

September 2021

TXT MAGAZINE

The
Pandemic
Papers



Artwork

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Cover

Bernard d'Agesci, Auguste. "Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard." c.1790. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Page 19

Fantin-Latour, Henri. "Still Life: Corner of a Table." 1873. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Pages 44-49

Friedrich, Caspar David. "Statue of the Madonna in the Mountains." 1804. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Page 53

Mayer, Constant. "Love's Melancholy." 1866. The Art Institute of Chicago.



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Designer's Note

For the design, one of the first decisions we made is that we wanted to include artwork which could function as a reflection of our own experiences during lockdown. The cover image of a lone, rich woman with a book, pondering over what she just read, seems to exude exasperation and ennui while actually being in a privileged position to be able to sit at home and be bored. With the mask, my own addition, I hope to properly convey this idea of the general annoyance experienced by the wealthy who are only mildly inconvenienced. I have added another 'masked woman' on page 53; she seems more grief-stricken, yet she has accepted the situation. Thus, she reflects a later stage of the pandemic blues.

I would like to thank Raquel Sofia Mendonça for her initial design choices regarding the theme. I would also like to thank Mark Tamea for his feedback on the cover design and the software recommendation. Next, a big thanks goes to the Art Institute of Chicago for having made public a large sum of their collection to be able to be used for free. Finally, I would like to shout out Sophie Starreveld, fashion designer, for having handmade the striking blue face mask seen on the cover.

—Mabel Meetsma, *Head Designer*

Plantin Institute *of Typography*

THE HISTORY OF PRINTING TYPES

For the first time John A. Lane will give his series of lectures about the history of printing types in English. The course will be taught in the classroom at the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp, but international students can participate remotely via Zoom.

These lectures discuss the influence of manuscript and engraved letterforms on the form of printing types from the introduction of European movable type to the digital era. They cover the work of the most important punchcutters and type designers from the earliest roman types (Nicholas Jenson, Francesco Griffo) to the late 20th century (Hermann Zapf, Adrian Frutiger).

John A. Lane is a freelance book and printing historian specializing in the history of printing types, punchcutters and typefounders. He is co-author of the standard work 'Dutch Typefounders' Specimens' and author of 'Early Type Specimens at the Plantin-Moretus Museum'.

Registration fee: € 420

Anyone who graduated from a college or university less than a year ago is eligible for a 20% reduction on the registration fee.

Dates and Times: 4 Saturday afternoons:

13, 20 and 27 November 2021, and 4 December 2021, each time from 1.50 p.m. to 4.40 p.m.

Enrol by filling in the form on www.plantininstitute.be/enrol

You can read more about our other courses on our website.

Preface

Publishing the "Pandemic Papers"

In your hand you hold the eighth issue of *TXT magazine*, which is proudly presented to you by our wonderful TXT team. Publishing this edition was not easy, as the current pandemic also had an enormous impact on the marketing budget of nearly every company working with books, texts, and data, that would have helped us realise the latest issue of the magazine. Thanks to several donors we are able to present an issue despite this corona year. We are very thankful to the Leids Universiteits Fonds (LUF), which sponsored the magazine. Another big thank you goes out to Academic Press Leiden, which generously donated to make this project possible. Furthermore, we were supported by the Plantin Institute in Antwerp and a private donation.

There is no need to say that the pandemic has a huge impact on all of us, including the book market. The "Pandemic Papers" wants to show how the current crisis, as well as pandemics and crises in the past, impacted reading, writing, learning, literacy, publishing, and digital media. We are happy to have found so many contributors who wanted to share their findings with us. As evident from the table of contents, the contributions vary from discussing Bibles as a place of safekeeping, to remarking on a change of reading mediums during the lockdown, to examining the phenomenon of Quaranzines. As studying this year was even harder than in non-pandemic situations, *TXT Magazine* decided to publish several free form pieces: a poem about the pandemic and several reflection pieces about studying, researching, and teaching during COVID-19. Although most of us are probably done with the term "corona" by now, we hope this magazine gives some insight into historical pandemics and their consequences. Through a more personal approach, we hope people feel seen and heard, especially after the past year in which life existed behind a screen.

Gathering enough articles for this magazine seemed impossible at the beginning. Researchers initially hesitated to respond to our call for papers on such a connoted topic, which is why it took considerable effort to gather the wonderful set of articles we now proudly present. We knew early on that we wanted to make this edition more personal to reflect the personal impact this pandemic has had on each and every one of us. By broadening the topic and also allowing alternative submissions, the list of possible contributions began to grow. What you have in front of you is not just another edition of *TXT*, but probably the most personal issue made thus far. People do not only share their research findings, but also comment on how they lived during a world-wide crisis, how they studied, taught, and researched. Together with Mabel Meetsma, head designer, who did an amazing job on the layout, we strived to make the best of the current situation and deliver the "Pandemic Papers." Of course, this would not have been possible without the rest of our hard-working team: the editors, the public relations team, and our supervisor Dr. Fleur Praal from the staff of the Book and Digital Media Studies programme. Together we managed to publish something we are more than proud of and hope that you, reader of our magazine, will enjoy it and perhaps even find comfort in our experiences.

—Mirjam Rörsch, *Editor-in-Chief*

The Virtues of Boredom: Reflecting on COVID-19 Temporalities

By Kim Sommer

Dunbar was lying motionless on his back again with his eyes staring up at the ceiling like a doll's. He was working hard at increasing his life span. He did it by cultivating boredom. Dunbar was working so hard at increasing his life span that Yossarian thought he was dead (Heller 9).

The above quote originates from the anti-war satirical novel *Catch-22*, written by Joseph Heller and published in 1961. The story follows the war-pilot John Yossarian, stationed on a Mediterranean island during the Second World War. Yossarian interprets the war as a personal attack, an intricate plot to send him to an untimely death. He therefore spends much of the story thinking of ways to escape his missions, feigning diseases to remain hospitalized, for one. On the island, he meets the like-minded Dunbar. Whereas Yossarian's ultimate fear is dying in battle, Dunbar's biggest fear is the evanescence of time itself. He dreads the swiftness with which time slips through his fingers, without being able to exercise any control over it. "Do you know how long a year takes when it's going away?" he asks, "Like that. A second ago, you were stepping into college with your lungs full of fresh air. Today you're an old man" (Heller 46). Dunbar decides to fight this ephemerality, by intentionally seeking boredom to 'slow time down'. By engaging in the same boring activities and routines every single day—such as lying motionless on his back, staring at the ceiling—he attempts to stop time from flying by so quickly and thus

supposedly prolonging his life, despite life being excruciatingly boring as a result. He believes that an unbearable state of 'ennui' and boredom ultimately result in an immense slowdown of experience and time, that grant him a transient state of immortality. This state of 'ennui', experiencing the same activities every day and not feeling any excitement whatsoever, seems reminiscent of the situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed upon many people, although in many cases it is not as voluntary and self-imposed as in Dunbar's case—or at least not for reasons like his. What I will highlight in the course of this article is the ambivalent experience of 'slowed down' COVID-19 time, a temporality that is seemingly also present in *Catch-22*. I argue that COVID-19 for many people brings about a striking alteration of their experience of time.

As hardly needs repeating, the COVID-19 pandemic has caught the world off-guard, shaking the very foundations of what was for many people generally deemed a stable, 'normal' way of living, connecting, and working in a global context. Many are now working from home, practicing social distancing, and quarantining for the sake of public and personal health. Although I do by no means wish to downplay the gravity of the virus and the many victims it has taken, this article will not focus on those who have been infected, or those who heroically put themselves on the line in crucial jobs or in medical care every single day. Rather, this article posits a reflection on the

ambivalence of the concept of boredom in a period with confinement and repetitiveness prevailing.

One of the side effects of the pandemic, I argue, is a sense of mental tiredness¹, exhaustion, or simply put: boredom. Boredom seems to have turned into the staple condition of our current times for those in quarantine. Every day follows a more or less similar format: working in the confinement of homes, seeing friends and loved ones every so often through ubiquitous Zoom-calls, and the trip to the supermarket being the only escapist diversion from an increasingly monotonous, repetitive pattern, while being reminded of the suffocating threat above one's head through omnipresent face-masks and warning signs. Of course, it should be noted that this does not universally apply to everyone, but for many people days are looking more and more alike and are almost interchangeable—boring even. A psychological study by Simon Grondin, Esteban Mendoza-Duran and Pier-Alexandre Rioux shows that during COVID-19, people who said they felt nervous or stressed reported that time seemed to pass more slowly in any given moment, while those who felt happy tended to experience moments passing more quickly. A recurrent phrase is that one "loses track of time": many people tend to forget which day it is due to a lack of structure or reside in an indefinite state of waiting in solitary confinement, killing time until they finally can embrace their loved ones again. The same study by Grondin, Mendoza-Duran and Rioux shows that for many people, staying at home generates boredom, which in turn affects their temporal experiences, "time appearing sometimes as extremely long and monotonous" (1). Boredom thus seemingly rules in this realm of confinement, and time—in the moment—passes by excruciatingly slow. "For the bored person," Michael Raposa in *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* states, "time

seems to stand still" (qtd. in Toohey 20). When someone is engaged in an enjoyable conversation or task, time in contrast seems to flow more freely and almost ceases to exist.

Paradoxically, due to the increasing repetitiveness and sameness of everyday life, time seems to fly by faster in the long run. It seems as if it was only yesterday that the virus was first diagnosed, whereas in actuality almost a year has passed by the time I am writing this. Because of the 'sameness' of everyday routines and being exposed to the same environments every day, many are bored and experience less 'newness' in their lives. Since days pass by without remarkable events or activities, it is impossible to make new memories. And because it feels like one is not making any worthwhile memories, it feels like time is going by more quickly. It is almost as if memories are the landmarks along the river of time: the fewer we have, the faster it feels like we are going. Memories thus function as 'buoys' which allow one to hold on to the meaningful moments in life, thereby slowing down and counteracting the merciless ephemerality of time. Returning to Dunbar in *Catch-22*, his only concern is a prolongation of his life, regardless of the qualities of the life in question. In Dunbar's self-imposed regime of boredom, intended to result in immortality, he thus paradoxically condemns himself to a life that seems to fly by even faster in the long run. The current confined situation is, in a way, like Dunbar's through the repetitiveness of everyday life, which forces us to experience time as this slow-yet-fast phenomenon. Time, during COVID-19, takes up the ambivalent position of simultaneously passing by unbearably slow in the boring instant of the moment, yet increasingly fast in the long run.

Conceptualizing Dunbar's temporality in *Catch-22* can make for an apt metaphor to learn something about the changing temporal regime during COVID-19 and how we cope with the feeling of boredom,

¹ For an interesting, in-depth reflection of different 'modes' of being tired during COVID-19, see *Pandemic!* by Slavoj Žižek, 2020.

passivity, and a general halting of everyday activities. How to understand temporalities that are simultaneously experienced as slow and fast? How to grasp the concept of boredom when its premise is fully unrooted in current conditions? Boredom is usually something that can be ‘remedied’ through a change of scenery, an initiation of something new to interrupt the monotonous flow of sameness. One can—most of the time—actively make decisions to obviate boredom and in that way, the condition of boredom in ‘normal’ times is characterized to an extent by an agentic component. In these times of uncertainty, however, not every scenario allows for such agency: it is simply not always possible to administer full control over one’s own actions and behaviour, at least not to the same extent as before. The virus is unpredictable and the world has been at the mercy of its whims and irregular outbursts. Within the confinements of our own homes, minor changes can be made, but any major alterations which break the banal, tiresome, and tedious character of our COVID-19-routines, is rendered difficult or even impossible in times like these. Possibilities for initiating change are limited, which simply means it is not always possible to just ‘walk away from boredom’.

Empty time

In order to understand COVID-19 temporality, it is necessary to outline time as a continuously moving, subjective phenomenon—or “drift” in Leo Charney’s terms. In his book *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity and Drift*, Charney conceptualizes drift as the experience of not being able to locate or delineate a stable present or ‘now’. This is partially due to the discrepancy between experience and cognition, which is a staple thought in the writings of Brian Massumi’s affect theory.² Presence is never fully present, since understanding or grasping it means transferring it to the realm of linguistics

and cognition, which dissociates it from actual experience and evacuates it into the future. This opens up an “empty space, an interval, that takes the place of a stable present” (6). This empty space does not adhere to linearity or logic, but is rather something that is corporeal and infinitely moving. When pinning down temporality by means of discursive, chronological frameworks—or what Massumi has termed “the grid”—you immobilize it, thereby nullifying the affective charge inherent in movement. Time—in its compressed affectivity—is something which cannot be grasped through discourse, language or any conceptual grid; it is rather something undefined which resides in the interval ‘in between’ definitions. In doing so, the concept of time harbours an infinite potentiality, encompassing everything that *might* happen, which makes for a powerful intensity which is also empty and passive since it is not *yet* anything. This interval is therefore associated with nonlinear processes, “which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future” (“The Autonomy of Affect” 90). Affective intensity, then, cannot be grasped by means of linear, chronological processes or temporal regimes, since it is every potential movement all at once gathered in a moment which is not yet active movement itself. It is like a “temporal sink, a hole in time”, according to Massumi (90).

It is in this empty space, or “temporal sink”, that the possibility for Charney’s notion of “drift” arises: the experience and activity of living with and in the empty present. Drift, then, is “the general condition of subjective experience in the loss of presence” (7). This experience of emptiness—of waste and of absence—is central to temporality, but it is something unbearable to grasp and to acknowledge, since it entails confirming life’s inherent boringness and emptiness. According to Charney, this realization is something too difficult to face, which is why it is

consistently denied by imposing on time a regime of productivity and linearity, and by ascribing a central purpose and a chronologic to the meaningless, boring jumble of different ‘times’. Discursive or linguistic frameworks then impose upon time a structure which leads up to meaningful progression, “a sense of futurity, an expectation, an intimation of what comes next in a conventional progression” (“The Autonomy of Affect” 90).

