

GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION

**Catching a glimpse: Corona-life and its micro-politics in
academia**

Journal:	<i>Gender, Work & Organization</i>
Manuscript ID	GWO-20-248
Manuscript Type:	Feminist Frontiers
Keywords:	Feminist care, Solidarity, Resistance, Writing differently, Crisis

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Manuscripts

Catching a glimpse:

Corona-life and its micro-politics in academia

Introduction

Following the outbreak of Covid-19 during the northern hemisphere winter and spring of 2020, we were forced into lockdown. One of the initiating authors lives in Copenhagen and another of the initiating authors in Sydney, and whilst we recognized that we were fortunate to be living the lives we were living, we experienced dramatic reactions to work and school closures. As mothers of children, our immediate reaction was: how is this going to work? We took to social media to discuss our emotional outburst, questioning the way in which confinement and enforced withdrawal from public life impacted us. Our busy family homes became busier as our children could not attend school and daycare and we were now expected to be schoolteachers and daycare teachers on top of our ‘normal’ jobs. It was the start of the academic year and our home became a battle ground for knowing how to manage the home/work divide. How do we care for our children whilst working? How do we work without disruptions? How do we teach from home? What does it feel like welcoming our students into our homes? How does flexibility work now that we are in times which on the one hand requires utmost flexibility and on the other hand, reduces flexibility through confinement? Where are ‘we’? What does being a working mum mean in the chaos that we were caught up in? What are the opportunities for resistance available to us? What happens if we get sick? Structural inequalities were being made visible, in terms of paid and unpaid labour, and we recognized our privilege.

The pandemic has surfaced and widened global structural inequalities presented through various forms of data on unemployment, access to health, poverty, and well as inadequate sanctions and protection and health and safety provisions for workers, and those most vulnerable such as the incarcerated, those living in immigration detention centers, those facing domestic violence and those living in densely populated slums without sanitation. People were being turned away from hospitals, front line workers lack safety provisions and governments were failing to enforce restrictions resulting in devastating death rates in the US, Italy, Spain, UK and Brazil. People continue to die at astronomical rates in some countries, and evidence from the USA and the UK show that BAME are particularly vulnerable.

Australia and Denmark were proactive in closing borders and ensuring lockdown, had good health provisions, but we desperately wanted to connect with others. We knew of women having to give birth alone, could not travel to be with family, and for us connection albeit via social media was vital, a virtual space where we gathered and which provided much needed solidarity and support for some, and gave a sense of purpose to our working lives where we could struggle 'together', whilst being apart, and we reflected on 'Corona-life'. During these times, we experienced individual and collective moments of embodied disgust and discomfort as well as new sparkles and shapes of feminist care and resistance in our socially distanced new (work)lives.

In this contribution, we offer the experiences and reflections of colleagues across different geographies, times and spaces which emerged from social media discussions around issues related to the inequalities and the transgressive politics that saturate our early experiences with be(com)ing humans and living during the pandemic. Ironically, adding to already busy work home lives, we called for and collated the accounts submitted. Keeping their raw honesty and emotional intensity intact, we present them below, together and yet apart, with respect and sensitivity. We are grateful to each colleague for sharing their experiences, experiences that matter to and are now imprinted in this text and embodied in a dis/connected new academia. Stories, snapshots, vignettes, images, thoughts, photos, and other reflections of everyday life with all the struggles involved speak for themselves. These accounts catch a glimpse of Corona-life and its micro-politics portray the multiple, often contradicting claims on practices emerging as many of us live, work and care at home these days.

Building on earlier collective, powerful writing as well as writing differently (Ahonen et al., 2020; Amrouche et al., 2018; Just et al., 2018; Pullen, 2018), this collective project is a coming together, an entangling of multiple voices and feelings, bodies within this moment. This unprecedented time acutely challenges and affects not just economic markets, demographic statistics, or health care systems, but indeed also the micro-politics of organizing and becoming in our new everyday lives at home - as partners, parents, employees, neighbours. This collective contribution elucidates and re/configures the living, working, caring we are performing at home - interweaved and intersecting subjectivities and agencies embodying concerns, dreams, anger, hope, numbness, passion, and much more. As this pandemic continues to spread across our shared globe and new worldings are in the making (Barad, 2007, p. 394; Haraway, 2008, pp. 3; 92), we feel a necessity to – together, apart – enact and explore

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constitutive relations of resistance, care and solidarity in these dis/organizing times of contested spaces, identities and agencies as we are living-working-caring in our homes. In what follows we meet this worlding in time and space characterised by multiplicity, contradiction, resistance, embracing and diverging meanings and matters.

We acknowledge that our activity could contribute to another burden of productivity in the name of a neo-liberalized academia which is also enhanced during this crisis, but we hope that our contribution facilitates a collegial act of speaking up, of virtually reaching out, listening to and wit(h)nessing this obscure moment in time, and, first and foremost as an act of caring - in one way or another, this was about caring to be with one another.

Author 1: (dis)connecting online

It feels like
my skin is
starving
to be in touch

My voice longing
to resonate,
compose melodies,
and harmonize
without the static
and delays
of the online interface

My eyes are

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4 frantically trying
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6 and failing
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8 to catch your gaze
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10 from behind
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12 the screen within
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14 a screen
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20 When you say
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22 the connection is bad
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24 maybe that means
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26 our bodies are simply
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28 refusing
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30 to be reduced to
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32 pixels and sound bites
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38 ***Author 2: Without other bodies, without touching, alone***
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40 Good Friday at four o'clock in the afternoon I sit down in front of my computer and open up a video
41 conferencing link. It is time for Bach. Easter is a time when we choir singers and other musicians
42 normally have many concerts. But as gatherings of more than 10 people have been banned here in
43 Finland, all concerts have been cancelled and even the churches in which we perform have closed. So,
44 no singing this Easter. But then my local choir friends decided to develop their family tradition of
45 singing Bach at home to a sing along with their extended choir family. The idea might seem really silly,
46 but we are about to do a sing along version of Bach's St Matthew passion. I will sit by my screen, turn
47 on the video and mute my microphone and my friends will put on a recording of the passion and we
48 will all sing along to the recording. There are more than 30 of us and we look at each other a bit funny.
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Some are struggling with the technology. I have spent hours in front of my screen in numerous meetings, supervisions and teachings so I admit, I was starting to feel a bit annoyed. More people join. Obviously, we can't hear each other, but we can see each other. We won't hear the music exactly at the same time, so we are not as synchronised as we would normally be, but we are more or less hearing the same music at the same time and adding our voices to a wonderful recording.

