse groups.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, some individuals do act selfishly and some may experience more distress – as it will be later developed – but overall cooperation and orderly norm-governed behaviours are common across a range of emergencies and disasters like the current pandemic; and there are many instances when people display remarkable altruism),<sup>11</sup> some examples of this altruism are the numerous community organizations, and even apps like Nextdoor, that have arisen to help with the provision of food and other needs for the elderly and other at-risk individuals. Furthermore, small behaviours like the clapping to the frontline workers as a sign of appreciation for their work has also brought this positive feeling of togetherness, much needed at a time when distance and isolation are being felt so acutely. These positive behaviours that have arisen as a consequence of these new social norms have shown an optimistic side to the pandemic, people behaving in a way that shows they care about others and are appreciative of the work being done.

The positive effects of these new social norms have however not permeated all levels of society, immigrant groups and the financially unprivileged have been severely hit by discrimination in various forms, along with other particular groups of people – like COVID-19 survivors and healthcare workers. In what concerns immigrants, stigmatization has been particularly prevalent towards individuals of Asian descent, who have been victims of hate crimes due to the connection of China with the birth of COVID-19. 267 offences against

12 David Mercer: "Coronavirus: Hate crimes against Chinese people soar in UK during COVID-19 crisis." Sky News, May 5, 2020. <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-hate-crimes-against-chinese-people-soar-in-uk-during-COVID-19-crisis-11979388>

13 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Reducing Stigma." CDC, March 30, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/reducing-stigma.html>

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

16 Lucia Del Carpio. "Social Norms During the Pandemic." Video, 6:32, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=281&v=7hcyv85Yoj8&feature=emb_logo).

17 Jay J. Van Bavel, Baicker, K., Boggio, P.S. et al. Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, 460–471 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0884-z>

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 Benjamin Parkin. "India's biggest slum tests Modi's coronavirus response." *Financial Times*, April 24, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/5199e04b-d235-49e2-a20c-af7bb8fc53a9>.

21 Leah Campbell. "How COVID-19 Could Affect Kids' Long-Term Social Development." *Healthline*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/social-distancing-effects-on-social-development>.

Chinese people were recorded in the UK in the first three months of 2020 which is nearly three times that of the previous two years according to data released by the UK police forces.<sup>12</sup> Stigmatization towards Asian individuals has increased to the point that the Centre for Disease Control<sup>13</sup> in the United States had to make a public announcement on stigma reduction where they pointed out that "It is important to remember that people – including those of Asian descent – who do not live in or have not recently been in an area of the ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, or have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 are not at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 than other Americans."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, stigmatization has also been faced by people who have been released from COVID-19 quarantine, people who have travelled, and emergency responders. These stigmatized people may face social rejection; healthcare, education, housing, and employment denial; and even physical violence.<sup>15</sup> Because people are under a situation of threat emotions run high, particularly fear. These feelings can alter perceptions of risk and can lead to the discrimination others.<sup>16</sup>

Discrimination has also been especially prevalent towards the financially underprivileged as social distancing norms can be non-inclusive ones. Communities with limited access to water, for instance, have a lower hand washing rate; meanwhile other vulnerable communities – but many times the same ones – are unable to comply with social distance given that their constrained living spaces do not permit them to stay six feet away from one another outside their household.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the financially vulnerable cannot afford to stop working hence, they are unable to comply with lockdown norms.<sup>18</sup> This reality is not exclusive to the developing world but also to the working class in Europe and the United States.<sup>19</sup> An example of how social distancing norms can be non-inclusive is the COVID-19 outbreak in Dharavi, one of the world's largest slums in India. Here, families or migrant worker groups typically live in single rooms and share public toilets and water taps, which require multiple trips a day for usage. The lanes between houses are so narrow that it is impossible to walk the street without touching one another additionally, poverty means that staying at home and losing income is unsustainable for the majority of Dharavi residents.<sup>20</sup> Their living conditions, caused by their crippled financial reality, make social distancing effectively impossible.

Social distancing norms have also brought non-discrimination related issues, one of particular concern is how these new norms could affect children's long-term social development. Social development is important for children of all ages but the environment under which optimal social development happens varies from age to age. Younger children's social development can mostly occur within the family but, older and hence more socially adept children need their peers as they begin to learn how to navigate complex social groups.<sup>21</sup> Late childhood and adolescence are the times when humans

are deciphering friendship development with deeper roots than sole play, they are discovering who they are and what they want from their friendships. Experimenting is needed to achieve this.<sup>22</sup> Though hard to navigate, these processes are a crucial stepping stone to healthy adult relationships later in life.<sup>23</sup> Although new telecommunications have provided us with fast and easy ways to virtually socialize, the kind of friendships that must develop during these key years are hard to reproduce through online platforms, nor while standing six feet apart,<sup>24</sup> it is because of this that experts on social behaviour have concur that if social distancing norms carry on for a long period of time social development issues will be bound to arise, and teenagers will be the most jeopardized by it. The reason for this is brain development, as it is during infancy and adolescence that humans go through their two major growth spurts, which means that at these times their brains are at its most malleable stage hence primed for learning;<sup>25</sup> consequently, missing out on key social development learning moments could mean long-term “damage” to these needed skills and knowledge.

Although social norms have generated positivity in some ways like has been the empathy among different spectrums of society through a shared caused, an overwhelmingly negative number of issues have arisen from these new norms. As it has been discussed, social norms impact social behaviour, and these new social norms of physical distance have in many cases lead to a feeling of threat and panic which has been manifested through deplorable behaviour of denial, coercion and stigmatization towards people who are believed to have been in exposed to COVID-19. Furthermore, the new social norms imposed have brought greater attention to the inequality gap between different economic sectors. Social distancing norms are non-inclusive as the less fortunate populations are unable to follow them due to their living and economic circumstances. Moreover, social distancing might be the cause for the tampering of social development in teenagers given that their prime years of social development have been halted due to the ban from having the social interactions needed to do so. Although the new social norms have brought some positivity to society this positivity might not be big enough to overpower the negative behavioural impact that has developed through the pandemic.

