

COVID-19 Extracts from Personal Journal

Mid-March. Thinking about all the things that have previously worried me this year that now seem mild and hilarious: moving alone to Tasmania; starting my PhD at a new university and finally meeting my supervisors; turning 28 (haha, actually). Now: Global pandemic; getting really sick; my loved ones getting really sick; state borders closing and being unable to return home even if I want to; my loved ones getting sick and not being able to travel to see them; the economy is destroyed, again.

Late-March. It is what it is. What a rollercoaster this year has been, and we're not yet three months in. I've been staying home in self-quarantine for a few weeks now. The days are distinct for twenty-four hours; in the mornings I can recall the previous mornings; the afternoons, the afternoons. Every day I wake around 10am, at some point I paint, make food, drink coffee, stand on the balcony and gaze at the view. At the dining table J plays Catan ("it's your turn"; maniacal laughter; the sound of sawing) while I read. B set up the gym in the spare room and is continually showing me exercises effortlessly, while I struggle on a single push up. We stack wood in the woodshed, B and I come up with names for movies replacing words with toilet paper in one of a million Facebook challenges to bubble up during a time when all we have is time, and after weeks of watching the PM's announcements as a house, we have all gradually stopped paying attention to the news. What is happening in Tasmania? That's all we care about anymore. I call home and [my parents] are cheery, full of house-plans and routine amidst the uncertainty. Recently J and I were discussing how we have different word associations -

prior to all this I saw virus as being inherently technological, a computer term; he saw it as a verb, something penetrating and spreading. He said he felt concerned that we all use the same term but we might all be meaning different things, so how can anyone authentically communicate? I feel that inherently at the moment. I have a wonderful Zoom call with D and D and they are jovial, laughing, but also patient and understanding with my PhD fog. (Sometimes I have to remind myself that I am doing one at all, and it zips back into consciousness with surprise: wait, you're doing it? Now? All you do is sit in your house.) University is at least some kind of consistency. I write to M and A, I paint zealous red gouache flowers on the envelopes, I run to the post box and hold my hand out in the air after touching the handle as though drenched with invisible miasma. J and I collect pine cones at the Domain. When strangers approach from a distance every part of me screams stay away! They seem to walk directly towards us, magnetised, a collision course, and it is always our job to duck and weave to avoid crashing. Crashing means 'breathing near'.

Mid-April. I ask J how many weeks it has been not leaving the house. "I don't know", he says. "Four? Five?" We count backwards. I was free on my birthday; the last time I went out for anything was a week after that, Me Wah. J remembers. "At least you got to sit in a restaurant", he says. He remembers mine and B's conversation to the word. I sense his mind is doing backflips in the emptiness, while mine is hazy and soft, a kaleidoscope of dreaming and staring into the flickering flames of our fire, looking at the soft Ghibli rain over the city, staring into never-ending mugs of steaming tea. There's no need to ever be

fully awake. We watch movies B picks out on Netflix (Psychokinesis; A Quiet Place), sip homemade cherry liqueur. We share treats. Occasionally we leave the house in an anxious flurry. People either look nervously as we pass them in the aisle, or not at all; oblivious, they bang into other people, walk aggressively, lean too close. J is frustrated and rattled. "I'm really grumpy", he says, roaring his car into the street. B and I silently look for teddy bears in the windows of people's houses. In our neighbour's window is a brightly painted sign, 'Thank you health care workers!' One particularly cagey afternoon (of golden sun licking the garden in early April, flecked summer shadows, all a warm 20 degrees) I walk. I walk around the Domain and lip sync to repetitive pop songs and take photos of the trees and a fat rainbow parrot, and I move into the dirt to avoid people, always watching, mapping trajectories and walking speed in space. I get home sunburnt and make a fluffy coffee, drink it in the sun on the deck while J pulls up our kale and spinach and gives it to me to munch, pops the heads of tiny caterpillars with his thumbnail. He leaves one for me to do and when I squish it green blood splashes like a poorly made film crime scene pool, obnoxiously overflowing. There are many places I could be during all this that would be worse than here.

Mid-May. This is new. The pressure has completely released. I don't feel on-edge for a millisecond, instead deeply slow and content and watchful. Given-up and exhausted. When I was deeply drunk I looked around my room tearfully (a clear theme these days) and touched my hand to the wall and thanked the spirits of this old house, whether they were listening or not, the echoes and shadows and fingerprints and DNA of those who

came before, for having me, and for their care during this time. After the months I have spent within this house I can't not anthropomorphize the walls. It was a wider gratitude - for the dappled sunlight on the plants on the ledge in the kitchen, for the depths of the crackling fire, watching it lick and munch at the dry logs, for the deep sea breeze coming up our street, for the view of the houses and the stone church and the pines and the mountain drifting beyond the clouds, for the thick fat roses persevering deep into the late autumn, for the brass-golden sun burning my skin lightly in the late afternoon, for everything delicate and rare and wonderful I have been contained with on this property. While coronavirus is rapidly disappearing in Tasmania (knock on wood, we say, tapping our knuckles on the table, and then on our own heads) the rest of the world is gripped in it. Domestic travel is looking possible by July, at the earliest - international not until 2023, so likely after my PhD is concluded. For now, the directive is clear: stay put and stay healthy and don't spread. Inspired by the frontliners M is considering doing a two-year intensive nursing degree, so by the time we're both finished perhaps the world will be opened and we can move around and see it. Who knows what the future will bring - and this year, more than any other, the year the word 'unprecedented' was thrown around frantically, this holds true.

Late-May. Today was nice. I walked aimlessly around the city, bought a coffee from Two Folks and waited eagerly in the alley for it to be ready since only one person could stand in front of the register on the X-marked tape at any given time (the childish thrill of in-person commerce); bought soap from Lush and laughed with the girl with sky-blue

ombre hair behind the plexiglass - "Thank you for keeping me in a job!", she said. People on the street seemed ready to smile at the slightest glance. There is a relieved, selfish joy in the air. At night I drank a bottle of wine and watched It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia, and as I always have laughed at every dark moment, and things felt preciously safe in this tiny pocket of the world.