So we begin. I hear the familiar intro to the theme. I start to move my body to the music and then I join in with "Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen ... Seht: Wohin? Auf unsure Schuld". "Come daughters, help me lament... See: Where? Our guilt." I am rusty. I have not been singing so much lately, so while I remember the music well, my body does not remember. I sit up straight, trying to reconnect to my core in order to reach the high notes more beautifully and carry the phase to the end. On this Good Friday I seriously consider changing to singing the alto instead, but I decide that though my singing is by no means beautiful, I need to keep doing this and hope that the neighbours don't complain too much. Singing the soprano at least allows my neighbours to hear the melody rather than a middle voice.

This is a strange way to make music with other people. I can see their faces and in some cases their whole bodies. I see the mouth moving, the head nodding. But I don't hear them sing. I can't feel them breath.

The sensation of other bodies in proximity is necessary for making music together. To sense the person next to you preparing for the next phrase. The concentration, the way they inhale, tells you how well they know the music, in what shape their voice and body is in that moment and it tells you when they will begin and how they will end.

Alone at home I sing. I sing despite my voice being scratchy and not as solide as it used to be. I sing with effort the high notes and I breathe in the middle of phrases. My body is really not up for this and I am glad no one is listening. Actually, I don't mind really. It is Easter, I'm confined to my home and this is music about life and death, about suffering and love. About hope and despair. I'm not religious as such, but the Easter narrative is powerful. St Matthew's passion is more about the anger of a mob, the injustice in society and the immanent death of Christ than about resurrection and deliverance.

The following day we meet again in front of the screen. This time much less hazzle about technology, we are anxious to get started. This time I sing much better and it makes me happy. I can carry phrases

again and hit the high notes without much effort. I realise at some point we are coming close to my small solo part as the wife of Pilate. "Habe du nichts zu schaffen mit diesem Gerechten; Ich habe heute viel erlitten im Traum von seinetwegen!" For a moment I am transferred to my cathedral and our performance of this music in 2017. We reach the end of the passion. "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder, Und rufen dir im Grabe zu: Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh!" (Tearfully we sit down and call to you in your tomb. Rest gently, gently rest!) We look at each other on the screen, smiling. Making music together even in this strange way is healing. For a moment I belonged to a community.

Then I close my computer and I am home. Alone. Again.

Author 3: working from home - a liminal experience

It's basically, a serene experience, because I am among the few lucky ones working at a traditional Polish university. True, most of us do not even realize how lucky we are - instead, many believe that we are old fashioned, unlike the excellent Anglo-Saxon universities, and should be changed fast, to catch up. There are plans to "reform" us to "improve us", starting from next academic year we should be as "excellent" as Warwick or Swansea. But we are still here, frozen in time, not there yet. Not anywhere; in limbo.



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We have been working from home since 11/3. Our rector decided about the lockdown of the university and it was announced in the middle of class by radio. The students all went home. Then we went home, too. On the next day we received an email from the dean (a collegially elected post, by all the professors and elected senators representing more junior academics, as well technical personnel and administrators), addressed to all the professors, asking us to use our best professional knowledge and judgement in order to teach our students to the best of our abilities under these extreme circumstances.



We are, after all, the professionals employed to solve problems, including the unforeseen ones. He made a list of resources and technologies available at the university, as well as contacts such as IT personnel and librarians. The institute director, also collegially elected, asked us to provide assistance to the less experienced teachers, should they need any. He asked us to report regularly to the vice-director for teaching. And so we work from home.



The administrators work limited hours and are asked not to share office space during the lockdown. They do not work in open plans, but each administrator has their own room. Our cleaning personnel are people employed on permanent contracts by the university. They also work limited hours and in sparse shifts and are asked not to mingle.

I try to think of ways to engage the students without me being physically present. They know me so they respond to my requests personally. I know them, so I know what to expect, what to ask for. It works. I try to think of puzzles for them to solve and send them texts, images, films, different material to dive into and use. I also made sure to declare that I will be pleased to offer extra support to those who wish it. A few students asked for extra literature, some commented on the images I've sent them (they liked them). One keeps sending me photos of her favourite bookshops... she is sad and scared, I think. Talking about books reassures her. I promised her we would have a seminar in one of the bookstores as soon as the distancing days are over. I don't dedicate all of my time to this. Time is in limbo too.

Occasionally, we send greetings to the administrators and they respond, sending us pictures of empty liminal buildings.

It's a difficult time, but we are doing our best to keep the human flame alive.

Pictures of hallways

Instead of chat and coffee

Not going places



Author 4: March 18th

I wake up with 34 full years on my shoulders. Am I wiser than yesterday? No clear signs of it yet. Grey hair has already started appearing since many years now. I get a hot shower. I don't immediately remember upon waking up that we are in quarantine. I had some intense dreams last night that helped attenuate the over-reflexive, nostalgic mode of these last days. I start realizing what is happening around me. I have a look from the window but the streets look empty. We have breakfast with my partner and a little after we realize we have to 'go to work': an itinerary that has never been shorter. Home office is now the new routine for both of us. I usually work from home, anyways, when I am only on research but not him. So, we have to re-evaluate the space and make a new routine for ourselves. These last days, he has been working in the living room, around 17-20sm, the biggest and more luminous space of our 40sm apartment. We have very limited space and have to adjust. As yesterday, I occupy the small kitchen space to work. I share the table with fruits, vegetables and the indispensable kettle. As long as there is hot water to make tea, I am fine!