22 Ibid

23 Ibid

24 Ibid

25 Ibid

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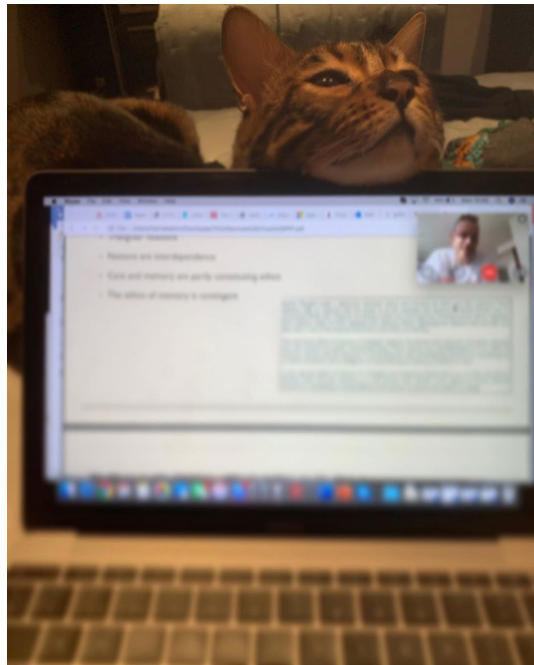
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 **kontaktcollective** London, United Kingdom ...

 **kontaktcollective** Although attending a physical class is ideal, online classes have provided great comfort during these times of isolation. Just hearing how everyone was and having some hours of some "normal" socializing made such a great difference in my mood and wellbeing! - Photograph of one of our first Spatial Biopolitics online classes 🥰

4d

 **isabellegh** 🐾💕   
4d Reply

     
 Liked by **stuckmist** and **14 others**  
4 DAYS AGO

Add a comment... [Post](#)

1 According to the policy in the area during the pandemic time, anyone who came back from overseas would have to isolate himself or herself at his or her places for 14 days. The quarantine state was under surveillance and the person was not allowed to go outdoor (I appreciate the guy who invented fridge). In fact, this regulation was changed right after the day I came back. People who came back then would be collectively quarantined in some hotels or somewhere instead of their own places.

2 Giorgio Agamben, 'The Invention of an Epidemic', in 'Coronavirus and philosophers', European Journal of Psychoanalysis, accessed March 25, 2020, <http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>  
Giorgio Agamben, 'Clarifications', in 'Coronavirus and philosophers', European Journal of Psychoanalysis, accessed March 25, 2020, <http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>  
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3 Jacques Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', in 'Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics', trans Steven Corcoran, (London: Continuum, 2010), 36-38.

4 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans Iain Hamilton Grant. (London: Sage, 2017), 146.

1.

During my 14 days (forced) home quarantine<sup>1</sup> in a small city in north west China, I found amusement reading Agamben and Luc-Nancy's back-and-forth exchanges<sup>2</sup> about the current topics. In my understanding, their disagreements, in a sense, less developed to a divergence than intrigued some backstage mockery behind a grand melodrama. No matter targeting the government forging its power by this state of exception or arguing the whole civilization is infected by the 'exceptional virus', for sure, both Agamben and Luc-Nancy, I suppose, deliberately and skilfully excluded the exclusion, the exceptional state as such, the 'void' within the centre of the spectacle while also circulating it from peripheral, where they crystalized their thinking back then, as a decent voyeur enjoy a scene by a separate menstruating body. They covertly assumed (and enjoy this assumption) that the latter enjoy it as they do, and as I do.

Once getting off the plane, escorted by those with protective clothing, I surely was placed into a state of exception. This also means, behind the sealed door, however, this man with his quarantine space contrives an abstract possibility, a faint, precarious spot that even the power which formulates this state, nonetheless, is distant from. I would not say the power is not in control of this unavowable vacuum but at least this space polarizes and embarrasses the power, as my personal information, akin to some sort of minor writing, was confirmed again and again while it ends up amounting to nothing in their record book. This is Rancière's politics of void, the exceptional without reciprocity.<sup>3</sup> If the social distancing keeps people from forging the 'coming community', an alternative mockery is conspired by the coronavirus and me. A spectre is knocking on their door while I am typing.

'We could even say that pleasure is possible insofar as there is a hell'<sup>4</sup>  
(*Symbolic Exchange and Death* 146)

2.

Agamben is a true Christian. He stands by the glory almost to a degree of innocence. That is his politics, the politics towards the 'empty throne'. But, to put it in this way, what is politics in the occasion that one sits next to his bed

5 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans by Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (London: Pluto, 2008)

(it is not about one man ‘encounter’-what an abusive Deleuzian word- his bed). If that is the case, as Baudrillard surely asserts,<sup>5</sup> the politics in vacuum, I would stand side by side with a terrorist with a bomb on his waist next to a coffee shop. But the fact is, I cook three times a day. The ‘bomb’ looks more like a parody regarding to the proximity to the coffee shop.

3.

Where does the flesh go?