This aligns with Stephen Kern’s idea of “public time”, which stands in opposition to the “plurality of private times” (33). He strikingly drew a distinction between these different ‘times’ in the context of the period of 1880-1918, which I argue is still highly relevant in conceptualizations of our temporal experiences today. Public time is characterized by its imposed universality and precision, which culminated in the worldwide introduction of standard time. It was embraced *en masse* during the modern age, due to its supposed objectivity that could serve ‘the greater good’ in its ability to streamline different worldwide processes or transports. This regime of public time subjugates the plurality of private times, which is characterized by its highly subjective and heterogenous nature. The “unconscious mental processes of private times are timeless” according to Kern, meaning they do not conform to the chronological, ‘stable’ duration and cessation of public time (31). The subjective temporalities of private time do not adhere to a regime of mathematical precision, with seconds, hours, days and years being its stable components. Instead, a year can subjectively fly by as if it was just a day and vice versa, which is strikingly exemplified by the notion of boredom ‘slowing down’ time.

Yet the wilful experience of drift—volunteering to be engulfed by the empty, boring moment, like Dunbar does in his surrendering to boredom—is something uncommon to modern-day temporality. Gilles Lipovetsky and Sebastien Charles, in

their co-written *Hypermodern Times*, have argued that ours is an era of urgency, “the era of time-zero, of immediacy, of instantaneity” (30-31). “Hypermodern times” are characterized by the suppression of waiting and the ‘in-between’ that is inherent to boredom and drift. In a similar way, Charney writes of continuous desire for presence, for purpose and for the eradication of the boredom that is ascribed to the empty moments in which the experience of drift takes shape. “Man must work... and in this alone lies the meaning and purpose of his life, his happiness, his ecstasy... In the same way that one has a craving for water in hot weather, we have a craving for work. We must work, work” (Charney 78). This mindset of continuous productivity and activity is exemplary for what Byung-Chul Han has termed the “achievement society [Leistungsgesellschaft]” (8). Han, in *The Burn-out Society*, states that the Foucauldian notion of the disciplinary, panoptical society has now transformed into an era inhabited by “achievement-subjects”, who discipline themselves (8). The achievement-subject is “predator and prey at once” (10): “the exploiter is simultaneously the exploited. Perpetrator and victim can no longer be distinguished” (11). People in the achievement-society, according to Han, do nothing but work and exploit themselves tirelessly, without the need for any kind of domination ‘from above’. Excessive information loads and stimuli result in fragmented, scattered perception and a shortening of attention spans. Immersive reflection and giving in to the experience of drift is being displaced by an entirely different form of attention: “hyperattention” (13), in line with Lipovetsky’s aforementioned claims.

But it is this notion of ‘boring’ immersive reflection that Han wishes to reintroduce: moments of deep contemplation, not assigned to any specific task in the grand scheme of productivity

² See Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002.

and speed, but moments in which one can just be. In these moments of deep and boring attention, it is that the new comes to being. The hectic rush of hypermodern times does not produce anything novel, but rather “reproduces and accelerates what is already available” (Han 13). In these supposedly useless and unproductive moments—moments of emptiness and boredom, you could say—creativity and contemplation can thrive. Instead of the oversaturated, productive intensity of hectic, hypermodern times, boredom paves the way for a certain emptiness, an in-between that is not yet delegated to a certain purpose and therefore offers space for whatever new, creative ideas arise. Moreover, this boring interval is a temporal slowdown that presupposes a ‘pause’, which in turn undermines the hasty linearity of Han’s “achievement society” and points to the nonlinearity and subjectivity of time (8).

Hyperattention is something which we are forcefully deprived of when self-quarantining and we are instead thrust into a temporal regime of nonlinearity in the experience of the empty moment. The current condition of self-exploitation is at odds with the boredom that COVID-19 imposes on many people. The forced stasis—the inability to exploit one’s self and to work tirelessly—wields resistance and fosters unrest since it is against the ingrained hypermodern nature of society, focused on elevating levels of productivity and purpose. Dunbar in *Catch-22* chooses to luxuriate in the experience of drift by boring himself and by eventually refusing to work in his battalion. His passive behaviour, easily written off as laziness, is not as ‘easy’ since it challenges the modernist condemnation of drift and the continuous self-exploitation of the achievement-society. Whereas living through time is commonly believed to be about energy, purpose, and ‘charged moments’, Charney states that it is instead

about the drift: “You can’t get away from the drift. You can’t resist its pull. Let it draw you in” (80). The COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to give in to the drift, but doing so is challenging and takes courage since it also entails admitting that life itself is empty and boring. Giving in to the empty moment, no matter how easy it sounds, is difficult and yields immense resistance. It is acceptable, ‘easy’, and safe to condemn drift and the associated characteristic of boredom. Surrendering yourself to the experience of drift and thereby acknowledging the empty, boring moment that is central to life itself, means approaching the nature of time itself. In Dunbar’s passive submission to the experience of drift, for instance when he is “shooting skeet, because he hated every minute of it and the time passed so slowly”, he is as close as he can get to experiencing the true nature of time in the empty moment (Heller 43).

Defamiliarization

The category of drift is, however, never a clear-cut forward stream. As I have mentioned, it is something nonlinear, subjective, and ungraspable since theorizing it means being conceptually distanced from experiencing it. It is nowhere and everywhere at the same time, it is nothing yet, since it could potentially become everything. Charney describes it as “an erratic vagrancy, a structured wandering” (10). The experience of drift is not something even and durational, but it is rather “studded with instantaneous flashes of consciousness and perception” (10). These sparks of intensity and consciousness exist in symbiosis to the drift with which they coexist. The momentary and the durational are opposite to each other but they also sustain each other and are mutually dependent on enabling their existence. The momentary instant can only be recognized in contrast to the undifferentiated drift that surrounds it, and

the instants do not occur separately from drift, but rather they *are* the drift. Individual moments, perceived as intensities or “sublime moments” (Charney 112), are like buoys bobbing on the surface of the drift, which cannot prevent the drift from happening or change its course, but they are rather participating in it, being dragged along.

The isolated moment or instant is, however, capable of temporarily ‘shaking up’ drift through its intense *defamiliarizing* qualities. It is by definition detached from life, as it frames a peak instant which is demarcated from the continuous flow of drift. This detachment also renders it inherently defamiliarizing, by way of contrast with the drift that surrounds and contains it. Defamiliarization (or the Russian term of “ostranenie”, which literally translates to ‘making strange’), a concept coined by one of the most influential and polemic Russian literary formalists Viktor Sjklovski, is intent on reevaluating everyday life. Defamiliarizing works initiate an alienating process, whereby a (literal) emptiness is created, in which the beauty of the depicted objects or locations usually regarded with a habitualized gaze, is yet again rendered visible. Sjklovski propagated these defamiliarizing properties of art: artworks are capable of lifting objects from their usual, ‘normal’ contexts, thereby making the objects in question ‘strange’ again. Ordinarily, according to Sjklovski, “our perception of the world is habitual, economical, automatic—too familiar.” (Gunn 28), and I would add, boring. The process of “habitualization” shrouds the world in a kind of desensitization, depriving its subjects of actual experience. Art possesses the capabilities to distort and slow down the habitual processes of perception, thereby making the world fantastical and beautiful again, in its estrangement. “Doel van het beeld is het (...) creëren van een bijzondere

waarneming van een voorwerp, *ervoor zorgen dat we het voorwerp zien, en niet slechts herkennen.*” (“The aim of the image is to (...) create a special perception of an object, *to make sure that we see the object, not merely recognize it.*” (Sjklovski 151). Charney’s notion of drift is then the continuity against which the momentary sensation of defamiliarized intensity takes shape. The directionless temporal jumble, the undifferentiated drift of everyday life, forms the contrast for fleeting momentary instants to build their intensity. This sublime moment generally happens as a ‘spark’ which is initiated by the unexpected configuration of elements. The lack of anticipation throws the subject into a process of defamiliarization, temporarily suspending the experience of the drift of everyday life. In so doing, the sublime instant opens up room for possible moments of contemplation. Set apart from the flow of everyday life, this moment provides potential for self-examination which allows you to revalue all that is taken for granted: yourself, your body, your environment. Defamiliarization can shake up perception, refresh awareness, and create moments of productive self-analysis.

The virtues of boredom

And yet this defamiliarizing moment, which results in a sublime experience, is a pitfall, according to Charney, since it is not drift. Drift is ungraspable, incoherent, inconsequent and nonlinear, it knows no purpose: it just *is*, while simultaneously it is not. By elevating discrete ordinary moments into a state of exception by marking their perception as a sublime experience, you fall into the trap of the regime of linearity and imposed purpose. Drift and the ‘boredom’ associated with it knows no extremes. Within drift, there is no distinction between highs and lows or between valleys and peaks, which renders the sublime moment of ‘ostranenie’ with its intended shock effect, impossible. The

empty moment is rather characterized by the monotonous incoherent drift which is all yet nothing at the same time: it is an infinite potentiality, without being amassed in one concrete shape, because it cannot be grasped by cognition but only be experienced. Elevating and coveting the beauty within emptiness anew is yet again a way of ascribing purpose, to chase away boredom and emptiness, and thus to remain within the hypermodern regime.

Instead, the only possible way to 'escape' boredom is, paradoxically, to accept it, to let it in, and to work with it. We are used to a regime of hyperattention—with achievement, purpose and future horizons prevailing. This is at odds with the 'present', to the boring instant of the now, as is foregrounded by the COVID-19 lockdown. Being at home, confined to your own room, complicates the common activities within the regime of productivity and purpose, and in doing so, gives us an opportunity to surrender to the boring experience of drift more often. Paradoxically, this giving in to the empty moment is not at all boring in its overt challenging of common thought, conception, experience, and identity. In the empty moment, there is no "safe haven that gives you a breather from your raw self" (Charney 121).

Rather, you have to face the true empty essence of time, life, and self, which hypermodernist diversion tactics usually conceal. In the empty moment, it is impossible to be distracted, since "there is no longer anything to be distracted from" (Charney 123). In the experience of drift, there is no extremity of emotion—just emptiness and boredom. You have to focus and stay alert because you cannot rely on the empty moment to offer a contrast between boredom and something else. "The empty moment forms a terrace on which you step outside for a respite from the emotions, to gather your feelings, to figure out what you're feeling, how it's moving. To

feel these emotions, you need to be able to step outside of them" (Charney 121). The only way in which we can perceive the supposed 'self-explanatory' functioning of the achievement society and hypermodernity is by temporarily stepping out of it: by allowing boredom in, and to be surrendered by it. There is no need to ascribe purpose to this boring drift, to defamiliarize the ordinary into a momentary sublime intensity or shock. Rather, the empty moment invites you to just be your incoherent self in the incoherent moment which is neither now, then, nor tomorrow. Since we have been offered the opportunity to luxuriate in the empty moment, let us take Dunbar's behaviour as an example: allowing yourself to be engulfed by boredom like he does, is—in hypermodern times—possibly one of the bravest things one can do. ■

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Minding the Gap: Online Quaranzine Distribution and/as Pandemic Participation

By Ellen Barth

Zines—self-published, do-it-yourself (DIY) booklets made of inexpensive materials and which typically address topics located outside of the mainstream—are, to quote Janice Radway "a form of social action driven by desires for new forms of sociability and new ways of being in the world" (40). As public life has been drastically altered during the global coronavirus pandemic and "new ways of being" have become a necessity for survival, 'quaranzines' that address life during the pandemic have become a new pandemic trend.

Stemming from amateur press association publications of the 1800s and science fiction fanzines of the 1930s, zines gained considerable popularity at the end of the twentieth century through their connection to the punk music scene (Duncombe 15, 54). In the twenty-first century and during the global COVID-19 pandemic, quaranzines (a portmanteau of quarantine and zines) have gained widespread popularity in part because they, like zines more generally, are easy to produce using common household materials—paper, glue, scissors, markers, and, more recently, computers, tablets, and smartphones. Supporting the popularity and dissemination of zines during and about the pandemic are online distribution spaces, which offer zines-makers (zinesters) and zine-readers a means to share, connect, and collaborate through these digital spaces.

With a low barrier for participation, online quaranzines provide a highly

democratic means of documenting individual and diverse pandemic experiences—perhaps even more so than paper zines do. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, for instance, has noted in her examination of the People of Color Zine Project that for groups traditionally lacking representation in zine culture, which has been described as a "white, middle class culture" (Duncombe 12), the opportunity to publish online has meant increased participation (Ramdarshan Bold 216). Thinking specifically about life during the COVID-19 pandemic, quaranzines offer an opportunity for people outside the mainstream to share their experiences and views, and therefore 'mind the gap' in regard to the diversity of stories publicly available at this historically significant moment. As zine librarian Jenna Freedman has noted: "People who make zines aren't the same people as the ones who are reporting on pandemic life on TV, in the newspaper, and in other outlets, and they have different stories to tell" (Murrell).

Online, quaranzines can be found either as born-digital documents or as scans, photographs, or videos of physical zines. The popularity of quaranzines online attests to what Clay Shirky has called 'mass amateurization', with the removal of the "bottlenecks that characterized mass media" resulting in an explosion of online content by non-professionals (55). And while amateur cultural production has always existed, digital technologies "have made it simple to capture and share this creativity with the world" and thus change

the scope of its exposure (Lessig 149). Instead of distribution at zinefests or concerts, zinesters are making use of the connectedness afforded by the internet to reach their readers in far-flung locations.

The following briefly examines three free-to-access online quaranzine distribution spaces that not only provide a broad platform for diverse stories, but also invite participation, link content, and afford people with opportunities to connect. As zines, “[l]ittle publications filled with rantings of high weirdness and exploding with chaotic design” (Duncombe 6), are translated to digital spheres of distribution with differing affordances, innovative practices are being furthered. The three quaranzine distribution sites discussed demonstrate how, even online, zines as an aesthetic form are beholden to few rules, so long as creative expression and community are furthered.