I open my computer and I stumble upon some articles, see colleagues' and friends' posts on Facebook, trying to make sense of all this information... I often feel connected to their authors while I doubt or question others. In all of what I read, the discourse is clear: Social distancing: #westayhome for us and the others. Without doubting the importance of it, I wonder: *Who are these Others?*

I am not sure! I have not seen them been much considered in the neoliberal society. Now they suddenly become important?! But many of these Others still continue to put their lives and bodies at risk by going to work to provide for our groceries, internet and phone connections, emptying our trash, etc. Some of them do not even have homes to go to, or stable internet connections to work from home. Are there new inequalities emerging in this situation? I wonder! Do these others exist? Do they have names, bodies, breaths?

Anyways, it does not seem to matter anymore. Now, we should not touch each other nor share our breaths. We are all suspects, potential carriers of the killing virus. Is the fear of contagion what makes us important to one another? Do we really care for each other? What are the ethical implications of this discourse? This thought makes me worry about the notion of solidarity that seems to be crucial in this situation. Can we really be solidary if we see suspects everywhere, if we embody fear for us and for others? Fear is a poor advisor...but has been extensively used to shape our new routines. Are we maybe

enemies in solidarity? Friends or enemies, it doesn't seem to matter. Luckily there is technology. Behind our screens we can hide all of these tendencies!

Or, maybe it is the era of technologically mediated solidarity conditional upon the constant tracking of our bodies, sensations, expressions, the words that we share in our exclusively digital ways of belonging to each other and to our new 'realities'. Indeed, the condition for working now is having our bodies 'wired' all day in front of a Wi-Fi-connected computer. All meetings and classes pass online. *Zoom* has become the magic word these days. The neoliberal academic cannot survive without this. This connects isolated bodies and fits them in limited screens. Bodies experiencing back pain sat on a chair all day long, bodies hurting, sick or healthy it doesn't really matter, as long as they fit the computer screen. Some of them appear still almost like porcelains, others move, some mothers appear with their kids, others breast-feeding their infants, others eating lunch, men are usually undisturbed (no surprise!). I sometimes avoid sharing my screen as I am not sure I am able to deal with the invasion into my private space, on top I am usually in my pyjamas and don't look very 'professional'. What is this? I wonder! Are we being daily more accustomed to the systems of surveillance that are imposed on our bodies?

My mind blurs

My body shrinks

Luckily I can still write, I remind myself!

I write these thoughts on the paper as I feel this is the only form of resistance to this technologically mediated world. But a little after, I read the call to this collective piece and my body shivers. This is solidarity I tell myself, I want to join. I contact my colleague to ask for further information about the call. So, I now have to pass these reflections to the computer to share them with her in the other part of the ocean. Technology is here to save me again. My body and sensations tracked again...

...but luckily I can still write...

and through this care, express, love, embody and make sense, accept, recognize, feel, share, dream and connect from afar in meaningful ways for me and for others...*with others in solidarity.*

Author 5: Is it too early for wine?

Today is the first day of home schooling- 23rd March 2020

I had all good intentions. We had a schedule posted which detailed the lesson plan for the morning. Afternoon was to be free play in the garden like they do at school. Did that go well? No it did not.

Firstly, I put on the Joe Wicks -PE at home live broadcast on You Tube. This was received with “we don’t do PE on a Monday morning, we do it on a Monday afternoon and a Thursday morning” and “I am not doing it”. After coercing them to do this on the basis I joined in, unfortunately my childbearing bladder couldn’t cope and after 15 minutes we gave up.

We then sat down to do some handwriting with the 4 year old twins while my 7yr old had time to work online with task set to him by school. The girls were absolutely fine, they worked well for all but 2 minutes until they wanted their snack and told me they were due play time. The computer crashed after 2 minutes, resulting in tears, and then followed by a chorus of “it’s not fair” by all of them, followed by “we hate Henley Home School”.

Notice how I have not mentioned yet I am doing any of “my” work that is because I haven’t yet and it is now 10.30am.

We left the house to go and do a quick shop. Got home to, “I’m hungry” and what’s for lunch. Served up cheese sandwiches and tomato soup to be told School don’t serve this. At 1230 when it should be Garden and Outdoor play time, they are watching TV, nothing educational but something that will keep them entertained for half hour- I hope.

I have now sat down at 1.30 to do some work, but I have been asked no joke, 600 questions ranging from – What is your favourite Colour?, to can we make a growing chart?, to will you wipe my bum I’ve had a poo?.

Tomorrow I have online tutorials set up from 9-12pm. I also have an online conference call with colleagues at 3pm. Wish me luck as I am going to need it. Any suggestions to keep the children entertained for more than 5 minutes would be gratefully received.

The Schedule? Well that lasted all but an hour. Tomorrow maybe a bit more free flow play is required.

Also, to top my day off a Speeding Ticket came through. After being put on hold what felt like half the day, it was found that I have to take the 3 points and £100 fine on the chin, because the Speed Awareness classes are cancelled for the foreseeable. FFS.

UPDATE: It is now 14.58pm. We have been for a short bike ride. After Connie crashing into 2 parked cars (she is still learning and no damage), we sacked that off too. They are currently in the garden shooting waterguns at each other- it is 8 degrees outside. Is it too early for wine?