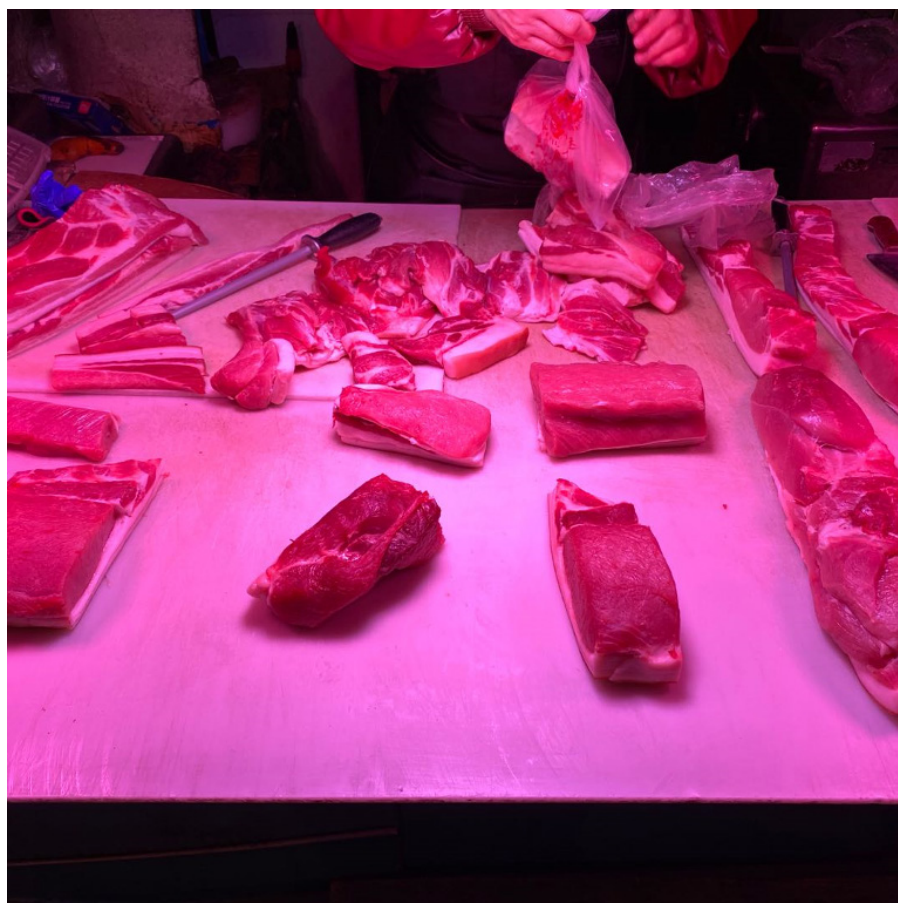


Figure 1. Butcher Shop during lockdown time. Taiyuan, China

6 Timothy Morton, ‘Thank Virus for Symbiosis’ (paper presented at STRP Festival 2020, Online, April 2 – May 28, 2020).

We are becoming plants. Or do we? Bringing about whatever propositions about symbiosis or post-Anthropocene creatures, we should not forget somatic actualities alongside the processes. And, as far as I understand, the sceneries are usually dramas of cruelty. Yes, physicality is always about cruelty, about hazards, about bodies and brains that were discharged and dismantled. It is brutal and tough; ‘beauty is an uneasy symbiosis.’<sup>6</sup> Nowhere can offer a more thorough provision of this carnal relationship between us and the Other than the backstreet market where I live, where still preposterously presents you muddy row squids and stroking tricksters. So what is that? When the butcher chopped a chunk of pork for me, we were both with masks, when the meat was exposed to the open air (not that open though) and was put in to a moist plastic bag. And, I put that meat in to my mouth. Maybe we just accomplished an ‘impossible exchange’ at that moment, since the great meta spectacle of the neoliberalists experienced their disfunction or absurdity by this small contagion

7 Ibid

between the pork and my flesh. The autoimmune was temporarily suspended by this carefree hillbilly conduct. That is the carnal moment of my body. ‘The Latin word *hostis* means host, guest, friend, enemy. Hospitality means you might open your door to a killer.’<sup>7</sup> Whereas, we should keep in mind that it is the muscles of limb, linking to the whole kinetic system of our body, opens the door. Being with the Other, at least from this respect, is quintessentially proximate and carnal. And that also means, contagious and viral. This is where Batailles’s ‘*La littérature et le mal*’ locates, capitalism does not leave a space for true evilness as it leaves no space to death. Nonetheless, ‘beauty is the possibility of death... beauty is virus.’<sup>8</sup>

8 Ibid

4.

One morning, a phone call comes in as I woke up. I was told there was going to be a nucleic acid test in 10 mins. My head was too numbed to answer because of nicotine. I mumbled some words while the line was hanged up. Got up washed my face, I was a bit disgruntled sitting in a couch in the living room, so I light up another cigarette as a micro resistance. Somebody knocked on the door. Two women came in with full masks, goggles and protective suits, (although looked in very poor quality) alongside some medical tools in plastic bags. I inhaled a large amount of smoke. ‘We are doing a nucleic acid test to you. Open your mouth’. ‘Well, I am smoking’ ‘Yes’, they were looking at me from top to bottom. Following the order, I sat back and had my mouth open (btw I did not brush my teeth as a part of my resistance and obviously I forgot the mask thing). They probed a cotton bud into my throat. I choked and coughed, retching as hell. ‘Keep you mouth wide open and hold on’. I felt the cotton was brushing my front neck as a piece of cold metal, as bitter liquid streamed along my throat to my lungs. Snots came to my nostril. ‘Okay, done’. I felt a headache, picked up the half-lit cigarette. ‘You will get result in one or two days.’ They cleared up everything and left.



Figure 2. Xu Bing, Tobacco Project, 2012  
Courtesy LACMA

9 Michel Foucault '17 March 1967' in "Society Must Be" Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003), 214.

That was the experience I met during my first encounter with a living person during the 14 days quarantine. That is almost, curiously, an experience of intimacy, since a deep part of my organ was touched by 'capillaries of power'<sup>9</sup>, so much so, a case of intimacy in the time of late capitalism. It is proximity and somatic interactions from way far, no matter food supplies from chains of food banks, phallus with condoms or the squirting conducted by its mirror images from PornHub. So what is the difference between this cotton bud deep-throat invasion and me putting a Mevius Blueberry, which I believe was produced in some mass factory in Japan by workers also with some protective suits and goggles, into my mouth and inhale the nicotine in to my lungs (or sometimes choked by it)? Desiring-machine is too negligent to take a note of that matter. Whereas, exactly because of that, an implosion is always in potential. In fact, it is the achievement of the virus. Virus is the ultimate contagion, so that the catalyse of this intimate chain of machinic Eros. Now, the whole system is driven mad to its endless orgasms. I cannot stop imagining the stunned and frenzied faces of those two nurses if I was confirmed infected at the end of the day.

5.

I live somewhere in northwest china, high and dry, somewhere used to prosper for coal mines and heavy industrial factories. As a result, the contact with dirt and dust comes prior to being exposed to anything else. Without proper (daily basis) cleaning, dust will occupy every sort of surface before your eyes; water will be sucked out from your skin which then will be fiberized as botanic specimen; walking in winds, small particles will take over your retina, your throat will be so dehydrated and you will cough until all your organs squeeze together, as if you are made as a BWO(body without organs) through dust, not to say the dusty doomsdays during sandstorms. Before the coronavirus took over everything, dust has claimed its sovereignty and has been mediating our life through physical spaces, at least during certain period of time in a year. For the same reason, gloves, sleeves and masks have never been far from our quotidian routines. In that sense, we do have an interesting history of so-called body as a territory of ecological struggle or symbiosis. In the dialect of this area, 'dou pie' means becoming dusty as something left in open air for too long; 'tu mi hong yan' indicates an unpleasant state or body feeling as being in a dusty environment; 'ma seng' basically equals to 'dander', whereas it is understood (usually by older generations) resulted from exposure to dirt and dust. These words are not very positive. Nonetheless, a subtle sense of humour and an intimate feeling of body sensibility are suggested when speaking these words.