Whereas book historical models like the Communications Circuit envisage publishing and distribution as distinct stages in the life cycle of books (Darnton 67), online distribution sites used for the dissemination of amateur and DIY materials complicate this understanding. These sites are part of a network of participatory culture, in which sharing, gifting, and connecting break down traditional boundaries of the book’s life cycle. Moreover, and as we move ever forward into what some have termed the ‘post-digital era’ (Pressman 105), it becomes clear that books can no longer simply be understood as either physical or digital. A closer inspection of current distribution strategies of quaranzines can thus also help address the perceived ‘gap’ between material and digital forms of communication shared online.

Getting the Zines Out

On April 15, 2020, the Blurt Foundation, a UK-based organization dedicated to helping people deal with depression, put

out a call for contributions to its Project Quaranzine, saying: “We know that being shut inside so much can have a big impact on how we feel. Lots of us have had to stop going to school, college, or university. Sometimes we don’t know what to do with ourselves” (Blurt). With a focus on encouraging younger people to produce zines, the project also addressed the issue of representation, saying that: “we feel as though there’s a gap in the stories we’re hearing” (Blurt). Blurt’s Project Quaranzine was therefore framed as a way to encourage young people to creatively work through their emotions through zine-making as well as a way to make diverse experiences accessible to their online community.

As of February 2021, Blurt’s Project Quaranzine consisted of six zines, which were ‘sold’ on the organization’s shop website for £0.00 and available for download. The zines that make up Project Quaranzine differ in their formats, styles, and themes. *Navigating the Lockdown*, for example, has tips on making successful video calls, and is a single page with dashed and solid lines representing where the reader should cut and fold the page to make a one-page minizine (Dickinson). *The Brockely Badger*, on the other hand, presents itself as a digital magazine and is full of activities the reader can do in isolation (Lane). One encourages the reader to print out the zine at home, whereas the other is meant to be read in a digital format.

Another of the Blurt zines is *Isolation Differences* by Libby Morris. The zine is six pages long, handwritten, and decorated with handmade drawings. A scanned digital file, the zine’s format nevertheless allows it to be easily printed by the purchaser/reader. In its pages, Morris discusses how her life has not changed much under lockdown. Morris, seventeen at the time of writing, reports that she has a chronic illness and is bedbound. She uses the zine

to highlight the discrimination people with disabilities have faced in society, giving the example of not having had the option to work from home before the pandemic. But because of the coronavirus, she writes, “they’ve rushed to make these same accommodations. This doesn’t seem fair!” (Morris). Having experienced the isolation now being newly felt by so many across the globe, Morris tries to offer encouragement and to help her readers by providing coping mechanisms, such as “take the day in small chunks,” and by providing a reading list, as well as drawing attention to social media movements and sites that support people with disabilities (Morris).

In this example, the Blurt Foundation encouraged zine production, giving creators a space where they could display and share their bookish output as well as their experiences during the pandemic. The foundation facilitated the dissemination of the zines through a creative use of the website’s shop feature, grouping the zines together spatially and topically to be ‘sold’ in a bundle, with the zines then made available for download.

Zines have typically been understood as non-commercial productions that participate in a gift economy. “And even when money does change hands,” says Alison Piepmeier, the informal and amateur aspects of zines “keep the acquisition of zines from feeling like a financial transaction” (231). In sharing their quaranzines online and for free, zinesters are inviting connection through the gift of labor in what Shirky has described as a reversal of common communicative practice: from “gather, then share” in person to “share, then gather” online (35). Although the Blurt website had a web storefront set up, through which visitors could purchase various items related to self-care, the zines that make up Project Quaranzine were made free to access. In this way, Blurt is not only distributing the quaranzines, but

encouraging engagement and community through the sharing of zines.

Additionally, the small number of quaranzines in Project Quaranzine speak to the history of zines as medium for niche, underground, and non-mainstream interests, as does the topic of isolation. According to Stephen Duncombe, loneliness and community creation are key motivators in zine creation, saying:

The loneliness that zinesters are striving to overcome through their zines doesn’t arise from physical isolation as much as it does from their social alienation. Through their zines, writers are trying to escape the society they feel alienated from while creating a new, albeit virtual community of friends they can feel connected to. (Duncombe 52)

Zines foster community, however large or small, through shared interest or experience, and indeed it is often the smaller communities existing at the margins of mainstream society who benefit the most from the accessibility and creative opportunities afforded by zines. In times of social distancing, when both physical and social isolation are more acute, zines discussing a single issue can provide a bridge to others and lessen the loneliness Duncombe refers to. That Blurt’s Project Quaranzine addresses and strengthens connections between contributors brought together by a specific topic—mental health—is in keeping with the long tradition of zines as alternative and small-scale communicative spaces, while at the same time reaching a potentially global audience through online distribution.

Similarly named, quaranZine is a Berlin-based online community project, which aims to use art as a vehicle for bringing people together (quaranZine). However, rather than sharing completed zines made by individuals on a shared distribution platform, the project instead considers the distribution website as the zine itself. Bound together by the

architecture of the webpage, anything shared on the site automatically becomes part of the zine, linked to and coming into conversation with the other works also shared. In this instance, the entire page of written and visual content shared by individuals is conceptualized as one unified quaranzine.

The nearly forty contributions shared on the website include videos, paintings, collages, texts, and other creative works by a variety of individuals, separated into discrete boxes that line the page in columns. Images are equally as present as text, with many images enriching or holding primacy over the textual contributions. Together, these pieces present a snapshot of disparate lives during quarantine, mingling breakups (“We broke up on day 9 of the quarantine”) with affirmations (“It’s okay to not be productive during the quarantine”) and laments (“And now there is space / space between us / space in your wallet / space for 30 rolls of toilet paper in your cupboard”) (quaranZine).

In its collaborative spirit, *quaranZine* is reminiscent of amateur press association (APA) zines. Dating back to the 1800s, these early zines gathered together individual contributions, which would then be copied, collated, bound together, and sent out to readers via a Central Mailer. In these terms, the *quaranZine* website could be understood as the Central Mailer, which assembles and distributes the end product, but does not edit the contributions in any way (Duncombe 54). The contents of *quaranZine* belong simultaneously to the individual creators and to the collective webzine. However, unlike the APA zines distributed to readers through the mail, online affordances make it possible not only for *quaranZine* to be accessible world-over and round-the-clock but also for contributors to connect themselves to the zine in various ways. The *quaranZine*

website delineates the boundaries of the collective zine while also providing links to personal websites and social media accounts, expanded content, printable versions, and video hosting sites, such as YouTube or Vimeo. Contributor Studio Mimik, for example, shares two images from a larger photo series on *quaranZine*, which readers can view by clicking the link under the images. The extended content is linked to, but understood as separate from, the zine as whole; after viewing the photo series, readers/viewers have the option to go “back to the zine” (quaranZine).

Perhaps the most popular method for sharing quaranzines online is on social media sites, such as Instagram, with zinesters spreading their content to interested parties not through collaborative and organized projects, but through the use of metadata tags like #quaranzine. At the time of writing in April, 2021, over 8,000 posts on Instagram were tagged with #quaranzine, #stayhomemakezines had 1,717 posts, and #quaranzinefest had 3,863 posts. A glance through the diverse quaranzines shared on Instagram and linked by the metadata tag #quaranzine demonstrates the creative potential of zines: some are irreverent, with zines used as a creative and humorous outlet for serious emotions, while others deal more directly with feelings of loneliness and grief.

Instagrammer G.R. Fix shares zines and art on the app, with a page biography line that reads “Draw your way thru it?”. The quaranzines shared are highly artistic, digitally illustrated, and usually feature more images than text. They vary in tone, from the somewhat lighter *Feeling Scattered AF* to the more serious *Heightened Senses During Social Distancing*, with thoughts like, “I guess daily talk of DEATH / END / FEARS is bound to affect us. And yes we now also have a keen sense of 6 feet” (Fix).

Heightened Senses During Social Distancing is a loose string of elements, in this case thoughts and feelings expressed through verbal and visual elements, which is typical of the wider zine genre. It shows the creator “drawing through” emotions and thoughts rather than providing a structured narrative. In sharing the zine on Instagram, Fix lays bare the chaotic feelings of life during the pandemic. Readers of the zine may see their own feelings mirrored there and feel inspired to, as Fix does, use zine-making as a way to work through emotions.

Not all the quaranzines deal directly with the pandemic, lockdown, or isolation, and the ones that do are incredibly diverse, such as zines giving advice on pandemic workout routines (Hu), or discussing the rights of essential workers (Mabute-Louie). Other zines deal less directly with the pandemic but nonetheless make use of and link to others through the #quaranzine tag. There is, for example, a *butch archive: curatorial notes* (Leigh), *Debbie’s Guide to Yiddish for Non-Jews* (Bamberger), *So You Think You Might be Non-Binary (but you’re not quite sure)* (Fake Magic Art Collective), and *Biógraphia Geógraphia de Mi Infancia* (Forero).

The zines gathered together under the #quaranzine tag comprise works by individuals as well as collectives from a variety of national and personal backgrounds. The zines can be presented as single photograph or a series of photographs that users swipe through at their own pace. The zine *Biógraphia Geógraphia de Mi Infancia* is shared with the reader in a video, with the pages being turned—or rather opened—for the viewer so that they can read and experience the zine online (Forero). With these options, zinesters sharing their work decide how much of their quaranzine they want to share (one page or several pages) and how it is viewed (static photograph or video).

Gina McMillen, an illustrator from Arizona, posts her quaranzines on Instagram, often using the multiple image and video features to share the pages of her creations. In the minizine *Great Expectations: A Social Distancing Story*, McMillen uses both the video and image sharing features. Her zine humorously pairs expectations (“read all the books”) to reality (“do all the laundry”) in quarantine (McMillen). Each verso and recto page combination contrasts an expectation with a reality, with the small format of the zine playing on the length and status of Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

In all these instances, metadata tags connect individual and diverse works into a connected pool of content; at the same time, readers have the option to comment on, tag others in, and link to the zine—creating virtual conversations around the zine. In her work on zines by women, Alison Piepmeier has argued that part of the appeal of zines is their materiality, an indicator to some extent of the intimacy they engender between creator and reader. She writes: “In a world where more and more of us spend all day at our computers, zines reconnect us to our bodies and to other human beings” (Piepmeier 214). What Instagram quaranzines may lack in material intimacy they more than make up for in connectivity. Moreover, there is, as Shirky notes, a particular intimacy in this kind of online connection. He remarks that tags are like a “potential stepping-stone from one user to another, adding a social dimension to the simple act of viewing” (33). And as many of the quaranzines shared on Instagram are images or videos of handmade and physical zines, the intimacy of the material is not altogether lost. One does not eliminate the other. Just as zinesters can (and do) share their zines across multiple online distribution spaces, so too can they share digital reproductions of physical zines with one sphere of readers, and material copies with another, mapping new practices on top of old.

Conclusion: Quaranzines and Pandemic Participation

The online quaranzine distribution sites described in this article demonstrate how zines about pandemic experiences are being creatively linked—topically, spatially, and through metadata—to share content from a multitude of creators and form spaces for online communities, something that has become ever more valuable during physical isolation. With more of our lives taking place on screens, online quaranzines offer a way for diverse people to mediate their personal experiences and share them with an interested audience of readers despite physical distances. In making their creative productions available in online spaces, zinesters decide how their work will be presented and read—collaboratively in a project, joined by a shared-interest, linked by tags, moving in a video, or still in a photograph.

Although online zines expand the book form in new and innovative ways, they are not a wholesale break from paper zines. Quaranzines shared online connect to the history of zines as amateur, small-scale, quirky, and experimental productions,

while also embracing digital advantages. Indeed, many zines shared online are digital versions of physical artifacts, and, more than that, a number of digital quaranzines are meant to be printed out, folded and stapled, so that readers can take part in a material reading experience.