Author 6: Both/and-neither/nor

In the shower, this morning, I felt relief that my grandmother died before all this, so we could sit by her side until the end, and as I think of her last days in the hospital, I am hit by the risk of my 10-year-old nephew with an immune system dysfunction catching this virus. My body shivers under the hot water. Out of the shower, I walk into our bedroom dressed in underwear, only to realize that the bedroom has momentarily become an office space, in which my partner is in the middle of a video conference. As I am standing there in my undies in my bedroom and simultaneously in a virtual meeting room of an international business corporation, I wonder how to exit? Should I (try to) play it cool or just excuse myself and smile embarrassed? Instead, I just turn around and disappear.

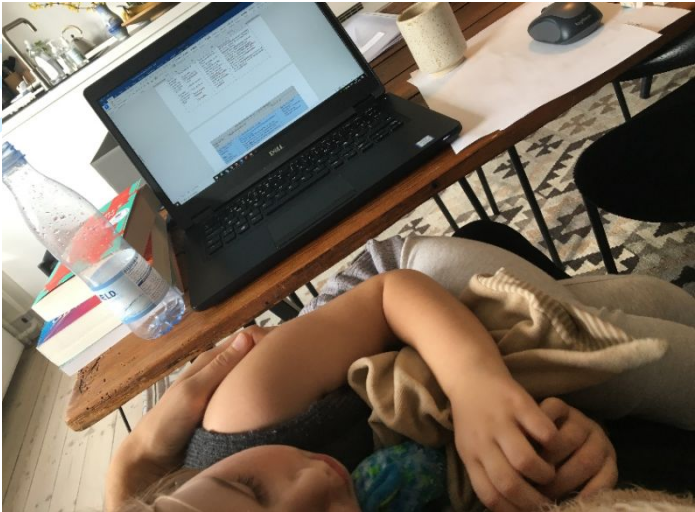
I want to disappear often these days. But I have nowhere to disappear into, I am in the middle of everything in this small home that capsules our present now. Our living room, our work space, our meeting room, class room, supervision room, technical room, playroom, bedroom. It's a materialized grey zone – an intense dis/organization of contested spaces that at the same time come to mean and matter a multitude of contradicting sayings, doings, feelings and things (Barad, 2013). In this mix, we unfold and enfold ourselves and (re)configure what and how we are becoming family members, colleagues, care givers. It is a sense of continuous collapses and confluations of time(s), space(s), and subjectivity(s) – infused with anger, loss, devotion, laughter and strangeness, as I try to both be a parent, a worker, a lover, a daughter.

My partner's work is suffering economically from this crisis, so he has to attend a lot of meetings during the day time, and I have to be with the kids and do most of the home schooling and home caring, like many other women currently. While I feel I should be solidarity to my husband's company

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and its financial issues – or at least support his professional and personal investment in that, I also hate the capitalist nature of this mess and the demands for a heteronormative, gender-stereotypical family construction (although I still am grateful for our (yet) stable income). It hurts my feminist self-image and identity work, as well as counter-produces the norm-critical idea(l)s of gender, of partnership, of family and work organization, I want my kids to grow up knowing. I hate Corona for this, and I hate myself for thinking so much about my egocentric issues, as others are battling a deadly disease.

Shameful. Struggling.



In many ways, it is as if I work all the time and none of the time as our living-working-caring spaces collapse and conflate. The days usually start between 5 and 6 am. The kids have been sick, so most nights we have been up a few times already to offer drinks, dry a nose or just for comfort (my oldest daughter has had quite a few corona-related nightmares too). As I get up, dress the kids, cook breakfast, I also check my e-mail to see if there is anything urgent, I need to attend to, or if it can wait until later – evenings are often my working time. If so, the kids sometimes play, other times draw, listen to music or watch iPad, as I steal some working time in the living room. It feels like I am stealing, because it

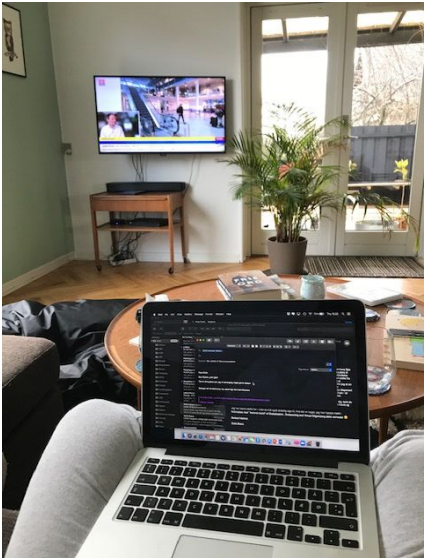
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4 demands that I ignore my kids, and I sometimes snap at them if I need quietness, and they are loud. I
5 hear my oldest telling my youngest: “don’t ask her anything now, she is not listening anyway”, and I
6 hate the mother I am becoming. Likewise, I wake up in the middle of the night remembering something
7 important at work that I had forgotten, and so I hate the scholar I am turning into. Living on/offline as
8 co-worker, parent and partner, all the time in the same space, I both feel a distance and nearness to
9 everyone and everything at once.
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15 In trying to make sense of the multiple selves, relations and performativities, I experience during these
16 moments, within the walls of our home, I think – with fear and hope – of Sara Ahmed’s feminist killjoy
17 manifesto and of diversity work as banging one’s head against a brick wall (Ahmed, 2017). What to do
18 and think, when the brick wall becomes our own walls? Allowing outside (disciplining, discriminating,
19 gendering) forces in, or when the walls keep us inside (a domestic violent, suppressing, or otherwise
20 harassing) home, keeping you trapped? Or when this forces us to not just multi-task as always (that is,
21 wo/men responsible for both full time work and house hold work are used to that), but also to multiply
22 ourselves through intersecting, but contradicting positionings of self and others (Davies & Harré,
23 1990). That produces pressures and demands of practices to multiply one’s identity(s) and agency(s)
24 across social relations and gendered norms and expectation of parenthood, partnership, professionalism
25 and more. This leaves me both distressed and related to something more than the walls of my own
26 home.
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36 At this point, I feel a need for dis/claiming my text. Disclaiming it because I am writing during nights
37 as I am teaching, mothering, partnering, daughtering, friending, most of my awaken daytime, leaving
38 little mental capacity, body and space to refine my wor(l)ding of the emerging real. Claiming it,
39 because this is exactly my life right now. These are the conditions under which I work, but also under
40 which my kids experience a mother, my partner a lover, my parents and sister a family member, my
41 colleagues a co-worker and my friends an ally. And this is - as ugly, frightening and hilarious it may
42 seem - how our momentary now is becoming.
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Author 7: Working-living-caring with children