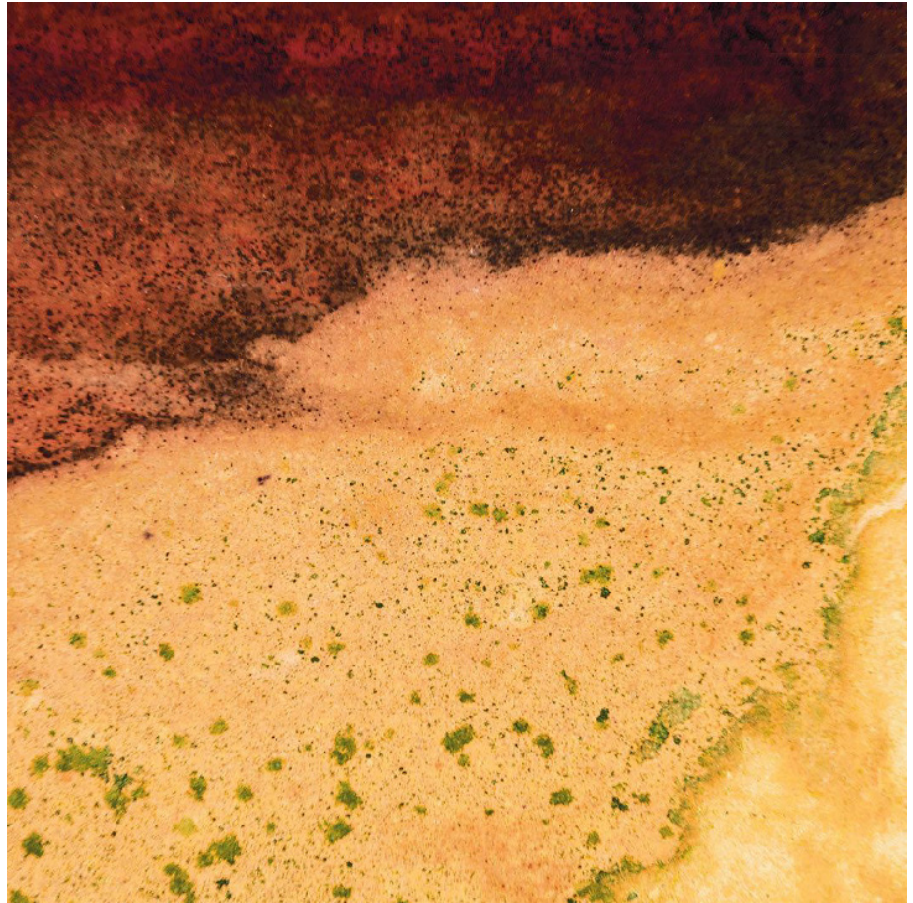


Figure 3. Anicka Yi, *Biologizing the Machine (terra incognita)* (detail), 2019  
Courtesy Artforum

I have not wiped tables or mopped floors for quite a while (almost a week I guess?) and I can see clearly a thin layer of dust, almost as white fluffs, appears on these surfaces, with some imprints of my hands or feet. Sometimes I am bored enough to play with them, drawing a circle with my finger on them, writing my name, or something else. For me, they look almost lovely. Whereas, I always know, if I do not clean them for several more days or week, they could be strong enough to drive me out the door. Or if one day, I, out of nowhere, decided to inhale all of them around my home, I would be infected black lung and die. Or, if one day they spontaneously turned themselves to 11, I would die too.

Does or will that offer an alternative (see, another fashionable term) understanding toward coronavirus? I am not sure. For one, it is not that enjoyable for me to get close to the virus as to the dust. But I would say, despite my actual pain, suffocation, fever and mortality, these little coronas will give quite a drama in my lung (or brain, or prostate perhaps) if visualized. To be honest, that sounds quite kitschy. The whole thing is still left very much unthinkable or unilluminated. My lung is as dark as any basement so the drama would be very likely to be in pitch black and in silence. Nevertheless, is that not what intimacy means? Being intimate to the phenomenological minimum, to your impossibility, to disappearance, and being intimate to your death.

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The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.

Because, once we are all ill and confined to the bed, sharing our stories of therapies and comforts, forming support groups, bearing witness to each other's tales of trauma, prioritizing the care and love of our sick, pained, expensive, sensitive, fantastic bodies, and there is no one left to go to work, perhaps then, finally, capitalism will screech to its much-needed, long-overdue, and motherfucking glorious halt.

*\* An earlier version of the essay was first published in Mask Magazine, maskmagazine.com, January 2016. Edited by Hanna Hurr and Isabelle Nastasia. This text is adapted from the lecture, "My Body Is a Prison of Pain so I Want to Leave It Like a Mystic But I Also Love It & Want It to Matter Politically," delivered at Human Resources, sponsored by the Women's Center for Creative Work, in Los Angeles, on October 7, 2015.*



The screenshot shows an Instagram post from the account 'kontaktcollective' (Peckham South East London). The post text reads: 'Something we've been thinking a lot about is care. What does it mean to care for ourselves, for others right now, at a time when we are all facing the possibility of becoming 'sick bodies' in need of care? This crisis has made even more visible the huge disparities in care. Who is able to access care? Who can afford it?'. The post has 35 likes and was posted on May 5. The interface includes icons for heart, comment, share, and bookmark, and a text input field for comments.



# The Eerily Normal Life: Understanding the New Normal in Post-COVID-19 Society through Science Fiction

## The Eerily Empty City

Mid-April 2020, London. Unlike the normal weather in the UK, a week-long burst of bright sunshine warms up the city. In the baking afternoon heat, people would usually spend their afternoon in the park or sunbathe on the beach. One would expect to hear noise from pubs and to smell delicious food cooking in busy restaurants, but instead, there is a strange eeriness throughout London this spring. The city's scenery remains the same, but human bodies have almost completely disappeared from the streets. It is an eerie spring day. 'Why is there nothing here when there should be something?'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 7.