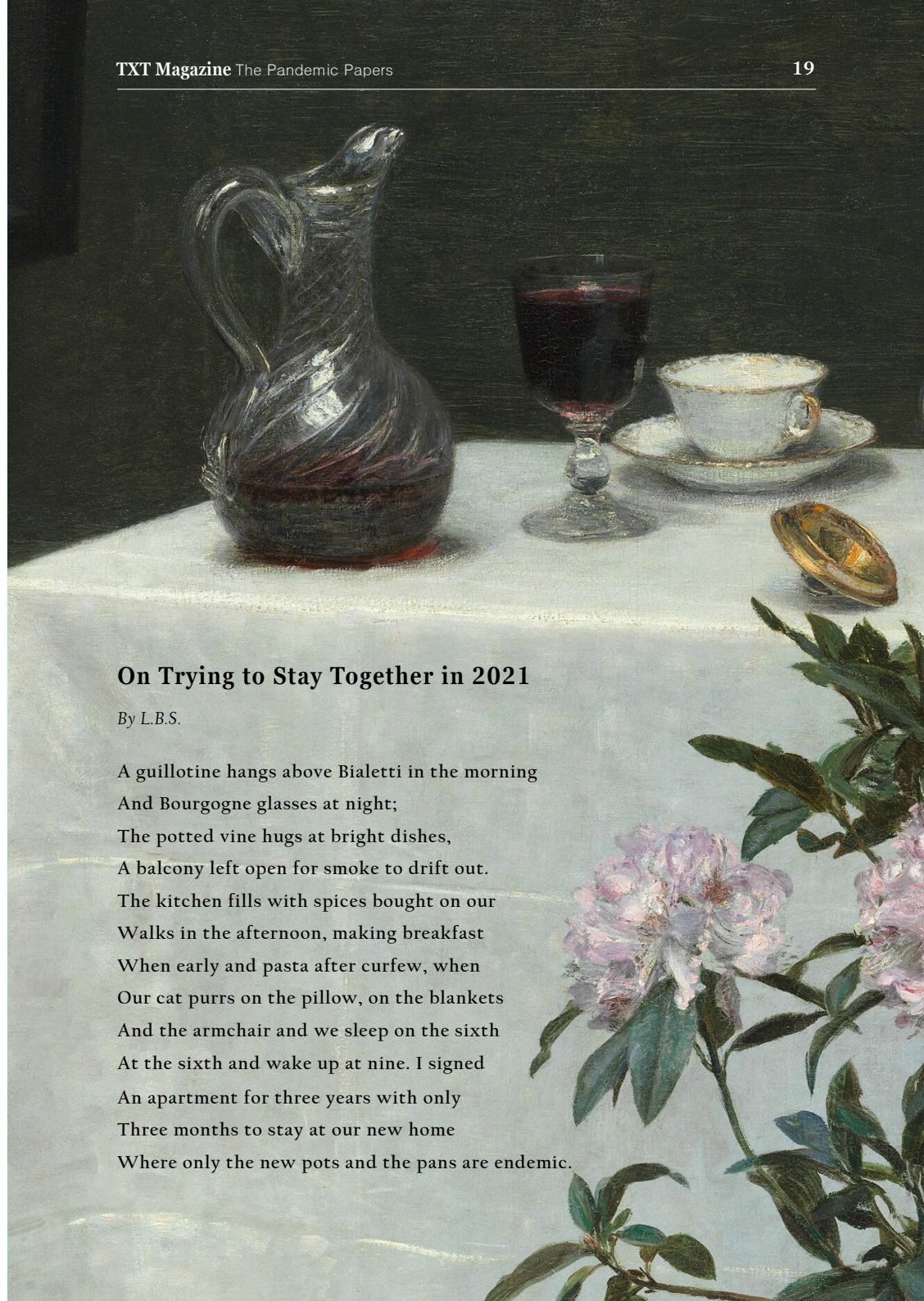
To return once again to Radway, she advises we think about zines as such:

[T]he now familiar question “What’s a zine?” ought to be reformulated in both a more social and a more performative way. We ought to ask not what a zine is but what zinesters do with them, how, and in what contexts. At the same time, we ought to ask how the practices of zine-ing reciprocally act upon all those who engage in them (29).

Quaranzine distribution sites show the ways zines are being creatively used to offer diverse representation and participation during the pandemic: to fill in the gaps of stories left out of mainstream channels and to mind the gaps between us as individuals. No matter what form they take, quaranzines are an invitation to express, to commiserate, and to come together. ■

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On Trying to Stay Together in 2021

By L.B.S.

A guillotine hangs above Bialetti in the morning
And Bourgogne glasses at night;
The potted vine hugs at bright dishes,
A balcony left open for smoke to drift out.
The kitchen fills with spices bought on our
Walks in the afternoon, making breakfast
When early and pasta after curfew, when
Our cat purrs on the pillow, on the blankets
And the armchair and we sleep on the sixth
At the sixth and wake up at nine. I signed
An apartment for three years with only
Three months to stay at our new home
Where only the new pots and the pans are endemic.

Safekeeping Memories of Transition and Trauma in Sixteenth-Century Dutch Bibles

By Renske Hoff

Eliesabet Campen died of smallpox in 1790, barely one year old.¹ In 1559, Siwerdt Janszoon's wife died in childbirth. Evertge Pieters fell ill in June 1647 and passed away within a month. Six children suddenly died in 1621 when the attic of their school collapsed. At first glance, the lives and tragic deaths of these early modern people have little in common. However, these events have all been recorded in blank spaces in sixteenth-century Bibles, in the handwriting of relatives and acquaintances. A considerable number of surviving Dutch Bibles from this time contain annotations by historic book users. Annotations demonstrate how the early modern Bible functioned as a space to shelter memories, secure identities, and provide, in Jason Scott-Warren's words, "anchors amid the flux of experience" (2). Usually written down within the blank areas in the front or back of the book, memories and experiences were tightly clasped between the binding and the biblical text. White spaces such as flyleaves, loose endleaves, and pastedowns were sites of transition, openness, and liminality, belonging as much to the book and its text as to the world of the reader. In their blankness and in-betweenness, these spaces of the early modern Bible enabled users to place their own experiences, memories, and emotions within the safety and guardianship of God's word. The negotiable, blank pages invited them to draw their own reflections, to grant themselves these places for production rather than merely reception, to put a pen to paper and materialise their memories (De Certeau 134).

This article explores the function of the Bible as an open space in which the temporal and exceptional could become durable. Through the lens of three types of transformative, impactful events that found their ways into the space of the book, I will display how people turned to their Bibles in various moments of disruption and insecurity. Firstly, the book regularly served as a place for the documentation and commemoration of crucial events within the family, such as births, marriages, and deaths. Genealogical annotations allowed for the transference of these memories from one generation to another, shaping social ties that crossed the boundaries between the living and the dead. Secondly, when local communities were disrupted by events such as political transitions or local catastrophes, people similarly turned to their Bibles to record these events in the safe space of the book. Moreover, a third category of impactful and unexpected occurrences were kept on flyleaves: extraordinary and impressive spells of weather. Each of these various examples demonstrate that when life proved vulnerable and unpredictable, the material book could come to serve as a place of refuge, assurance, and safekeeping.

Family memorial in the sight of God

Bibles—including complete Bibles, New Testaments, Epistles and Gospels, and Psalters—were the type of books most likely to be owned by and recorded in the inventories of early modern households in the Low Countries (Dibbitts 217, Kamermans 124, Blaak 27-28). The Bible

was an inherent "part of the cadences of daily life" (Narveson 53), defining beliefs, behaviours, language, and identity in both private and public spheres, across social-economic divides (Hamling 211). Bibles were regularly handed down from one generation to the next, allowing the book to function as a material transporter of identities and memories across multiple generations. Keeping record of a family's transitions, changes, and traumas was a practice that could "hold the dead in the minds of the living, and transmit the responsibility for remembrance forward to children and grandchildren" (Hodgkin 312).

A sixteenth-century book owner called Aernt Poelman illustrates how the Bible could be appropriated as a space of commemoration. His annotations were inscribed in a Dutch Bible printed by the Antwerp printer Henrick Peetersen van Middelburch in 1541 (Utrecht University Library 111 F 13). Poelman's moving account of the deaths of his wife and their new-born daughter fill the endleaf of his Bible. On the 20th of October (the year is unknown, but a previous annotation mentions that they were married in 1588), his wife gave birth to a daughter at five in the afternoon. However, he describes that "after that my wife suffered great distress ... [in which] there was no longer a real distinction between life and death."² They called for a midwife around midnight, but the help came to no avail: "around three o'clock she was found dead in bed, compliant to what the Lord has foreseen."³ Poelman's daughter was baptised, died, and was buried within the first three days of her life. Although early modern accounts of personal memories often display little emotion (Pollmann "Memory" 1, 20), Poelman's affection towards his wife and child shine through when he refers to them as his "dear wife" and "dear, sweet daughter."⁴ By writing down life events in his Bible, he created a space in which valuable memories of his wife and child could be sheltered and their stories passed

on to subsequent generations.

Like others of his time, Poelman made the vulnerability of human life part of the trustworthy, protective space of the biblical narrative through his annotations. Placed and kept in the same binding as the eternal word of God, the divides between the personal and the universal, the material and immaterial, and the transitory and the permanent became elusive. Jaspas Vinckel (1581-1638), an Amsterdam based merchant, similarly used the flyleaves of his Bible to place experiences of transition and distress "in the sight of God" (Scott-Warren 3). In his Bible, printed in 1542 by Jacob van Liesvelt (Württembergische Landesbibliothek Bb.niederländ.154201), he registered the births and deaths of his children between 1607 and 1622. With the birth of each child, Vinckel included a short benediction, such as: "Item on the 21st of July 1620, being between Tuesday and Wednesday at night, at half past two, my wife gave birth to my son Abraham Vinckel. The almighty God shall let him grow in virtuousness and [grant him] a blessed death and life. Amen."⁵ Through these annotations, the Bible came to serve as a place of connection and communication between the earthly and the divine, allowing Vinckel to commemorate the lives and deaths of his children in God's material and spiritual embrace.

Local disturbances and traumas

An overarching characteristic of the various genealogical notes in sixteenth century Bibles is that the events described announce disruptions, both positive and negative, and the transition to a renewed and altered situation. Marriages, births, and deaths transformed social positions and modified the relationships between each of the members involved. In a similar manner, it was at moments of political or societal disturbance and discontinuation that experiences and memories were entrusted to the book. Situations such as outbreaks of violence, transfers of political power, or traumatic accidents could greatly

¹ The arguments presented here have been developed within the research project "In Readers' Hands: Early Modern Dutch Bibles from a User's Perspective" (2017-2021). This NWO-FWO-funded project is a collaboration between the University of Groningen and the KU Leuven, and is supervised by Prof. Dr. Sabrina Corbellini and Prof. Dr. Wim François. The main aim of the project is to study the multitude of interactions—textual, conceptual, and material—between early modern readers and their Bibles. The research derives in particular from the surviving copies of Bibles printed by the Antwerp printers Jacob van Liesvelt, Henrick Peetersen van Middelburch, and Willem Vorsterman, between 1522 and 1546. My gratitude, furthermore, goes to Sabrina Corbellini, Olin Moctezuma Burns, and Joe Saunders for their valuable comments on previous versions of this paper.

² ... daer na ijs mijn lijue huijsfrau in sullicken benauthijet geuest ... ende datter tuessent leijven ende die doot gheen onderschijet wel en was. All English translations are my own.

³ ... ontrent de drije uren soe ijs sij opt gebeddet geuonden voer doot gevochsaem dan die heer heeftet versijen

⁴ lijue huijsfrau; lijue souete dochter...

⁵ Item opten 21 Julij 1620 wessends tussen dinsdach en woensdach snachts, te half 3 uren, is mijn huijsvrouw, van mijn soen Abraham vinckel verloest. Die Almachtigen Godt wil hem in doechden lateen op wassen en een salich sterven ende leuen Amen.

unsettle local communities and disrupt feelings of security and predictability. The flyleaves of the early modern Bible provided space for the recollection of these events and the transfer of powerful memories from one generation to the next.

Jan Vrancx, who lived in Heverlee near Leuven from the 1550s onwards, left various annotations about life-altering moments in his Bible, which was printed by Marie Ancxt in 1560 (Maurits Sabbe Library P22.005.1/Fo BLJB 1560). The markings register his marriage and the births of his children, but also important events of recent, local history. One such event was the unsuccessful siege of Leuven by the army-commander Maarten (or Merten) van Rossum. Vrancx recollects that “in the year of our Lord 1542, Merten van Rossum was stationed before Leuven, on the first day of August, on the day of Saint Peter in Chains. But he was not able to fulfil his wish because God will resist so no one may trouble Leuven.”⁶ The attempted siege and the grave brutalities that preceded it severely impacted local civilians and led to the publication of a wide range of pamphlets and chronicles reflecting on this violent episode (Pleij 188–189). Vrancx’s annotations not only give testimony to the impression these events made on him, but also display his wish to preserve his recollections of the siege within the personalised, secure space of his Bible. Vrancx’s concerns with local uprisings of violence also become clear in another note:

“... in the year of our Lord 1561, on the 9th day of May, on Saint Job’s Eve, great violence occurred [at] Terbank and at many other places.”⁷

This burning and plundering of Terbank was part of a long-lasting series of disturbances in and around Leuven in the second half of the sixteenth century (Van Uytven 379, 386). Although the societal impact of this particular affair was

considerably smaller than that of Van Rossem’s attempted siege, Jan Vrancx clearly considered it valuable to memorialise this outbreak of violence in his family Bible.

Another Bible in which local events are commemorated is a Bible printed by Willem Vorsterman in 1528 (Tilburg University Library TF PRE TFK 149). On a blank leaf, an anonymous user of the book left a handwritten note about a fatal, local accident in 1621: “Item, the attic of the large school has collapsed because so much hay was stored onto it, on the 17th of August, anno 1621. And six children died underneath the hay and have all been buried in the church.”⁸ The annotator, who does not seem to be directly related to any of the victims, confided the accident to the pages of their Bible, generating a connection with the trauma and bereavement of the children’s parents. Like the bodies of the children were consigned to their graves in the church, the story of their tragic death was consigned here to the textual equivalent of the house of God. As genealogical annotations show how early modern people valued and engaged with the intergenerational bonds between family members, the commemoration of this event displays how “trauma shared can serve as a source of communality” (Erikson 459).

The force of nature

“In 1704, on the 26th of July, very large hailstones fell here in Emmerich, which caused much damage to the windows and roofs.”⁹ Franciscus Hendericks left his record of this surprising and damaging hailstorm in his 1535 Liesvelt Bible (Württembergische Landesbibliothek Bb.niederländ.153501), positioning it between his commemorations of family affairs and political events—such as the coronation of King Frederick I of Prussia in 1701 and the death of Emperor Leopold I in 1705.¹⁰ Similarly observing a spell of

extreme weather, another Bible owner recorded in their New Testament from 1548 (Sint-Andriesabdij Brugge pret. 23) that “on the 1st of November 1786, and the following days, it was so cold that the Scheldt froze over in several spots and that at other [places] the anchor ice openly floated.”¹¹ Historical weather measurements show that November 1787 was indeed extremely cold, with temperatures falling as low as -5°C in Amsterdam (Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut). Both eighteenth-century annotators used a book that was printed two centuries prior to record these transitory experiences. A copy of Van Liesvelt’s Bible of 1526 (Leiden University Library, Collection Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, I.N.L. Vide B 22 F 38) displays how Bibles were also used to memorialise events from before the printing date: a sixteenth-century annotator commemorated the fifteenth-century St. Elisabeth’s Flood. This annotation illustrates the fact that the flood of 1421, which took the lives of approximately two thousand people, remained part of the collective memory well into the sixteenth century (Van Asperen, Pollmann “Of Living Legends” 108–115). Hence, exceptional weather spells across several centuries were given a place of commemoration and durability by placing them in the trustworthy space of the sixteenth-century Bible.