Author 8: A counter-narrative?

COVID-19, the destroyer of lives and livelihoods, has not made it to my door. My husband and I work and live high up on the 23rd floor. People who are less lucky and less privileged bring me things. I have no caring responsibilities and my family are bored but safe 17,000 kilometres away. For me life under lockdown is quiet and calm and productive. In fact, my research area has increased in salience. I found connection and structure at home through my work. My husband and I, both academics, talk papers, watch nonsense and avoid the news. I am on the edge of this crisis looking out. This is a space I have become familiar with. Before the outbreak, colleagues were joking that I was dangerous to be around. I was on the Ovation of the Seas cruise ship when so many lost their lives in the White Island volcano eruption. I left on the last flight as a cyclone ripped through Fiji. In Sydney I saw smoke and bushfires through my windows but breathed clear filtered air. I talked in hushed tones that it felt like something bigger and badder was coming. And when it did, I wasn't surprised. I told you so persistently rattled in my throat. Yet, in the quiet moments I began to experience a generalized sense of anxiety. I had once contained my discomfort with risky and uncertain things in my research, but now these polluting

thoughts of crisis and vulnerability began to invade my dreams. I choose to self-isolate early. In the building opposite I see people who don't have the luxury of homeworking. On Zoom I see parents corralling their children whilst trying to remain productive. In the press I see images of those who give care dying because of a lack of reciprocal concern. My professional and personal life have been blurred by COVID-19 not practically but conceptually. The guiltier I feel about occupying this lucky liminal space the more I bake. I wonder, have I become The Albatross?

Author 9: Them and us?

Myself and my wife are both in two risk categories for the effects of the virus; age and underlying conditions. So, we decided to self-isolate and, because of that, decided to do grocery etc. shopping with home delivery for the first time. That was beginning of last week. Unfortunately, the promise of that system is failing due to demand. We have so far tried two retailers and, having got to the stage of booking a delivery slot on three occasions on each system, both had no slots available up to and including the point when options ceased to be offered in three weeks time. After the first occasion, we had to do as usual and physically shop in store as we needed food supplies. Those supplies will last for maybe another week but as of today, we are still unable to book a slot for a home delivery as both retailers' systems are still showing no available slots up to the point options cease to be offered. If you accept the distinction, a difference between rhetoric and reality in relation to 'official' advice on what to do in the current situation.

Another part of our story happened yesterday. My wife noticed a neighbour walking up our drive and waited for the knock on the door. It didn't come. Instead, the neighbour slipped a leaflet through our letter box. The leaflet describes and gives contact information for a local, to our village, volunteer group set up to provide help to elderly and vulnerable households. An example is doing shopping for households that are self-isolating. Such initiatives are springing up all over the UK. According to the leaflet, our local group is being sponsored (financially supported; e.g. paying for printing the leaflets and for fuel for shopping runs) by a local company. We have yet to contact the group but it might well be our only means of accessing future food supplies. This group, and others like it, are I think an example of communities taking action and control outside of established and formal leadership and power structures.

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Author 10: Homesickness

Noun; the characteristic of being homesick; a strong, sad feeling of missing one's home (often left-behind loved ones, such as family and friends) when physically away (Retrieved 12 april 2020 from: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/homesickness>).

As I sit here to write this piece trying to explain how I fell all I can think about is how much I miss being home. Tomorrow (April 14, 2020) marks the beginning of my 4th month living in Canada, away from Brazil. Away from home.

My journey to Canada started with my PhD in Brazil. Since when we begin our PhD, we hear how wonderful and important for our career and for our personal growth is to spend some time abroad, so, since I started my PhD, living abroad Brazil was a goal as an academic, however being someone coming from a very simple – and far away from the elites – family was a dream. Spending time abroad would allow me to experience a new culture, a new life and to develop my skills as a (critical) researcher. Since last year, this dream was coming true when I got a scholarship to spend six months in Quebec, Canada. I moved from Brazil to Canada in December (coincidentally in a Friday 13 – which can be read as a bad sign for those who believe it!) and everything was amazing - even better than I ever dreamt of!

In order to fulfill this dream, I knew there was a price to pay: spend time away from home, from my family and from my friends. Family may have different meanings to different people, but for me a family is a group of people who you can count on no matter what, is a group of people you love and love you back. In my opinion and experience, family doesn't necessarily need to share the same DNA or blood. The price I knew was high, but I thought it would be ok to pay it, after all it would be only six months and I live away from my parent's house since 2012, so I thought it would be an affordable price for the amazing experience everyone always talked about it.