## Science Fiction Comes True

Science Fiction does not attempt to imagine the real future but rather to *think*<sup>2</sup> the detrimental consequences of current trends to influence the present. American theorist Fredric Jameson says Sci-Fi's 'multiple mock futures serve the function of transforming our present into the determinate past of something yet to come.'<sup>3</sup> Through Sci-Fi stories, British theorist Mark Fisher uncovers the qualities of the *weird* and the *eerie* in his short book of essays. He believes that the weird and the eerie allow us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside.<sup>4</sup> For Fisher, the quality of the weird is associated with a sense of wrongness<sup>5</sup> which makes people realise that our world is not the world we think it is. The more subtle quality of the eerie, on the other hand, is associated with ideas about existence and non-existence and is fundamentally concerned with questions of *agency*.<sup>6</sup> He also states these associations have obscured what is specific to the weird and the eerie.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Sci-Fi novel *Ender's Game* author Orson Scott Card mentions that the novel set him not to dreaming, but to thinking: 'What would the future be like? How would things change? What would remain the same?' (Card, *Ender's Game*, 7)

<sup>3</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future? (Progrès Contre Utopie, Ou: Pouvons-Nous Imaginer l'avenir)," *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (1982): 147–158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239476>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The quality of the eerie is exemplified in London's city streets emptied of human activity during the coronavirus threat. The city we have always known has stayed physically intact but the juxtaposition of the desolate city where people have disappeared implies an ongoing conflict. There is an eerie sense of silence<sup>8</sup> and weirdness at the same time. The weird emptied city space reminds us that our world may no longer be what it once was. However, what we are seeing is not the backdrop of a Sci-Fi story; we are facing a real coronavirus pandemic that is changing the global landscape. As Lefebvre argues, this should be conceived of solely as a transition after the end of a well-defined

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

9 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1974; repr. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 408.

period'.<sup>9</sup> We are currently going through this transition, and many expect a 'Post-COVID-19' period after the coronavirus outbreak passes. In this essay, I will explore the Sci-Fi qualities of the weird and the eerie as they relate to the real experiences of inhabitants amid the COVID-19 turmoil and Post-COVID-19 period.

### Lockdown

Like most other countries around the world fighting COVID-19, the UK has imposed a lockdown to limit the spread of the coronavirus by restricting all non-essential human movements. The UK's prime minister announced unprecedented lockdown measures on 23 March 2020 which resulted in the implementation of a two-metre social distancing requirement and the prohibition of gatherings or groups of more than two people. Cinemas, restaurants, pubs, and gyms have also been closed, weddings have been cancelled, and funerals should be limited to a person's immediate family.<sup>10</sup> After several weeks of lockdown, what we used to consider 'normal' social behaviour has completely changed.

10 Matt Burgess, "The UK's Coronavirus Lockdown, and How Long It Will Last, Explained," *Wired.co.uk*, March 24, 2020, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/uk-lockdown>.

While I am confined at home amid lockdown restrictions, I can only keep up to date with COVID-19 related news via the internet and other communication technology. According to internet news, the global coronavirus death toll has surpassed 40,000, and more than 20,000 UK patients with coronavirus have died in hospital in less than a month. While stuck at home, this number almost seems unrealistic because when I look through my window at the emptied 'human-less' streets, there is an eeriness and it feels like I am the only 'human' left alive in a world otherwise inhabited by threatening entities of Sci-Fi novels.<sup>11</sup>

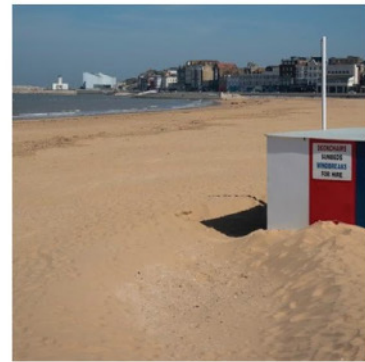
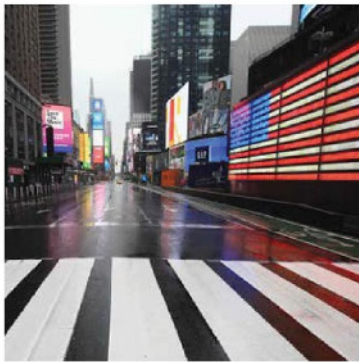
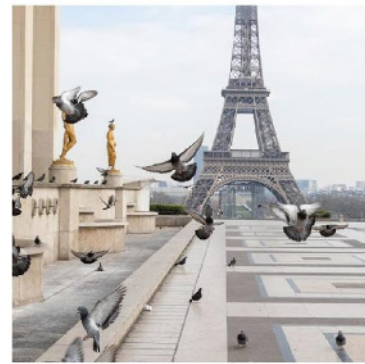
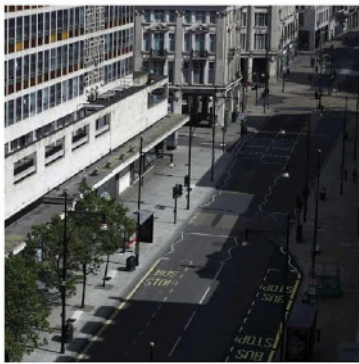
11 At the beginning, I thought it was just my personal feeling, but many journalists and individuals have shared eerie pictures show desolate streets and landmarks in lockdown cities worldwide. There is also an interview with a Stamford resident and she said: "It feels eerie, like I'm in a sci-fi movie. Or maybe an iconic TV series." (Carella, "Coronavirus Lockdown Leaves 'Eerie' Feeling, Stamford Residents Say.")

### Let's Meet in the Digital Space

Under the lockdown regulation, isolation has increased and people have to live in a solitary environment. However, despite this physical isolation, people still proactively seek social interactions using communication technologies and social media. Around the world, virtual communication apps such as Google Hangouts, Discord, Slack, Zoom and Houseparty saw record levels of growth.<sup>12</sup> People even find social connections through interactive digital games. With advanced digital technologies, it does not matter where one's physical body is for social interactions to occur.

12 Josh Constone, "Under quarantine, media is actually social!" *Tech Crunch*, March 21, 2020, <https://techcrunch.com/2020/03/21/showing-up-not-showing-off/>.





## Game the Social Space

'With much of the US and Europe in lockdown, video game use has exploded.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Elisa Menendez, "Social Distancing Ignored Yet Again on Westminster Bridge during Clap for Carers," Metro, April 23, 2020, <https://metro.co.uk/2020/04/23/fury-social-distancing-ignored-westminster-bridge-12602395/?ito=cbshare>.

<sup>14</sup> The World Health Organisation has also urged the world to stay at home and play video games. (Griffin, 2020)

<sup>15</sup> Chris Baraniuk, "Computer Games: More than a Lockdown Distraction," BBC News, April 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52210938>.