Natural forces and spells of extreme weather could greatly impact a local community. This is particularly evident in an event recorded in the Bible owned by Jan Vrancx, mentioned above (Maurits Sabbe Library P22.005.1/Fo BLJB 1560). He commemorated that “... the destruction of Mechelen [took place] anno 1546, the seventh day of August ... by the great thunderstorm.”¹² The event he refers to is the major explosion of the Zandpoort in

Mechelen. The Zandpoort was one of the smaller town gates and was primarily used to store the gunpowder supply. During a heavy thunderstorm on 7 August 1546, lightning struck the gate, resulting in a catastrophic explosion. Surrounding buildings were utterly destroyed and hundreds of people were left dead or injured (Duke 125). Although Mechelen is located considerably further away from Vrancx’s home in Heverlee than the other events mentioned in his annotations, the impact of this enormous destruction was far-reaching.

Contemporary accounts in pamphlets and chronicles generally perceived the disaster in Mechelen to be a warning or punishment by God (Duke 125–128). Throughout the premodern period and across confessional divides, natural occurrences were generally understood as fundamental manifestations of God’s power (Jorink 20–24). Observing the weather and gaining knowledge about natural phenomena was, hence, highly relevant to a wide range of people (Johnston 395), not only because weather spells could greatly impact various personal lives and communities, but also because through studying nature, one could become convinced of the almightiness of God’s power (Pettegree 335). Available for both the literate and illiterate, reading the ‘Book of Nature’ served as a way to gain knowledge about God alongside the Scriptures. In the examples discussed here, Bible owners positioned their observations of influential and exceptional ‘chapters’ of the Book of Nature within the very book that held the Word of God.

Conclusion

In many sixteenth-century Bibles the liminal spaces of endleaves and flyleaves are filled with experiences, memories, and identities as vibrant and dynamic as life itself. Simultaneously, it was here that

⁶ ... int jaer ons heeren mvc ende xlij lach voer Louen Merten van Rossem den eersten dach van augusto, op Sinte Peeters Banden dach, mer hij en heeft synen wille niet moeghen volbringhen daer God wil strijden, daer en mach hem niemant hienderen Louen.

⁷ ... int jaer ons Heeren mvc ende lxj den ixten dach meij, op Sinte Job auent, doen was den grote gheweldt Ter Banck ende tot tweel diuersche plaessen.

⁸ Item is in die groten schol den solder in gevallen dar so veel horren op lach, den 17 Augustus anno 1621. Ende sijn ses kinderen onder dat horren doet bleuen ende sijn alle gader indie kyrck begrauen.

⁹ Anno 1704 den 26 july syn alhier binnen emmerick seer grote hagelsteen gevalle waardoor viel schad geschiet is aen de glaes ende daeke.

¹⁰ “Anno 1701, on the 18th of January, our elector was crowned king” (Anno 1701 den 18 januari is onse cuervorst coninck gecroont); “Anno 1705, on the 5th of May, King Leopoldus died” (Anno 1705 den 5 meij is den keiser Leopoldus gestorven).

¹¹ Den 1 9ber 1786 ende volgende dagen was het soo cout dat op verschijde platsen de schelde was toe gevrosen en in andere het grondeijs openbaerlijck dreef.
Grondeijs is translated here as ‘anchor ice’, the formation of ice at the bottom of streams and rivers, which occurs at extreme temperatures.

¹² ... destruxcij van Mechelen anno m vc xlvj den viisten dach augusto ... van den groeten onweer.

transitions and transformations could eventually solidify, when the ink of an annotator's writing slowly settled between receptive paper fibres. The flyleaves of sixteenth-century Bibles were thus both inherently intertwined with and disconnected from the worlds in which they moved. As the examples presented in this article show, it was during moments of change, unpredictability, and personal or communal trauma that Bible owners found their books to be a place to safe-keep, stabilise, and commemorate those events that transformed their lives. In the hands of its users, the book could become a chest of memories and affirmations, guarded by wooden boards, patiently waiting before

being passed on as valuable heirlooms.

In the words of Evangelia Stead, books “partake of the way humans construct notions of truth, existence, the world, life itself” (14). This is not only the case for the practice of reading, but also for the practice of annotating a Bible. It is through handwritten notes on blank spaces at the beginning and the end of their books that users could reflect upon and establish their relationship with the events and experiences that shaped their identity. In the sacred space of the Bible, they could house themselves at their most vulnerable, their most shaken, their most impressed—all in the unlimited, tender care of the Word of God. ■

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From Paris to Pixels: Publicising Medieval Manuscripts during the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Irene O'Daly

In early March 2020, I visited Paris for research. As the train left Brussels the woman beside me, who was in her early 20s, coughed twice, and then turned to me and said, “Don’t worry, it isn’t the coronavirus”. We both laughed, and I turned back to my laptop to focus on the notes I had prepared for the trip. Sitting on that crowded train, a week before the first Dutch lockdown, the virus was a worry, but an abstract one, with international and work travel still permitted. On my return, only six days later, the journey was quite different. As the train pulled out of Gare du Nord, I breathed a sigh of relief that I was on my way home, knowing that drastic restrictions were imminent.

During the year of limitations on work and life which followed, I often thought back on those halcyon days in Paris, considering the way in which the city’s atmosphere slowly began to reflect the growing sense of concern and urgency in reaction to the early pandemic. Billboards advertising the municipal elections due to take place later that week jostled with signs advising the frequent washing of hands. I saw a handful of people wearing facemasks, never imagining how ubiquitous they would become only months later. By the end of the week, the manuscripts’ reading room in the Richelieu branch of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF, France’s national library), would close to the public, and since then the majority of my research, indeed the majority of my personal and professional life, has moved online. This short piece tells the story behind

that trip to Paris, from research to output, a story which parallels the proverbial shift from desk to desktop computer that has been the hallmark of the work-life of many researchers over the past year.

The principal objective of that trip to Paris was to gather material for an online exhibition which I was curating, along with three colleagues (Irene van Renswoude, Renée Schilling and Mariken Teeuwen) from Huygens ING, an institute of the Dutch Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam. The exhibition, *The Art of Reasoning in Medieval Manuscripts* (which launched in February 2021), showcases research we carried out from June 2016–June 2020 as part of the project “The Art of Reasoning: Techniques of Scientific Argumentation in the Medieval Latin West (400-1400)” (art-of-reasoning-.huygens.knaw.nl). The objective of the project, which was funded by NWO (the Dutch Research Council), was to trace the techniques used by medieval scholars to express argumentation, and demonstrate how these were articulated in manuscripts of the period (en.huygens.knaw.nl). The exhibition, in turn, aims to present examples of these techniques to a public or interested academic audience, and so illustrate the novelty of medieval intellectual practices.

Several manuscripts from the BnF are featured in the exhibition, which allows the viewer to get (albeit virtually) close to the books owned and used by scholars of the past. Written on the inert skins of animals, medieval

manuscripts are carriers of texts. It is thanks to these manuscripts, for example, that key works from antiquity were preserved, such as Cicero's *De inventione*, a Roman text on rhetorical practice written in the century before the birth of Christ. Unlike modern printed copies, manuscripts, made by hand, are inherently unique. Moreover, they often contain information about those who used and owned them; in often tiny script, squeezed between the lines of the text and encircling it in its margins, scholars recorded interpretations and critiques of what they read. These layers of annotations, akin to layers of earth built up at an archeological site, can reveal how scholars reasoned with texts and with each other. They also show how ideas regarding dialectic—the study of logic—and rhetoric—the study of speech—spread in the Middle Ages, whether in religious centres, schools or universities. Making sense of these, sometimes chaotic, layers of annotation can allow us to make sense of how the medieval reader understood a text, and bring hidden modes of study, debate, and interpretation to life.

The exhibition virtually unearths this intellectual past through several thematic strands. One, 'Teachers and Students', examines how dialectic and rhetoric, the arts of reasoning, were taught in the medieval classroom. One figure examined in this strand, Gerard d'Abbeville, was a former owner of some of the manuscripts I examined in the BnF (art-of-reasoning.huygens.knaw.nl/gerard). Upon his death in 1272, Gerard donated some 300 manuscripts to the library of the Sorbonne in Paris, a massive donation which doubled the library's collection. Gerard's manuscripts included cutting-edge works of medieval logic, such as Peter of Spain's *Summulae logicales*,

a thirteenth-century textbook. Gerard's copy (BnF MS lat. 16598) is illustrated with a scheme known as a 'Porphyrian Tree', used for representing the genera and species of a particular substance. Having only examined the black-and-white digitization prior to my research trip, I was struck when sitting in the library by the vibrant reds and greens used in Gerard's manuscript.¹ Even though this is a textbook, covered in student notes, care was clearly taken in its production.

Another manuscript I examined, BnF MS lat. 6638, a set of logical works copied in the tenth century in Fleury in France, contained a circular diagram which had been copied on a small square leaf of parchment, originally loose but now bound into the volume (see fig. 1). The diagram, which represented relationships between different types of logical propositions, was probably copied onto this loose leaf so that it could be rotated, consulted alongside texts, and perhaps used as an explanatory aid for teaching. It had survived by virtue of the fact that it was bound into its carrier manuscript, but as I turned the pages of the volume in the BnF, I could appreciate its dynamic quality.² Its dynamism contrasted with another copy of the diagram I had previously viewed in Leiden; in Leiden, UB BPL 139B, this wheel of propositions was copied into a manuscript containing Apuleius' *Peri hermenias* (the text from which the content of the wheel is borrowed, see fig. 2). There the diagram was statically presented; in order to rotate it, one has to rotate the whole book. By contrast I could imagine the leaf in BnF MS lat. 6638 being turned carefully in the hand of its medieval user; it was a tool actively used for personal study.

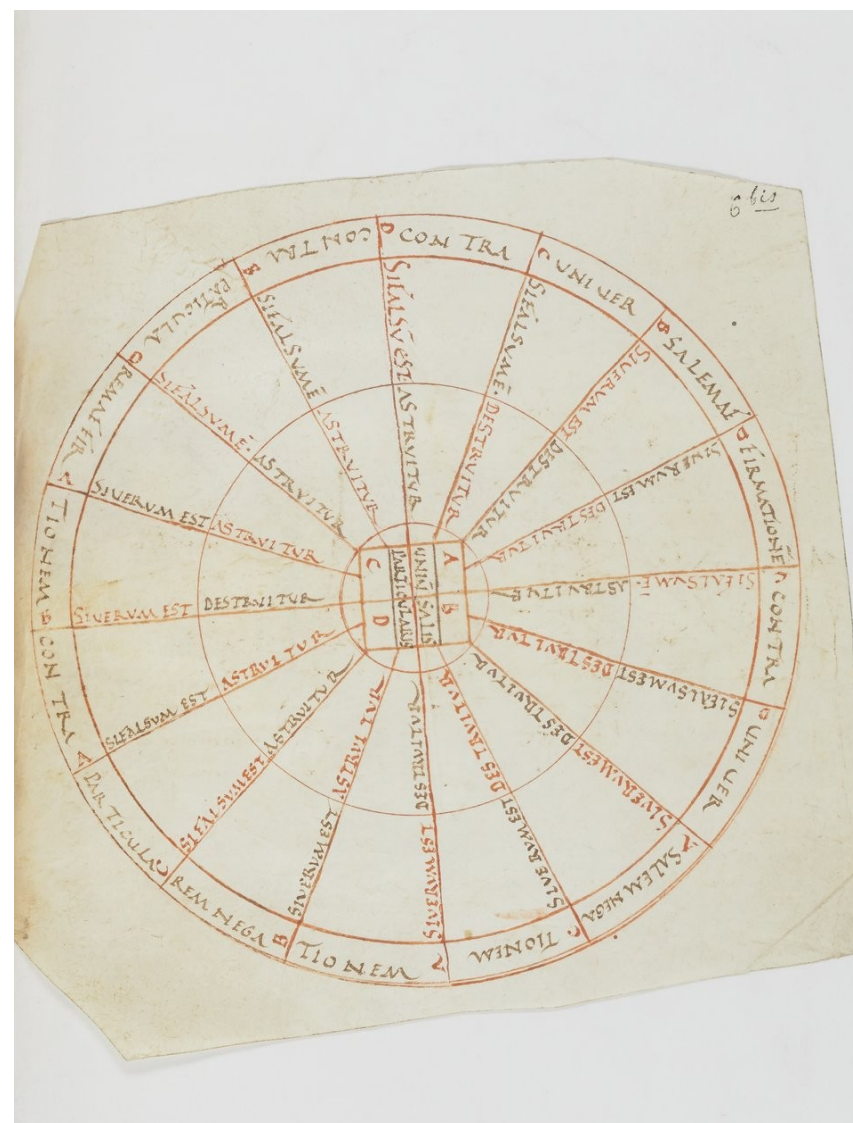


Fig 1: BnF MS lat. 6638, f. 6 bis. (Source: gallica.bnf.fr/BnF)

¹ The black-and-white image (BnF MS lat. 16598, f. 8v) can be viewed here: gallica.bnf.fr; the colour image is included on the exhibit page: art-of-reasoning.huygens.knaw.nl.

² Further information about how the scheme worked and an image demonstrating how the leaf is inserted into the manuscript can be found in the exhibition: I. O'Daly, 'Reasoning through syllogisms', The art of reasoning in medieval manuscripts (2020), art-of-reasoning.huygens.knaw.nl.