I arrived in Quebec in the morning of December 14, 2019. It was a cold and rainy day, I was exhausted from the trip, but at the same time I was excited for the new thing that were waiting for me. This first day was a really nice day! My Brazilian PhD supervisor was also in Quebec for a post-doctoral stage and picked me up at the airport, drove me to the AirBnB I would spend my first nights, took me out to have lunch and to know the neighborhood I was staying and by night to have dinner with some

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4 Brazilian friends. The next day early in the morning, my Canadian PhD supervisor took me out
5 shopping for winter clothes, after all, I was coming from Brazil that in December is usually 35°C, so I
6 needed new clothes to a city that it reaches -30°C. After we were done shopping, we had a hot
7 chocolate and a quick view of the city – which was amazing.
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11 The journey was being wonderful: new friends, new language, new culture, discovering new things
12 about myself, learning a lot, but then, March 11th happened: we have covid-19 pandemics. Since then
13 the dream became a nightmare. I'm in a good country with a good health system, but I'm away from my
14 family. Canada's government is taking serious measures to handle covid-19, but the Brazilian
15 government isn't. Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president, called covid-19 a "little flu" and isn't dealing with
16 it as he should.
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22 Since March 11th I felt lonely, I wanted to go home, I cried, I felt anxious and a lot of mixed feelings. I
23 worry about myself being in another country that it's not mine, but at the same time I worry about my
24 family and friends and everyone else who are living in a country where the president doesn't give a
25 fuck about people's health. Some big company owners are even saying in the media that 5.000 to 7.000
26 deaths are a low price to pay compared to the damage Brazilian economy will suffer from people
27 getting quarantined - and both the president and economy minister feels the same.
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33 Since everything started, I see people going from “someone” to numbers. Fathers becoming statistics.
34 Mothers becoming statistics. Sons and daughters becoming statics. People becoming statistics of how
35 many are dying because of the pandemics. Since everything started, I can't help but wonder: “what
36 if?”. What if I get covid-19? What if my dad gets covid-19? What if someone in my family gets covid-
37 19? What if... what if... what if...
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42 This situation has put everything into a new perspective because I think that sometimes we forget how
43 fragile a life is and covid-19 is here to remind us. I also think that sometimes we care so much about
44 work that we forget to tell people around us how much they mean to us. At the same time, this situation
45 has put me in some tensions: I should take care of myself, but I'm also worried about others, so how
46 can we take care of others and of ourselves at the same time? I feel that I'm also facing this tension
47 because I'm privileged to be in Canada, while my dad goes to work every day since he works in a
48 factory that didn't stop. I'm privileged enough because while Canadian politicians are treating the
49 pandemic with due seriousness, some Brazilian politicians are calling it a “Chinese conspiracy to
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dominate the economy”. I’m privileged enough to be in Canada while the Brazilian president when asked about the thousands of Covid 19 related deaths answered to the media “so what?”.

In order to occupy my mind and not to think about the “what if’s” I’m reading a lot, I’m writing a lot, but some days, like this weekend – Easter, a very dear day for so many people and families (mine including) –, I feel hopeless and overburdened . Among my coping strategies I decided to write a paper about covid-19 trying to make sense of it. I also call my dad every day. Among my strategies are also talking to friends and trying to focus on my ongoing research projects.

Despite all my efforts, it's been a hard time because at the same time I want to go home I know that I shouldn't – or either can – because I can get covid-19 during the trip back home. Since March 11th all I can think, talk, read and write about is Covid-19 because it's all over the internet and at the same time I'm trying to make sense of everything that is happening and everything that will and may happen. No matter how much I talk about it, no matter how supportive people have been in trying to understand my situation I feel like no one is going through the same pressures and worries I am.

So, since March 11th I feel a lot of things, but most of the time I feel homesick.

Author 11

We wait, and we wait,
life suspended and still.
Grateful for the slowing down of usual routines,
the days blur, days become strangely and intensely busy.
‘You have zoom, get ready!’,
‘I have a zoom with the faculty, make sure the dogs don’t bark’,
‘I am teaching, please don’t scream or slam doors’...
Weeks pass, zoom is our common vocabulary,
school holidays are strangely relaxed, pierced by work.
Solitude is the new normal.

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6 Reports from the US stating 50,000 deaths,
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8 the UK disguising the deaths of elderly care patients.
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10 Mass graves dug in Brazil,
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12 grieving families.
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14 Borders closed, longing for family,
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16 distance intensifies.
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18 Universities function as normal,
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20 work intensification, student engagement, performance metrics.
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22 The new normality is truly absurd,
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24 foot soldiers for ivory towers,
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26 Removed from global tragedy, craving humanity.
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33 Lockdown restrictions become relaxed,
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35 many live freely,
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37 Driven by the economy.
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39 schools open to foster economic growth,
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41 Lambs to the slaughter,
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43 fear abounds.
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45 Entering new times,
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47 the longevity of the pandemic becomes known.
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51 Citizen surveillance,
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53 Trapped, anxious and fatigued.
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Author 12: Notes on working from home

I thought I would manage working from home because academics are supposed to be used to it. But this does not feel like working from home. It's more like being at home and trying to do your job, but without the infrastructure.

Sharing the kitchen with three other household members also trying to do their jobs and/or study (or cook/eat!) while I talk means I must move to our bedroom for meetings so as not to disturb everyone else. Perched on the end of the bed with my feet resting on a shoe box, and the computer propped up on a stand in front of me, I spend hour after hour staring at zoom.

I had thought of the bedroom as a quiet space for reading and relaxing (no screens) but that is no longer true - and not just for me, the bedroom has ceased to be a relaxing place for my partner too because I am in it, in meetings and in the semi-darkness with the blinds down, so I can focus on the tiny faces on the screen in front of me. Work and home boundaries have become truly blurred.

I had thought corridor chats and coffees at work were an opportunity for social time - I did not appreciate how important these were in supporting the work we do, and I miss them.

Struggling with the small screen my eyes sting as I try to manage large documents on a lap top, I miss the monitors in my office but I may not go and fetch them.