<sup>16</sup> Some games like Animal Crossing are considered as the new social media of the coronavirus era (Basu, "Why Games like Animal Crossing are the New Social Media of the Coronavirus Era.")

Millions of people in physical isolation are turning to video games as a way to spend their time and stay connected to others without spreading coronavirus.<sup>14</sup> As more people are becoming involved in playing virtual games, the growing phenomenon of meeting friends in game space cannot be experienced or replicated in physical space. Hundreds of games allow people to meet online and weekly game sales have risen by between 40% and 60%.<sup>15</sup> This has been aided by the release of the new games such as Animal Crossing<sup>16</sup> and other new titles like Call of Duty: Warzone, which allow people to meet up in the game. Friends socialise, chat with one another, cooperate with, battle against, one another and explore the virtual world together as colourful video game characters free from the threat of coronavirus. Game space is now transforming the nature of social relations in society. Lefebvre believes that a space has always been a social product:

Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial(...) Within the body itself, spatially considered, the successive levels constituted by the senses (from the sense of smell to sight, treated as different within a differentiated field) prefigure the payers of social space and their interconnections. The passive body (the senses) and the active body (labour) converge in space.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 404.

Traditionally, social relationships have been underpinned by physical space, but with the development of communication technologies, these relationships are now underpinned by digital space as well. Michael Nitsche, a games researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology, similarly describes the relations of the layered condition between social space and synthetic space. He considers game space as a layered condition, running from the coded workings of the machine through to the layer of social space in which games are played.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2008), 16.

From this perspective, *abstract* social relations are underpinned by game space in which there are layers of social space and bodies' interconnections. In this digital social space, the roles of body from Lefebvre's assertion may have to be adjusted as the passive body (a body with *labouring* games at home) and the active body (virtual avatar *sensing* in a game space), but they converge in game space.

## Alternative Sci-Fi Universe

More people have started playing online games to escape the seemingly nonstop bombardment of bad news about COVID-19 as well as to avoid the virus outside. Games do not only provide a way of connecting with quarantined friends; they are also an alternative universe where the reality of pandemic can be momentarily forgotten. For many, Sci-Fi is considered as the best way to cope with COVID-19 crisis. Unlike other 'mundane'<sup>19</sup> literature,

<sup>19</sup> Delany argues that 'science fiction differs from the discourse called literature, particularly that bulk of literature we Sci-Fi readers call mundane fiction.' (From mundus, meaning the world; stories that take place on the Earth in the present or past.) (Delany, "Science Fiction and 'Literature'—or, The Conscience of the King," 69)

Sci-Fi novels often have boldly futuristic backdrops and tell dystopian stories that explore devastating realities by climate change, biowarfare, pandemics, totalitarian governments or technology and now it seems more relevant to the current situation.<sup>20</sup>

20 Caroline Zielinski, "I've Been Reading More Dystopian Fiction than Ever during the Corona Crisis. Here's Why" The Guardian, April 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/08/ive-been-reading-more-dystopian-fiction-than-ever-during-the-corona-crisis-heres-why>.

Video games are highly effective as a medium to bring Sci-Fi worlds to life and the most popular Sci-Fi games are almost like Sci-Fi films. Set in a vivid Sci-Fi universe, Sci-Fi games are more intimate and personal than novels or films as players can actively participate in them and can use the games' fun, futuristic technology. Some players prefer to spend most of their day as a virtual character, like a main protagonist, living out their surreal fantasy in game space. As a result, their daily realities outside of the game space become increasingly obscure during the lockdown, and digital life becomes more real to them than real life.

### **Adapting to a New Normal through Science Fiction**

After several weeks of lockdown, what we used to consider normal has completely changed. Leaving the house, going to work, enjoying a meal with friends, going to a park or a pub... Every mundane normal activity that we took for granted in the past might soon become untypical of everyday life. Post-COVID-19 should be conceived of solely as a transition after the end of a well-defined period<sup>21</sup> and our society has embraced the transition into a largely digital age.

21 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 408.

We may continue to experience an eerie life after the coronavirus pandemic due to unexpected agencies like Sci-Fi's popular threatening topics of environment, pandemics, or artificial intelligence. Whatever future lies before us, people have most likely already experienced a simulated version of it through Sci-Fi's mock futures and will, therefore, already know how to adapt to the new normal when the time comes. The sense of the weird and the eerie will help us to see our world differently and see the inside from the perspective of the outside.<sup>22</sup> People will be able to readily experience those qualities within such Sci-Fi-like landscapes, and are left questioning their sense of agency and existence. From digital space, people create layers of social space and interconnections, and at the same time, they can learn the art of combat in a series of battle games like training simulations within some digital game settings.

22 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 6.

Sci-Fi usually explores questions about society, humanity, and relationships and follows a plausible chronological progression from the first sign of crisis to the sign of returning to normality.<sup>23</sup> Although many Sci-Fi stories are mostly concerned with apocalyptic or dystopian events, Sci-Fi does not suggest a prophetic look into the future, but to show us a way out.

23 Jane Ciabattari, "The Plague Writers Who Predicted Today," BBC, April 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200413-what-can-we-learn-from-pandemic-fiction?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>.



Still from Vanishing on 7th street (2010)

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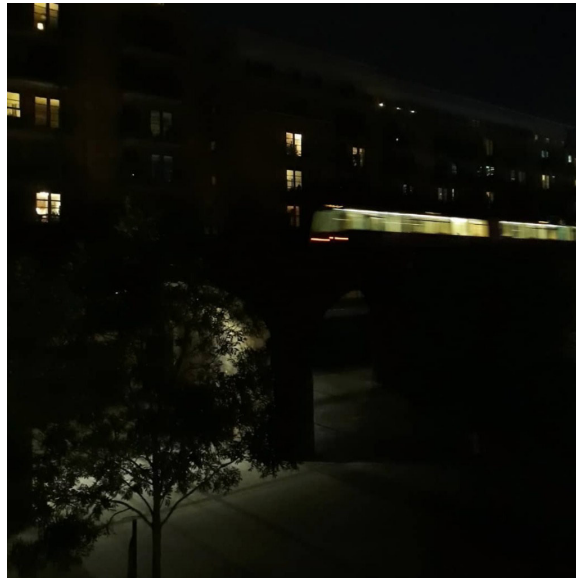
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 **kontaktcollective**  
London, United Kingdom


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 **kontaktcollective** My social contact has for the past two months strictly been exercised through some window or other. Whether that be the windows of my flat or the window Microsoft has provided me with. Neighbor-watching has been my prime – if not only – social pastime during the long period of this lockdown.  
To quote Emily Dickinson "I cannot walk to the distant friends on nights piercing as these, so I put both hands on the window-pane, and try to think how birds fly, and imitate, and fail..."