The work I did during those days in Paris, sitting by a window looking out at the ornate courtyard of the library, would assume a new significance for me in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. In a period of limited accessibility to libraries, our planned exhibition seemed prescient. Elements we had already envisaged for the exhibition, such as a trailer created by the animation studio Colorbleed—that concluded by diving into the annotations of a manuscript page, opening into an imagined, Escherian, foundation of infinite blocks of text—would convey the physical sense of turning the pages of a manuscript.³ Other structural features of the exhibition, such as the division into thematic strands (“Teachers and students”; “Glosses and diagrams”, “Debates and controversies”), would allow the visitor to browse the site through different entry points, navigating it based on their own interests, as one would work in a physical library.⁴ Meanwhile the “Manuscript

portraits”, a gallery of fourteen in-depth investigations of individual manuscripts, constitutes a virtual research trip for the user, full of tantalizing details which bring these books and their users to life (art-of-reasoning.huygens.knaw.nl/manuscripts).

The exhibition makes extensive use of images which libraries have generously made available for reuse under Creative Commons licenses. Indeed, the pandemic has underscored the necessity of opening access to research and resources beyond the walls of the university and the library. On a personal note, it has also reminded me of the immense privilege I have previously enjoyed in being able to travel and view manuscripts in person. I hope, in turn, that our exhibition will invite users into the world of the medieval scholar, potentially serving as a resource for educators and other parties interested in the fields of medieval history and the history of the book. ■

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³ The trailer can be viewed at vimeo.com/458930971. Information about its conception can be found at colorbleed.nl.

⁴ One can navigate to these strands from the homepage of the exhibition: I. O'Daly et al. *The art of reasoning in medieval manuscripts* (2020), art-of-reasoning.huygens.knaw.nl.

The ‘Reading Crisis’: Audiobooks to the Rescue?

By Adriaan van der Weel

Of late, at the same time as the reading of printed books has been declining, listening to audiobooks has become a very popular new way of consuming books. Well... ‘new’? Listening to stories goes back a very long way: back to the oral tradition that flourished long before writing and reading ever existed. As long as people have been talking to each other, they have been telling each other stories. Stories are very old social media: they connect people. For thousands of years, stories were passed down orally. The oldest stories we know stem from the storytelling tradition, such as the epics of *The Mahabharata*, *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*. When writing was invented, many of those stories were recorded and immortalised so they can still keep us spellbound today. We now read those age-old stories silently, in print, never even pausing to think that their creators never intended them for individual readers.

Tremendous growth in audiobooks at large

But are today's audiobooks really ‘books’—any more than we can call the ancient epics books? Whatever we may think about the phenomenon, the audiobook market is growing so fast that it makes good sense to examine it more closely. It's a big subject, and to make it a little more manageable I propose to look at it especially from an education perspective. In education there is actually a history of unsuccessful introductions of new, non-textual, media.

Will it work this time? What could be the implications? Before we can begin to answer such questions, let's briefly go over our existing reading practices, and the position of book reading in society today.

Over the course of less than a century, between the first few decades of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth, reading went from being the exclusive domain of a literate elite to a widespread popular pastime. Reading is almost single-handedly responsible for creating the particular type of modern democracy we inhabit today. Its core institutions, like justice, science and bureaucracy, totally depend on reading and writing. From the late nineteenth century the demand for literacy made by our increasingly sophisticated society steadily grew. However, soon the original vistas of self-development, emancipation, and political, economic and cultural uplift began to cloud over, and reading was gradually reduced to being a common ability, no more than a minimal condition for social and economic participation. Little is left today of the sense of promise and excitement that mass literacy engendered when it first became a realistic possibility. In fact, it has become so invisible, and so little is left of its former high standing that books and reading now find themselves in a rather precarious position.

The ‘reading crisis’

Reading clearly remains vitally important in many ways. Yet as the nineteenth-

century enthusiasm faded away, teaching, learning, as well as practising reading appear to have all become a bit of a chore. As schools find themselves at a loss on how to inspire students to read beyond the barest necessity, they retreat to an ever more functional and pragmatic approach to reading education. As a result, the sort of literacy we had about fifty years ago is now rapidly disappearing and the spectre of 'low literacy' has come to haunt even the most advanced societies. The latest PISA report (2019) shows that by 2018 nearly a quarter of Dutch young people's reading abilities had fallen below the basic level that PISA considers necessary to function in society. At the same time, the report shows that reading motivation of 15-year-olds has reached an all-time low. Sixty-three percent only read when they have to, 42 percent of students consider reading a waste of time, and 59 percent of students read only to look up information. Given this lack of enthusiasm, it is hardly surprising to find time-use surveys showing that the time spent on reading has been consistently declining for quite a while. In 1975, the Dutch still read 6.1 hours a week in print media and the 'participation rate' (people engaging in reading at all) was 96%. In 2005 this was down to 3.8 hours and 81%, and in 2018 it had dwindled to barely 1.5 hours and 83%. In line with this dramatic drop in reported reading time, library loans are also plummeting. While 173 million loans were registered in 1995, that number declined rapidly, to 142 million in 2000, 93 million in 2010, and 61 million in 2019. (I've represented the Dutch case here, but in most OESO countries participating in PISA the figures are very similar.)

Statistics being statistics, the figures require interpretation. If age is taken into account, for example, the time-use survey figures align even more closely with the dramatic PISA results. For under the age of 35, the number of readers and their reading time declined even more sharply than the

overall figures show. This obviously casts its shadow ahead. The literacy levels that used to accompany widespread long-form reading and deep reading are a thing of the past. Reading is clearly under mounting pressure.

The digital pressures on reading

It looks as if recent digital developments should take much of the blame for this pressure. Excessive screen use has a negative impact on the motivation to engage in long-form reading. To begin with, we're all only too familiar with how the digital medium tinges everything with a sense of urgency. Screens constantly give us the impression that we might be missing out on things that are always just one mouse click away. This leads to a lesser preparedness to spend time on something as slow as long-form reading.

Next, screens offer very serious direct competition to (long-form) reading. In terms of the amount of disposable (leisure) time, all sorts of screen-based activities—from film and video to social media and games—gobble up precious reading time. Not only that, but with their use of sound, graphics, and video these competing attractions and distractions tend to be less cognitively demanding than reading text, which only adds to their attraction. Indeed, even when it comes to reading specifically, very often the same or very similar materials are available in other, less cognitively demanding modalities than text. When it was still primarily a matter of print on paper, reading used to be really separate from other media and modalities, and it would naturally be judged separately. Digitally, however, reading is confronted on its own turf—viz., the screen—by these other media and modalities, and it suffers in the comparison. Apart from the greater cognitive effort reading requires, for less fluent readers it is also slower than listening or viewing, and to top it all off, the words that make up the text seem rather

dull and lifeless. They stand tediously still, they don't beep and they don't have gaudy colours. They require an active brain to animate them: a mind willing to go seek them out and play with them.

More insidiously, digital habits have been found to undermine the quality of all reading, whether on or off screen. Our excessive screen use may help us to make reading miles, mailing, texting, blogging, commenting, using social media, et cetera. But while digital reading miles cover distance, they don't 'do' depth. Scanning of text appears to be the norm, favouring quantity while impeding deep engagement. Moreover, there is a 'screen disadvantage': texts read from screen are taken less seriously than the same texts read from paper. And this has proved not to be a temporary hitch, while we wait for younger, 'digital-born' generations to grow up with reading from screen. Instead, the screen disadvantage has turned out to actually be getting worse over time. Here the most worrying development is that modern screen reading habits (characterised by scanning and not taking the text very seriously) appear to be extended also to non-screen texts, including even books.

That famous reader, Alberto Manguel, recalled later in life how reading provided to him, as the son of a diplomat, "a permanent home, and one I could inhabit exactly as I felt, at any time, no matter how strange the room in which I had to sleep or how unintelligible the voices outside my door". Every book that accompanied him on his travels was to him "a world unto itself" in which he could take refuge. That a book can be a whole world unto itself would very likely scare rather than soothe readers accustomed to the scanning of text in quantity rather than deeply and lengthily engaging with it.

Does all this matter?

That may sound like a rhetorical question, but it is not meant as one. The digital world

is still expanding and, realistically, its impact can only be expected to grow. Might it not make sense in the circumstances to accept simply that deep reading has had its day and that any effort to revive it is like flogging a dead horse? It may be tempting to agree. But before we do, let's survey the relevant known facts about long-form reading first. As we know, a long list of personal and social advantages is associated with reading, and especially long-form reading. At the risk of repeating the obvious, let me sum up some of the most important ones. Reading reduces stress and it improves our understanding of language (vocabulary: breadth and depth), our imagination and empathy, our focus and attention, and thus our ability to engage in abstract and analytical thought. A good reader can think better, and is able to exercise more control over how and what he or she is thinking. Moreover, reading (especially of books, thus again long-form text) correlates with wellbeing, educational performance, socio-economic status, mental health and life expectancy. In a social context, correlations have also been found with social integration and reduced crime levels. So reading, especially of long-form books, is extremely useful, both for individual literacy and wellbeing and for society. The only snag is that some of the most desirable benefits of long-form book reading are unintended side-effects. Learning to think more critically and deeply is not why most people are motivated to become avid readers. A healthy, stable democracy could probably not exist without the cognitive patience and abstract and analytical thinking promoted by long-form reading, but again, this is hardly the reason why we pick up a good book. As unintended side-effects, these outcomes therefore remain under the radar. That they are also very hard to measure only helps to keep them invisible. Yet invisibility doesn't make them any less vital.

Audiobooks to the rescue?

Is the tremendous growth in audiobooks yet another pressure on reading or could their growing popularity help reading to recover terrain lost to the wealth of screen-based activities that seduce readers away from books? Audiobooks have a lot going for them. They are often longform, and they testify to the timeless appetite for storytelling. They may use a different modality, but being stories, they are likely to stimulate fantasy, imagination, mental imagery, empathy, complexity of social relations, perspective taking as much as textual reading does. And being language-based (rather than, say, primarily visual), audiobooks will also contribute to the listener's linguistic competence, such as vocabulary, grammar and syntax (though not of course spelling).

Given the problems of young people with (long-form) reading reported above, audiobooks could be a welcome addition to the repertoire of learning materials in education, in particular in foreign language teaching. Also, compared to earlier attempts at introducing 'multimedia' like radio and TV in the classroom, conditions would seem to be more favourable. Listening to podcasts (and videos of talking heads) has become a staple of people's daily media behaviour. Moreover, the necessary hardware is now cheap and ubiquitous. It can in principle be the same computers or personal digital devices like mobile phones, tablets, notebooks, et cetera already in widespread use for staying abreast in the communication society.

In addition, among the characteristics that set it uniquely apart from paper books, the audio format allows multitasking. Listening can thus make productive time that would otherwise not be available for reading. But perhaps the greatest appeal of audiobooks is that audio, as I suggested earlier, is less cognitively demanding than reading. There is no need to engage in

something as unnatural as the laborious decoding of the meanings of symbolic signs that we call reading. Thus there is no need even to be literate. Again, this feature also offers obvious opportunities in remedial situations in education. At the same time, this important difference between reading and listening is precisely why we should explore the significance of turning to audio as a 'reading' technology for education a bit further.

So what is not to like about audiobooks?

At the risk of appearing ungrateful at a time when we should be looking for solutions for the diminishing popularity of book reading rather than fresh problems, I would like to mention some issues.

Bearing in mind the cognitive effects of reading as a textual medium that we just rehearsed, the chief problem with audiobooks is that, despite their name, audiobooks are not books. You don't read them as you do books; you listen to them. Why should that be an issue? What does reading offer that listening doesn't? The obvious and simple answer is: the very fact that it requires you to be literate. In that sense, listening is a cop out, precisely because it doesn't require the cognitively demanding step of decoding characters. Listening does not demand the same level of concentration (focused attention) and patience, and so is not as good at fostering abstract and analytical thinking. Listening is less of an exercise in restraint, demanding less from the brain's cognitive frontal lobe functions. Altogether, listening is more passive. The narrator will, for example, do some of the interpretation (intonation, stress, et cetera) that is usually demanded from the reader. Finally, because no reading is involved, listening to audiobooks does not offer help in achieving or practising the fluent decoding skills needed to function properly in our advanced literate society. In an educational setting this is especially

relevant.

With its different inherent characteristics listening has advantages over reading that make the new kid welcome on the block. However, listening cannot contribute very much to some of the effects of reading and literacy that we have just identified as being vital to our advanced literate culture. Reading has taught the human mind the ability of disciplined concentration on an unmoving text. It has taught it focused attention and patience. Reading is a powerful means to train the mind and literacy is a more amazing feat than we usually give it credit for. Listening to audiobooks, by contrast, doesn't help to

flex the frontal lobe muscle in the same way. These unintended side effects of literacy and reading may have started as a mere windfall, yet for all of their being unintended, over the centuries we have unsuspectingly come to rely on them. They have become vital to prepare us for functioning in a literate, bureaucratic, and democratic society.

That audiobooks do not carry the same benefits as paper books doesn't mean they are not a wonderful additional medium to experience narrative texts. However, if audiobooks are regarded as a replacement of book reading, we do stand to lose something. ■

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Reading on Lockdown

By Mirjam Rörsch

The lockdown had an impact on every single person, whether financially, mentally, or on our health (World Health Organization). Some people lost their jobs or had to suddenly teach their children at home; others might have changed their lifestyle, taken up exercising, started eating healthy, or decluttered their homes (Pantony and London). With all the changes we are currently facing, one could assume that they are also having an impact on people's reading behaviors: for example, some might have started reading the newspaper while others bought a Kindle to read digitally, since decluttering became a point of focus for many and switching to digital carriers means that readers do not enlarge their physical book collections. This paper will discuss whether Dutch readers changed their reading carrier during the lockdown in spring 2020 and what the consequences of such a switch are. Do readers notice a difference between text on paper and digital text? If so, does this influence their reading behaviour? Are there indications that the use of digital texts increased during the pandemic, and what does existing research say about differences in reading perception of paper-based reading and the reading of digital texts? To answer these questions, this essay will first focus on research concerning the choice of a carrier and differences between the reading of digital texts and the ones on paper. After these theoretical findings, this essay will present data from an online survey which focused on the reading of narrative books for leisure. The results of the study will then help to conclude if the reading practices of Dutch readers have changed during the lockdown.