I thought I would manage working from home because I am supposed to be used to it. But it turns out this is not quite the case. I did not realise how reliant I am on library space to write (now closed) or how used I had become to working at home alone while others were at work or school. Sharing the space and limited internet bandwidth between us all at home is not quite the same thing.

I thought with so many in person meetings and conferences cancelled I would have more time. I did not allow for the proliferation of zoom meetings that would so quickly take up our lives, tying us literally with the wire that connects headphones to the computer.

And as for students - I am so sorry their university experience is spoiled. And no amount of on-line anything can make up for this. How many imagined they would take their degrees and exams (and celebrate the end of exams) sitting at their parents' kitchen table? No summer balls or barbecues for this generation.

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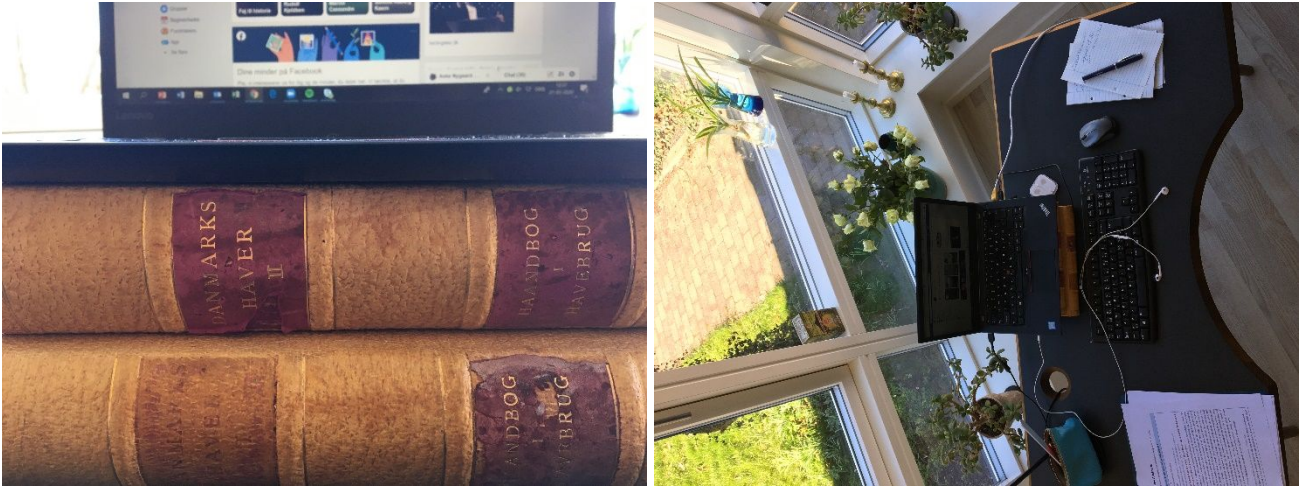
Somehow we are getting on with it, it doesn't feel like we have a choice. But I hope this is not the way forward for the future. As I sit with the blinds drawn, talking with colleagues and students also hunched over screens it feels as if we have become moles living underground and in the dark. I hope we may soon come up for air, and that this way of working won't become a blueprint for our (or our students') future.

Author 13: All that ends, ends well?

Thursday evening we were informed that my father – who is an Alzheimer patient living in a nursing home – had a high fever: 39.4 degrees. He had the symptoms of the virus. As program director I had been working all day to manage the implications of the virus for our teaching: e.g. I send a letter to 300 master students doing thesis research and another one to their supervisors, I received 115 emails and managed to answer most of them and I had been on the phone, on skype, on a conference call and on zoom. In-between things I talked to my son and two daughters. One of them might have the virus, but didn't feel so bad. And I encouraged my teenage daughter to not yet start the summer holidays but do her homework. Being worried I couldn't sleep that night and, since I felt physically well, I wrote a bit on a paper until 5 in the morning. Meanwhile I tried to figure out what to do: if I would be allowed to visit my father, I had to go into quarantine afterwards. So, it was a choice: do I go to my father to hold a wake or to my mother to cheer her up? I would miss the funeral? In the morning doctors told us that it was not The Virus. After the management team meeting and a few emails, I went for a short run. Today is Saturday. A bike ride with my wife. The sun was shining. I got a tan.

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Author 14: Working-living-caring on top of the history of grandparents' work



Author 15: Anxious thoughts

What does a safe space look like? We've been homebound for the last six weeks or so, although it's tremendously difficult to know when the blurring of days started and what day we're actually experiencing at the moment. The usual time demarcations are no longer functioning, the signals we get around when it's time to work, to play, to relax and so forth. Frankly, these demarcations never seem to apply to some people anyway, those who have more than one shift at home or at work, the second or even third shifter. There are many right now who have to leave their home to work 'out there' given they're deemed essential workers. What does essential mean? I'm still not quite sure, it is a type of work that allows other work to take place, or the type of work that sustains us as humans, like food or art...Yet it seems that what constitutes essential differs between different states in the U.S., which is where we live. The news constantly shows how people are dealing with their various situation including those who are literally protesting to continue working, to get haircuts, to go to golf clubs—there is an upheaval going on around the role and meaning of government and the ways we think democracy should work in the U.S. Tyranny is being brought up often, by white people with firearms who claim that their individual rights are being trampled...I have family members who are Black and

they do not feel safe going to stores with masks for fear of being labeled criminals. I've also married into an Asian-American family, Taiwanese to be specific and they fear being targeted as well, for 'bringing the virus from China'. This all seems like systemic tyranny, no? These thoughts consume me daily and are broken up with the sound of a door opening from the garage.