4d

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# A New Mode of Thinking for a Post-Pandemic World: another Otherness and contemplative lingering

1 "Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) SITUATION REPORT - 1". WHO. JANUARY 21, 2020. [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200121-sit-rep-1-2019-ncov.pdf?sfvrsn=20a99c10\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200121-sit-rep-1-2019-ncov.pdf?sfvrsn=20a99c10_4)

2 "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report - 94". WHO. April 23, 2020. [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-COVID-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b-8304bf0\\_2#:~:text=Retrospective%20investigations%20by%20Chinese%20authorities.%2C%20some%20did%20not](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-COVID-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b-8304bf0_2#:~:text=Retrospective%20investigations%20by%20Chinese%20authorities.%2C%20some%20did%20not)

3 Byung-Chul, Han. *The Burnout Society*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report published on December 31st 2019, China's WHO Country Office had been informed of the first human cases of an unknown form of pneumonia, that was detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China.<sup>1</sup> The pneumonia was caused by the novel coronavirus which caused COVID-19, subsequently named SARS-CoV-2.<sup>2</sup> A month later, on January 30th 2020, the WHO declared "a public health emergency of international concern", and a few weeks later, on February 28th, after further assessment of the risk and impact of COVID-19's spread, the WHO increased its public health emergency criteria to "very high at a global level." Finally, on March 11th, the WHO officially declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a "pandemic". The UK was put into lockdown on March 23rd and until today, May 18th, 2020, the city has been literally closed for most activities of daily life. We are indeed going through a virus-induced crisis something we never expected to happen and people are living amidst mass hysteria and fear.

In 2010, Byung-Chul Han, a South Korean-born German philosopher, declared in his book *The Burnout Society*, that we have reached the end of an epidemiologic age. The writings carried out by Han indicate that there is a paradigm shift between the twentieth century and the twentieth-first. That is, from an immunologically organized society based on the dialectic of negativity to a "neuronal society" of excessive positivity.<sup>3</sup> In other words, from a disciplinary society in Foucauldian terms, to an achievement society. However, in 2020, the planet faces this novel coronavirus, with no vaccine yet available, and the usual state of the economic activity crushed by lockdown measures. The world has been helplessly struck. The post-pandemic era will not lead to the return of either an immunological society, or an achievement society. This essay will examine the pre-pandemic era and anticipate how post-pandemic life might be.

The paradigm shift from an immunological to a neuronal society is essentially owed to the advancement of immunological technology, which provided protection against viral infections. Immunisation is a protective response in the face of risk. As such, the target of immunological defense is the

4 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 2.

foreign. Even if the foreign has no hostile intentions, or even if it poses no immediate danger, it is eliminated based on its Otherness.<sup>4</sup> This creates a societal imperative for a clear distinction between in and out; friend and enemy; me and other; to protect myself from the other, the foreign. Based on this concept, immunological patterns follow attack and defense mechanisms, which designate other as negative opponents. The dialectic of negativity is the fundamental trait of immunity. In other words, the immunological self-assertion of “the Own” proceeds as the “negation of the negation”. The Own asserts itself in-and against-the Other by negating its negativity.<sup>5</sup> As immunological technology develops, society changes its form to that of a neuronal society, instead of a viral or bacterial era. It can be described as a negativity-free space of “the Same”. The Same becomes possible by the disappearance of otherness and foreignness.<sup>6</sup> It can be seen as positivity with no hostile otherness. According to Han, however, there can definitely be violence in positivity, which derives from the surplus of the Same such as overproduction, overachievement, and overcommunication. This can also be explained from the point of view of accelerated capitalism and globalization. It is a promiscuous and limitlessly permissive society. In other words, it can be seen as the totalitarianism of the Same. As he describes, there is no polarization between inside and outside, or proper and foreign. The new forms of violence no longer stem from the immunological Other.<sup>7</sup> The violence is produced within the system.

5 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 4.

6 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 2.

7 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 6.

We have been living this era until the sudden, unprecedented Coronavirus infiltrated it. In a recent essay by Byung-Chul Han regarding COVID-19, he points out that the virus broke into the middle of a society that is immunologically weakened due to global capitalism and that we actually have lived without an enemy for a very long time.<sup>8</sup> According to him, this could be the main reason why the world has gone into panic to the point that even the economy has been enormously affected. Moreover, recent writings from Paul B. Preciado, a philosopher, curator, and a trans activist, demonstrate how discourse around the pandemic has created the notion that virus is the enemy. Once again, because the virus lives in human bodies, other people can be a negative opponent to me. This is logic that arises from the conditions of the human body as an agent for the virus. Borrowing his words; “an epidemic radicalizes and shifts biopolitical techniques by incorporating them at the level of the individual body. At the same time, an epidemic extends to the whole of the population the political measures of immunisation that had until then been violently applied onto those who were considered to be aliens both within and at the borders of national territory.”<sup>9</sup> Han’s words remind us that, during a pandemic era, people consider the other primarily as a potential virus carrier, from which one has to refrain from because they jeopardize one’s survival.<sup>10</sup> To leave both the immunological and neuronal eras behind, we need to define Otherness in a different way. As we are converting from the era that is composed of an excess of positivity, a negative otherness should be accepted differently, not viewing Others as the enemy. Otherness is neither

8 Byung-Chul, Han. “We must not leave reason to the virus”. *Welt*, March 2020. [https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus206681771/Byung-Chul-Han-zu-Corona-Vernunft-nicht-dem-Virus-ueberlassen.html?cid=onsite.onsite-search&ticket=ST-A-1546387-0jckqNjbVVFZctgldVWk-b-sso-signin-server#\\_=\\_](https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus206681771/Byung-Chul-Han-zu-Corona-Vernunft-nicht-dem-Virus-ueberlassen.html?cid=onsite.onsite-search&ticket=ST-A-1546387-0jckqNjbVVFZctgldVWk-b-sso-signin-server#_=_)