The carrier and its influence

In her article from 2019, Kristensen mentions four criteria that influence what carrier or reading medium a reader chooses (the terms 'carrier' and 'medium' will be used interchangeably in this essay): cultural and social belonging; remediation and physicality; technology acceptance and usage of new technology; and, finally, affect and emotions. With respect to cultural and social belonging, Kristensen looks to the field of cultural studies, which claims that media have an impact on people as they give them different experiences and identities. Furthermore, researchers are convinced that consumers are not just passive recipients of content but that they actively appreciate different cultural products, like books, in different ways. As McLuhan argues, the experience of reading is impacted by the medium one uses (Meyrowitz 192). This makes it seem logical that readers choose their carrier wisely. McLuhan states, for example, that the book has always been a display of knowledge (Kristensen); when reading digitally, however, one does not collect books on a bookshelf. This means that cultural capital is not as visible as it would be with paper books, which of course has an influence on how readers are perceived (Kristensen).

Pressman argues that the physicality of a bound book is important as well, not just the knowledge which can be found inside. This means that the collector of the books does not just focus on their content, but also on other factors (Kristensen). According to Kristensen, Bolter and Grusin state that one medium can be represented

in another, which is called remediation. This connects to McLuhan's thought that a medium can transcend the content (Meyrowitz 192). Regarding the physicality, Kristensen states that a book can also display social and symbolic capital. As soon as one puts a book on the shelf, visitors can see it and get an impression about the reader from it. This thought resembles the one regarding social and cultural belonging.

The third aspect is technology acceptance (Kristensen). There are several components to this. First, Davis found that technical difficulties are tolerated by its users, as long as the technology works (Kristensen). Furthermore, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have an influence on the use of technology. Torres et al. conducted a study to discover more about the motivations one might have regarding the use of an e-reader and found that not only intrinsic and extrinsic motivations add to technology acceptance, but playfulness as well. Additionally, the amount of available content for e-readers has an impact (Kristensen). Besides that, the results of a Japanese study show that compatibility impacts the growth of digital reading too (Kristensen). Naturally, normative influences such as peer groups and mainstream popularity also have an impact (Kristensen). Kristensen sums up four groups in the discussion 'book versus print'.¹ The two most radical groups are the 'book lovers' and the 'technophiles'. They are emotionally attached to the carrier of their choice and the book as a (physical) object. 'Pragmatists', on the other hand, see positive and negative things in both carriers and therefore use both, while the 'printers' like to search for literature on the internet but prefer reading on paper (Kristensen).

The final aspects which impact the choice of a carrier are emotions and affect (Kristensen). While emotions are experienced feelings, affect escapes human awareness. Affect is a type of feeling, but it can often not be distinguished; sometimes

people do not even realize that they are affected by something or someone. The user of a product affects everyone else who is looking at how said product is used. This usage can, for instance, invoke some emotions which affect our adaption behaviors (Kristensen): because we see how people use an e-reader and how much they like it, we might feel like we also want to have this same experience, which is why we end up buying an e-reader ourselves. This makes affect a social and an individual experience, as our individual feelings towards an idea or product create affect on another person (Kristensen).

Kristensen's discoveries clearly show that the choice for digital texts is well-considered, with the image one gains or loses when choosing a medium playing an important role. Furthermore, the use of technology, its user-friendliness, the affect users have on non-users, and the range of products should not be underestimated. In a study conducted by Wilson et al., 56% of the participants favored printed reading over digital reading while 42% said that they were insecure or uncomfortable with the use of e-books, which underlines Kristensen's point (Wilson et al. 12).

In Van der Weel's *Changing Our Textual Minds*, it is argued that printed books form the baseline for judgement, even though there are many new technologies. From a very young age we learn the importance of books, mostly at school, which is why we cannot let that thought go. Therefore, Van der Weel asserts that the importance of the book will not just disappear, but instead remains an important factor when choosing a medium (64). Before looking at the impact of reading carriers, it must be noted that, according to a study conducted by Cai et al. in 2017, gender does not have an impact on technology use, which is an important presumption for this essay (Kristensen). According to Van der Weel (13):

Manuscript, print, radio, television, and the digital medium each have traits that predispose us to particular types of

¹ By this Kristensen touches upon the discussion 'reading on paper versus reading digital'. I would however not use the terms 'book versus print' as a digital text might also been perceived as a 'book' and a 'print' can be interpreted as a paper book.

knowing, and particular types of knowledge, and so ultimately affect the way we see the world and our place in it.

Although Van der Weel later argues that the medium of our choice does not absolutely predispose how we think, as gaining knowledge is a process which combines language, the medium, and cultural differences—the medium can determine our way of thinking and how we see the world (17). What we know is thus partly regulated through the medium and the opportunity it offers to organize and transmit our knowledge. Digital text can shape our understanding in a different way than printed text does (Van der Weel 17), and this is why the next part of this section is dedicated to findings regarding reading on different carriers.

Delgado et al. argue that it is not clear how the carrier affects the reading outcome overall (24). Nevertheless, their study did find that paper-based reading should be favored in educational matters, as it has a positive effect on reading comprehension (33-34). However, as it is not possible to avoid reading on screens, educators must make sure children and students learn to navigate digital texts as well (36). Delgado et al. examined not just educational materials but also narrative texts, although the carrier had no influence on reading comprehension of the latter (34). These conclusions are in line with the Stavanger Declaration, which also found that the reading medium has no impact on readers of narrative texts (1). However, while the results were not significant, Delgado et al. could identify a small preference for reading on computers than on handheld devices and digital texts which require scrolling (34). Furthermore, Delgado et al. determined that the educational level and the age of readers did not impact the participants' understanding (34).

As Mangen and Van der Weel argue, the deep reading we are used to is now changing to a more shallow reading, due to the shift from paper to digital reading (117). This change can be explained due to the fact

that attitudes towards reading are changing and that screens are taking over from printed books (117). There are several studies on reading behaviors and differences between reading off a screen and reading off paper, like Ackermann and Goldsmith presented in 2011 (18-32). However, these all focus on educational reading, like Mangen et al. 2013 or Siegenthaler et al. 2011.

This means that although there are noticeable differences when a person reads an informative text on paper compared to when they read the same text digitally, these differences do not apply to narrative texts read for pleasure. Additionally, gender, age, and previous education do not affect the difference a carrier might have. This paper aimed to discover whether the carrier has an influence on readers and if they notice it. One could say that the first part of this question has now been answered: when reading narrative texts there is no difference, although social and technology acceptance and reading tradition might lead readers to believe that there is. These opinions will be discussed in the following sections, with help of the previously mentioned case study.

Reading on lockdown, a case study

As previously indicated, one could assume that the lockdown had an impact on people's reading behavior. In several conversations people mentioned that they broadened their knowledge about specific topics during the lockdown. They educated themselves about the Black Lives Matter Movement or took up a new hobby which resulted in them reading different genres and topics than before the lockdown, hence the hypothesis that some readers switched their genre of choice. This seemed something worth researching and will be discussed in an essay by G. Sastrosoedjono (2021). This, however, raised the question if just the genres people were interested in changed, or whether they changed more about their reading behavior. This paper aims to find out if people changed their reading medium between the 16th of March

2020 and the 30th of June 2020.² To this end, a survey was conducted between November 2020 and January 2021. It was spread through several social media channels and targeted Dutch adult readers (no younger than 18). 98 people answered the questions. In table 1, you can find some primary information about the participants.

This overview makes it clear that this paper is predominantly based on the reading behaviour of people who have a bachelor's or master's degree in applied sciences. The survey was mostly taken by people between the ages of 18 and 25.

N=98	
Gender	
Female	75,5%
Male	23,5%
Age	
18-25	36,7%
26-35	15,3%
46-55	14,3%
56-65	19,4%
66-75	13,3%
Education	
HBO/WO	76,6%
MBO	10,2%
Secondary school	10,2%

Table 1: Overview of survey participants, split up in gender, age and education.

Of the ninety-eight participants, thirty-eight said that they read more during the lockdown, twelve people read less, and the reading behavior of forty-seven people did not change. In table 2 the used carrier both before and after the lockdown can be found, as well as the changes readers made. In this table the numbers for the people who did not change their carrier are not mentioned.

There were many different answers to the question which type of texts people read digitally or on paper. Most people read their books as a hard copy but chose a digital carrier for the news. There was, however, one person who flipped those two around, preferring paper-based reading for

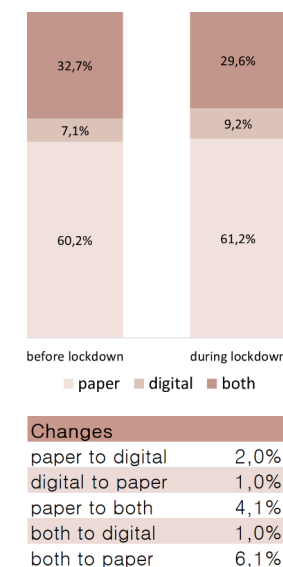


Table 2: Reading carriers used by participants before and during the lockdown.

news articles and magazines. Most people have carrier and genre preferences: they read fantasy or the bible on paper, for instance, and the rest online. One person mentioned that she reads everything online, except for cookbooks. Although the focus of this paper is leisure reading, many people answered that they prefer digital reading for study materials. Six people said that they read depending on what carrier is at hand: if they have an interesting book on their shelf they read the hard copy, and they read a digital version whenever they see an interesting title whilst they browse online. Four people read digital whenever this gives them a financial advantage, because that version is less expensive than the hard copy. Some people also download the digital text as a free PDF. Three people said that they always buy the physical book from certain authors or genres but do not do so with others. One person reads digital texts

² The intelligent lockdown started on the 23rd of March, according to a speech Premier Rutte gave and which can be found on "Premier Rutte: dit is een intelligente lockdown", NOS News, 23 March 2020, <https://nos.nl/video/2328097-premier-rutte-dit-is-een-intelligente-lockdown.html>. Accessed 17 January 2021. However, the schools had to close on the 16th of March and people were urged to work from home. That is why this paper defines the 16th as the starting point of the lockdown. See also: Rijksoverheid.nl. "Aanvullende maatregelen onderwijs, horeca, sport." 15 March, 2020. rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/03/15/aanvullende-maatregelen-onderwijs-horeca-sport. Accessed 17 January 2021. As from the 1st of July on most places, like gyms, were open again, and cinemas and restaurants etc. could welcome 100 instead of 30 people, the 30th of June has been chosen as the end date of this lockdown. More information can be found on Wikipedia. "Coronacrisis in Nederland", nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronacrisis_in_Nederland. Accessed 17 January 2021.

Presupposing	Reason	Answers in numbers (N = 98)
Print because	Digital reading is not good for my eyes/ I already have too much screen time.	11
Print because	I do not have the right hardware.	2
Print because	I love the book and its traits.	28
Print because	I just do not like reading digitally.	8
Print because	I like having the book on my shelf/ like going to the bookstore.	3
Digital because	Digital carriers are easy to take with me/ easy to access.	22
Digital because	More choice/ easier access to digital books.	3
Open	I buy the version which costs less.	9

Table 3: Reasons why participants chose their carrier.

on vacation and paper books at home. One participant has started reading e-books during the lockdown, as bookshops were closed.

There are a lot of different reasons why people decide to read on paper or on screen, and they often have several of them, as can be seen in table 3.

Table 3 does not contain the complete list of reasons. While some people prefer reading digitally because e-readers have lights, other people see that as a disadvantage. Some people just really like their carrier, whether it is paper or a screen. One person prefers screens because they feel it is better for the environment. However, a lot of people just love the feeling of a book: they say that they are more focused when reading on paper and that a physical book also offers more comfort. A large group prefers the practicality of e-books, as they can take a lot of different texts with them. Furthermore, digital texts allow the reader to search for keywords or to mark important parts, which makes texts more accessible for some people. Some participants mentioned that they preferred paper-based reading especially during the times of corona, as they already spend too much time on

screens. Paper-based reading is sometimes also used as a division between work and free time. One person's statement was quite direct and gave an insight into the feelings people sometimes have towards digital reading. The participant said: "I read—therefore paper" ("Ik lees—dus papier.") He does not count digital reading as reading at all.

One question of the survey was whether people feel a difference between reading from paper and reading digitally. Twenty-three people said that they are less concentrated and/or more easily tired out when reading from a screen. Nine people stated that they get problems with their eyes and/or headaches. Several people mentioned their reading speed; while some of them read faster from a screen, others have a higher reading speed when reading from paper. A majority of all the participants said that they just like one of the carriers better, without giving any further explanation.

Six participants mentioned that their opinion towards digital reading changed during the lockdown. One person switched from paper to digital texts as they do not have enough room to store all the physical books. Another person realized that they

could read digital texts during the night whenever they cannot fall asleep. Both these partakers went from reading on paper to reading digitally. One participant went from reading on paper to both carriers, as they got a Storytel subscription, which also allows them to read e-books. Two people did have a more negative view on digital reading after the lockdown, as they did not appreciate more screen time and one of them sometimes gets headaches from digital reading. Someone else mentioned that digital carriers allow the reader to enlarge the font, although this person did not switch from paper to a digital carrier.

The results of this study are in some respects quite interesting and varied, while other aspects, like the influence people feel, are narrowed down to just a few different responses which were mentioned by several participants. In the next section these results will be discussed further.

Discussion

This survey made clear that readers can have feelings towards a reading carrier and there are plenty of reasons why one would switch. This is only logical when looking back at the concepts of affect, emotion, and attitude, which have already been discussed. The impacts people believe their carrier has on them are, however, less in number. At the beginning of the previous section, it became clear that just a small percentage of readers did switch to a new or additional reading carrier. The largest increase can be found in paper-based readers who switched to a more fluid combination of paper-based and digital reading. Two people switched from paper-based reading to digital reading completely. One person switched from digital reading to paper. One reason for that could be that life started to revolve more around online activities during lockdown, as can be found in the answers to this survey. Reading from paper might therefore offer an opportunity to get away from the digital environment. This assumption can be backed up by the

number of readers who went from reading digitally and analogue to just paper, which was 6,1%. There were, however, also other reasons why people changed their carriers. One person mentioned that she does not like to print academic articles for environmental reasons, but she prefers reading from paper.