There's collective breath-holding in our home as my husband enters the house and declares, "I had to intubate COVID patients today" and starts his disinfection routine. He's staying in a different part of the house now. It seems no matter what we do, the virus can potentially come to us, to our home, ironically, through the very person who's helping patients during a terrible time. Intubation is risky business, it is also incredibly difficult and violent, the sort of thing they can't show you on TV or on social media due to privacy laws. And it's what my husband does now, hoping to be safe while doing it, hoping he will have enough gear. It makes me angry to know that we, the collective kind of we, were unable to prepare for the virus because science and scientific knowledge are now looked upon with suspicion, the utter failure of our educational systems to create critical thinkers on fully display globally.

Anxious thoughts, that's what I have on a daily basis—so I bake, I write, I spend time with my children 24/7, and sometimes I get 'work' done.

Author 16: It would be easier not knowing

The elderly and the at risk are vulnerable to Covid-19. In the UK the Government this week will write to 1.5 Million people considered to be at particular risk advising them to self-isolate. My older sister is one of those 1.5 Million as she has leukemia. Knowing that though is only one of my concerns, my mum is in her 90s and needs care and attention and her risk is exacerbated as she does not understand, or perhaps does not think that the Government's requirement that we 'stay at home' apply to her. My daughter who is in her early 20s is undergoing testing for Crones Disease, or she was until the lock down happened. Crones is on the list of that defines the 1.5 Million who must self-isolate but with her diagnosis incomplete we do not know if she is at risk. Three generations – my entire nuclear family - may be at risk but where we only know that one is considered so by the Government and national

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4 health system. We know too much whilst knowing too little. I know this. Knowing this is repeated
5 every day. And I can't escape knowing it.
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8 But that is not all that I know. I also know that my elderly mother needs help and care. I provide that
9 care and in doing so I cannot self-isolate. I need to see her and may contract the virus on the one
10 journey I make beyond my front door each day. A journey where I may unwittingly contract the virus
11 and in turn infect my mother knowing that if she contracts it she may well die. But if I don't go she can
12 not cope and she will have to go outside. If I see her I may be the cause of her death, if I don't my
13 neglect may be the cause of her death. I know this. Knowing this is repeated every day. And I can't
14 escape knowing it.
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20 I was diagnosed with 'inherited emphysema' some 15 years ago. The consultant told me my diagnosis
21 and ended with the words, 'Well you now know what will kill you, unless you get hit by a bus.' In a
22 state of shock I mumbled my thanks for his crass behaviour. Each year I receive an annual flu jab
23 because I am on an at risk list. Every few years my lung function is tested and I am asked if I want to
24 start taking a steroidal inhaler, each time I refuse. I do not need a daily reminder of what may kill me
25 and so far it has not drawn close enough for me to be on a list of serious emphysema cases. I am not
26 one of the 1.5 Million but I am still advised to self-isolate. This I know.
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33 Five years earlier I had visited my father in a South African military hospital where he lay dying of
34 emphysema. Yeats told us that we are but a bunch of sticks and that is what I saw, my father brought
35 down to grey parchment stretched thin over a frame of sticks already dead whilst not yet quite there,
36 still sighing by mechanical intervention, breath drawn out and pumped in by tubes in a cyborg
37 intervention. He asked me to forgive him for how he had treated me as a young child. I did not then and
38 I do not now. I did not want to know then; this ungrateful child still does not forgive. What I did not
39 know 20 years ago was what I now know, my future, my most likely death. Parchment and sticks
40 inflated mechanically as air sighs out and death rushes in. This I know.
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47 The University that I work for posts a Covid-19 update daily for staff. It now informs staff to work
48 from home unless they are essential to operations. It also advises staff at risk to self-isolate and work
49 from home. Work during Covid-19 was moving on-campus to off campus delivery but now, just a few
50 days later, it has become anything palpably different. Anything you can do is now regarded publicly as
51 sufficient work. Living, surviving, coping, managing risk, just being here are all defined now not just
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as work but enough work. Am I churlish if I ask why that was never regarded as work before Covid-19? Why was it that when I was homeless, rough sleeping, unemployed, in poverty and at risk of abuse and assault that just surviving was never regarded as work let alone enough work? We are so fucked up as a society that we need a pandemic to realise that merely surviving precarity is hard work. We are so fucked up as a society that knowing this now still does not stop us regarding this as exceptional work that requires specific acknowledgement, tolerance and official acceptance. And when this pandemic is over I know that society will most likely return to an abhorrent normality where the precarious marked as lazy and feckless in their exceptional 'non-work'. This may come to pass.

Teaching and supervising on-line is not new to me, I have spent ten years designing and delivering distance learning. What is different is that others now receive training and support and anything is regarded as sufficient. What was once exceptional becomes the norm in a centripetal rush from the margin(alised) to the centre that does not track a processual movement but an orbital decay where, to paraphrase Yeats, the margin may not hold. Will this come to pass?

It already has come to pass in one UK University which having moved its teaching on-line now seeks to dismiss its temporary academic staff. The work having been done that university no longer has need for those who worked so hard in these dark days. It instead amplifies their precarity and establishes it work as precarious for many now deemed not as exceptional but as a fungible excess to be removed.

But must it come to pass? Do we accept as feminists that this return to precarity for the vulnerable is an acceptable state to bolster the privileges of the few? Do we accept the deaths of our loved ones as collateral damage required to save capitalism? Or do we know different? I know I will die. I know how I most likely will die. What happens between now and my death however can be different to what has passed. A better world is possible. This I know.

Epilog

It is a privilege to write these words. This archive is important as a way to thinking through, to document, as well as to share and to care for how we embody and experience this time. Glimpses into our academic community – the ways in which home and work, private and public spaces collide. Our lives have sped up and slowed down. The COVID-19 virus has not infected us yet, but it has affected

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our worlds. The words offered here are connecting yet suspended in time, allow us to use words to suspend ‘doing’. Knowing and unknowing. Silences and screams of frustration. The power of collective writing – words gathering momentum sitting alongside each other. With each other. For each other.

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