9 Paul, B. Preciado. “Learning from the Virus” in *E-flux*, June 2020. <https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/paul-b-preciado-82823>

10 Han, *Welt*.

the dialectic of negativity with immune defense, nor excess positivity with the totalitarianism of the Same. We need to deem others as different Beings. This new form of Otherness that we need in this moment can be found in a song. During the COVID-19, Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) has issued a daily newsletter since 23 March 2020, which is composed of recommended reading, viewing, listening and more from the ICA's curatorial team.<sup>11</sup> May 4th 2020 ICA Daily recommends a song, as track of the day, called 'Synthesize Me(1990)' by Susan Schneider aka The Space Lady. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

Your eyes are set on stun/You are hotter than the sun/I love to see you shine/Because you really blow my mind/Your heart beats like a drum/It hammers when you're gone/The terms with you and me are up, set us free/*Synthesize Me/Hypnotize Me/Humanize Me/Energize Me* (repeats)  
- Synthesize Me, 1990, The Space Lady.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> From the very first letter; they asserted that this pandemic is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. For that reason, they should be ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it with borrowing words from 'The pandemic is a portal' by Arundhati Roy.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSscfU\\_09r0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSscfU_09r0)



Figure 1. captured image from YouTube of Synthesize Me, 1990 by The Space Lady

To synthesize can be understood as either: the chemical production of a reaction between different materials; or the Hegelian idea of the final stage in the process of dialectical reasoning, between thesis and antithesis. The process of synthesizing “me” and others is neither dialectical negativity, nor excess positivity by a totalitarian Same. If we follow the lyrics, by synthesizing and hypnotizing, we might humanize and energize the Self.

According to Han in *'The Burnout Society'*, a paradigm shift in contemporary capitalism can be explained as a shift from Michel Foucault's concept of the disciplinary society to achievement society, where people became self-exploited from an internalized capitalist pull. The disciplinary society is composed of obedience-subjects who follow the rule of negativity through prohibition. It is governed by the modal verb, as a form of *May Not*. On the other hand,

13 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 9.

the achievement society is comprised of achievement-subjects who abolish negativity and have unlimited *Cans*, which leads to a positive orientation for the society. For productivity maximization, the positivity of *Can* replaces the negativity of *Should*.<sup>13</sup> It is in this way that society constrains individuals from achievement and productivity. The excessive positivity makes each subject into an entrepreneur who incessantly exploits themselves, as corporations that pursue profit maximization. Han describes a rise in clinical depression, or neuronal illness; “The complaint of the depressive individual, ‘Nothing is possible’ can only occur in a society that thinks, “Nothing is impossible.” The subject of achievement society is both lord and master. The fact that they are free from any external domination means they are in a state of compulsive freedom. In other words, the exploiter is simultaneously the exploited and the individual suffers from fatigue, burnout syndrome, and exhaustive depression.<sup>14</sup>

14 Han, *The Burnout Society*, 11.

With COVID-19, almost everything has suddenly stopped, or slowed down. It is an unprecedented pause of the economy of capitalist societies. We were so busily invested in labour; but now, abruptly, we have free time. Thanks to the current capacity to telecommunicate, many are spending more time at home, physically gaining more time for ourselves. Nonetheless, society cannot say for sure that it will get better soon. Negative economic growth prevails and is set to keep doing so for much longer. Under the current situation, society is not in a state of limitless positivity. It cannot say “Nothing is impossible,” anymore. As a result, the priority, for now, is health rather than productivity of capitalist value. To exploit oneself to achieve something is no longer our top priority. We have even become resilient to Michel Foucault’s notion of human capital, which is that the ability to perform labour and to produce economic value is a human’s societal value. We want to be Being rather than producing human capital or entrepreneurs of ourselves; the Being which has been suppressed by capitalism and the constant demand to be productive. Caring for the self (and others) takes precedence over everything, and to be Being can be done through contemplative lingering. This coincides with what Han suggests in his book. In order to resist an achievement society that makes us self-exploit, Han suggests us to embrace tiredness, be slow, detouring, and contemplative.<sup>15</sup> We now have time to embrace this suggestion. During and after this COVID-19 era, we need to accept the new notion of others and we must try to slow down and break off from the accelerating productions of late capitalism. In doing so, a better world can be built.

15 Han, *The Burnout Society*.

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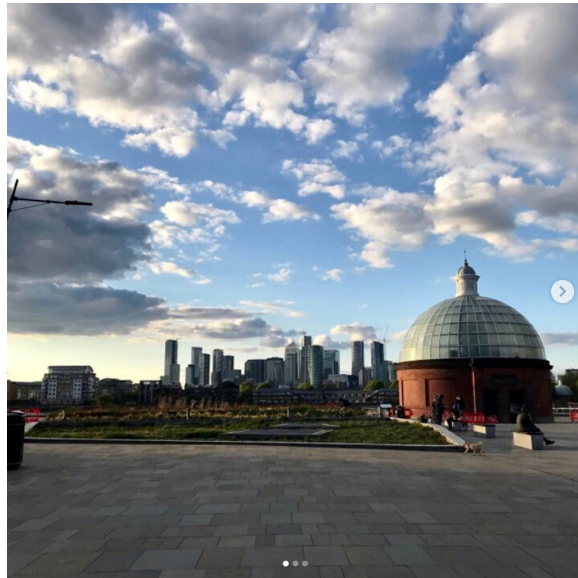
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Greenwich Park

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What happened to produce...this disappearance?  
Why is there nothing here when there should be something?

What kind of entity was involved?

#lockdowndiary #quarantinediary  
#sameplace #oneyearapart #gdif  
#MarkFisher #theweirdandtheerie  
#quote  
#kontaktcollective #quarantinediary  
#socialspace #socialdistance

     
Liked by **eran.sabaner** and **22 others**

MAY 13

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# Contact Info

**Email** [kontaktcollective@gmail.com](mailto:kontaktcollective@gmail.com)  
Please email for further enquires.

**Instagram** <https://www.instagram.com/kontaktcollective/>  
Check out our Instagram account @kontaktcollective, which we treated as a quarantine diary where we share our thoughts and perspectives from across the globe.

**YouTube** [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLP3kxakq\\_UEFHNJhGzh\\_VA/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLP3kxakq_UEFHNJhGzh_VA/featured)

**Eventbrite** <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kontakt-collective-tickets-105241269470>