It became clear that a substantial number of participants have personal reasons for (not) switching carriers, for instance because their eyes have problems adjusting to digital reading. Several people have financial motivations to choose a carrier: they want the lowest price, or they have a subscription to an e-book platform which enables them to take "greater risks" in their choice of text to read, as they can now read a book they are maybe less interested in and do not have to pay extra for it. One participant reads the news online, as they can use the account of their parents for free. There were also a few people who mentioned their bookshelves and collections, which seems to support Kristensen's claim that choosing a carrier is impacted by factors like cultural and social belonging, remediation, and physicality (Kristensen).

As already mentioned, some participants prefer reading on paper as they can make a better distinction between work and leisure time or because they already use their computers very often. It was interesting to see that some people made a distinction between reading from a laptop/mobile device or from an e-reader. One person said that reading from an e-reader is for them quite the same as reading a paper book, but reading from a laptop or mobile device is more tiring as the screen is different and there are more distractions. This can be explained by the fact that some devices, like a laptop, offer internet connectivity and do not offer an e-ink screen. However, an e-reader offers less connectivity and a more suitable screen for long-term reading. Twenty-three people mentioned that their focus is diminished

when reading on a digital carrier. There is reason to believe that these participants were referring to reading from a laptop or a mobile device as they mentioned that they get distracted by messages, other apps, or the Internet. This makes clear that reading should happen in a quiet environment, without any other distractions, which some participants claim they can experience only with a printed book. An e-reader would be a good solution for people who like to read digitally but get distracted by other functions of their device.

There were several partakers who said that they could not absorb the information when read digitally as well as when they read it on paper. However, there is no data which supports this (E-Read, "Stavanger Declaration", 1). This means that there must be another reason for this claim. One explanation could be that people who read digitally actually read on a laptop, which offers them more distraction and prevents them from being focused. On the other hand, some people just do not like digital reading or have a very strong preference for the paper book. As Van der Weel (64) already mentioned, people are raised with the idea that they learn from books, which leads to a strong preference for paper reading. This feeling may have led to a perceived disadvantage of digital reading. Readers might think they absorb the information less well, as they do not want to admit that there is a digital replacement for the paper book or because they realize that reading digital informational texts are better understood when read on paper. They connect this experience with leisure reading. This means that the effect they experience might be imagined, or it might be true because it is a self-fulfilling prophecy and people act differently when using a digital carrier.

This study made clear that the choice of a reading medium is often well-considered, even though people might have different reasons to disregard one or the other. The

most important reasons will be summarized in the conclusion, as well as several significant discoveries from other scholars.

Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to identify criteria readers might have when choosing a reading carrier and what influence reading off paper and reading from a screen might have. There are several reasons why people prefer one reading medium over the other; these reasons are influenced by social circumstances, the physicality of the book, technology acceptance, and emotions and affect, as presented by Kristensen. According to her, people want to display their knowledge in the form of books, which might often be a reason why people favor the hard copy. Furthermore, people are used to the book as a reading medium and the carrier of knowledge distribution, which is why people often tend to prefer the printed book. According to several researchers there are, however, no differences in understanding between reading narrative texts from paper or from a screen. This is very different when reading informative texts, where the medium does have a significant impact (Delgado et al. 34). Overall, the medium can have an impact on the way we think, as a book is not just a text alone but a combination of its medium, cultural differences, and language. The carrier might thus have an impact on how we perceive the world (Van der Weel, 17).

In addition to the impact a reading carrier might have on leisure reading, the assumption was made that during the lockdown, when so many things changed, people also might have changed their reading behavior. In the conducted study participants were asked to answer questions regarding the number of books they read before and during the lockdown and if they started using other mediums as well. It became clear that 39,8% read more in the targeted 3.5 months. There were just

a few who changed from paper-based reading to only digital reading and vice versa, yet there were several people who started using both carriers as opposed to one. When asked about the impact they feel the carrier has on them, several people said that they were easily distracted when reading digitally and that it was bad for their eyes. Of the people who did read digitally, a majority said that they value the practicality of digital reading as an e-reader or other reading device weighs less and one can have several books on one gadget.

An interesting finding of this paper was the number of people that read the book for the book. One person said reading is not reading without a book. Some people like flipping the page, others like the smell of it or the possibility to see how many pages they have left. They really value the book for its physical traits.

One could argue that the influence of the lockdown on the choice of reading

carrier was not significant, but it was there. Only six people said that their opinion towards digital reading changed during the lockdown. Three people started to appreciate digital carriers, two were negative about them, and one person did see a positive aspect, although this did not impact their use of them. Some people mentioned that they favored the physical book as they already work a lot on screens, so they use the paper book as a division between work and free time and to relax their eyes. Other people started reading digitally as bookshops had to close. The most important influence the lockdown did have was on the number of books people read. More than a third of all the participants did read more and that is for sure something worth highlighting. Even if the lockdown did change many things, it changed at least some things for the better, as more books got the attention they (probably) deserve. ■

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Reflection Pieces

Students and teachers reflect on how they experienced the forced online environment during lockdown.

A Day in the Life of an at-Risk Student

By Lesley Joy Rietvelt

It is Thursday—that means I have the house to myself. I clean, study and read and thank him when he comes back. He did the groceries again, all the shopping and filling the tank. He has not seen his friends or family, gave up parties and dinners. I thank him again, for everything he has done.

The isolation has been difficult, but it is getting easier after a year. The guilt has not changed—it is always there. I ask him if it would have been better had I moved out. It would give him the freedom to be the same as others—to sneak out, pay the fines, complain about festivals being cancelled. But he just smiles and shakes his head: “I would rather be with you instead”.

That night we watch the news, and I softly cry. *Young people are suffering from the lack of social contact. Businesses are drowning in debt. We need to go back to normal, even if it means we risk a few lives.* I realise I will be stuck in the house for even longer, which means he will too. I look over to him and feel the guilt creeping in again.

The freer the world is, the more imprisoned we feel.

Playing Video Games to Socialize

By Sofia Guido

I am in the very privileged position of not having been too affected by the pandemic, academically speaking. Thus far I have had very available and supportive professors, supervisors, and classmates, who have made the whole journey very pleasant. Unfortunately, since the start of the pandemic, I have almost entirely stopped reading for personal interest. After spending so much time indoors in front of screens reading to prepare for classes and assignments, I am not too motivated to read for personal interest. Because of COVID-19-related restrictions, in-person interactions are limited, so my friends and I have resorted to meeting up online and playing video games to socialize. I have therefore worked on my digital literacy: I re-discovered video games and the myriad of worlds they open. Specifically, I experienced their utility as platforms for socializing, as well as storytelling, depending on the type of video game. I am really interested in Ancient Greece, so I decided to play *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*. The game does an amazing job at storytelling, so even though during this pandemic I haven't read many books, I have read through video games.

Perpetual lockdown as experienced from within temporary contract prison

By Gerlov van Engelenhoven

On 23 December 2020, ING posted their End of the Year Video on Facebook, with the caption: “This year tested all of us in many ways. It demanded so much from everyone, stretching our limits like never before. But through it all you also showed your resilience. Here's to 2021!” The video shows lots of quirky moments with even quirkier captions: a man is lying on the floor, lifting his toddler up and down like a barbell, with the caption: “Finding new gym partners”; someone is filming their baby in a chair next to their

computer, with the caption “Meeting new colleagues”; and then there's a whole series of selfies taken from people's highly creative remote work places at home, with the caption “Showing off your new corner office.”

The advertisement is possibly intended to make everyone feel better and offer some emotional support, reminding us that we're all in this together: “It was a challenging year, but that didn't stop you from doing your thing”, the captions tell us, before launching into ING's slogan, “Do your thing.” I think it's a quite sympathetic message, for a bank, and yet these quirky examples fill me with a sense of dread: the final veil that separated private from public life has been torn away. We are now always at home, therefore we are now always at work. Who needs parental leave if you can take your meetings from your laptop next to your newborn baby? This is scary to me.

To be fair, this breach of the boundary between private and public life did indeed enable me to “do my thing” in 2020. After finishing my PhD in Giessen, Germany, I moved back to Den Haag in the summer of 2020 and started working on temporary contracts as a teacher for three different institutes: the BA programme Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics (PPLE) at the University of Amsterdam, the BA Film and Literary studies at Leiden University, and the BA and MA programs Photography and Society at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. For all three of these jobs I had my job interviews either via Zoom or phone call. I did not have to travel to the Netherlands in my best suit, leaving my wife in Giessen with our twins: two one-year-olds, climbing up the walls, breaking things, and endangering themselves in myriad other creative ways. Instead, I discussed didactic and pedagogical questions with my future employers from the relative comfort of my apartment, wearing sweatpants and slippers while my wife and kids visited the park around the corner. After the interviews were finished, I would close my laptop and start cooking dinner for them.

To be very clear, the fact that I have three jobs in three different cities is not a testament to workaholic tendencies or a fear of coherent commitment from my side; rather, it's a symptom of the sad fate of early career researchers. We're forced to spread ourselves too thin, and we are granted no stability or future perspective. We jump from temporary contract to temporary contract, structurally forced to be disloyal to our current employer: we have no choice but to always look out for better options that could provide us with more certainty, knowing that we'll be forced out of our current employment after a maximum of three years. Since the second half of 2020, my colleagues from the Casual Leiden initiative have been working hard to raise awareness about this illogical status quo in order to engender lasting change.

In the meantime, however, I must continue to balance three jobs not only to arrive at full-time employment, which none of my separate employers are offering me, but also to make sure that I don't end up without work at any point. As such, my Leiden contract starts in January, while my Amsterdam and The Hague contracts start in August and September, respectively: by organizing my employment like this, I ensure that whenever one of my three-year temporary contract cycles runs out I'll still have others running. It's pretty crazy, but that's life for a large majority of young academic teachers today. Forced to work under these unstable circumstances, I often find myself feeling grateful (but to whom?) for the fact that at least I currently don't have to travel between Amsterdam, Leiden and The Hague five days a week. Instead, I am capable of taking meetings for two of my jobs in a row by simply switching Zoom space. I've been able to take my online office hours for students of one university in between teaching my online classes for a different university, all from the comfort of my home. I can walk my kids to daycare and stroll back via the supermarket, sit down at the office next to my bed, open my laptop and start teaching.

However, the gratitude I feel for this situation must be taken with a hard-to-swallow grain of salt. After all, I'm describing a situation in which the seemingly perpetual full-

society lockdown feels like a step forward as compared to “usual life,” in which I would be forced to be all over the country all week long just to make a living. I’m pursuing the elusive carrot of permanent employment and running from the endless stick of my final temporary contract running out, which would stain my CV with at least a half year of unemployment before I’m even allowed to apply for the same job again. But hey, at least I’m running on this treadmill from the comforts of my entirely too small, rented apartment, right? If lockdown is more comfortable to deal with than regular life under academic employment, something is not right.

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Groundhog Day

By Mirjam Rörsch

Studying during corona is hard. All days look the same and you hardly get off the screen. It feels like you’re stuck in *Groundhog Day*. During the first lockdown I was quite happy. Life slowed down a bit, I realized what was important to me and which things I could let go of. I enjoyed not having to go to university; this meant more time at home to do fun stuff. But at a certain point I felt caged. I had to force myself to get off that screen and was extremely bored. Furthermore, the relationships with teachers and other students, which are so crucial, seemed less serious. Sometimes we all just forgot to check in with one another all together, living in our own bubble, minding our own business, which made me feel like I was on an island by myself.

I struggled a lot between September 2020 and January 2021. We had one in-person class but the other eleven hours of weekly classes were completely online, and I was so done with it. I couldn’t focus anymore, did not enjoy any of my classes and just wanted to lay under my blanket until this was all over. Fortunately, after a study break, I could finally breathe again. It was in these weeks that I realized something: this is just a degree I am working on, and it is still valid even if I finish it in two years instead of one. I need to give myself a break sometimes and enjoy life because we are never getting this time back again. This corona time is precious, even if it is not always enjoyable. It is still a part of our lives. We shouldn’t be too hard on ourselves, even if that sometimes means missing a deadline or not being prepared for a lecture. We must stay sane. That should currently be our main focus.

I was Taught to Teach in Turmoil. Here’s How

By Robert van der Wijk

There are those of us, and they are few and far between, that desire to aid our next generation in obtaining an education. People who suffer from this self-flagellatory disorder are often referred to as educators or teachers. The following are thoughts and opinions held by one who aspires to be a teacher. Specifically, they are a recollection of my own personal experiences (and this point warrants stressing) trying to become a teacher through ICLON, Leiden University’s Graduate School of Teaching while schools were closing nationwide.

Too often have I heard fellow students joke that “if all else fails, I’ll just become a teacher!” Little do they realise, I fear, that anyone foolish enough to think of teaching as a backup, is bound to be swallowed up, ground up, and annihilated by the amalgamous monster of parties with a vested interest. Unsurprisingly, teaching requires a rather

significant amount of patience, pedagogical skill, and character that causes an equally significant number of students to quit the track prematurely. So what could being a teaching intern in 2020, in our darkest, corona-filled timeline, possibly have looked like?

In short, it was challenging. As I speak merely for myself, I’ll limit myself to the experiences of a language teacher. Those, like myself, who come from a literature-focused track, will find that less than 10% of the skills and knowledge they have attained in their MAs and BAs is even remotely relevant. This means that second to the substantial workload of pedagogical and didactic skill you are expected to attain, you are also re-learning the language you wholeheartedly believed you spoke. This challenge however is absolutely thrilling, and those with enough passion for teaching and a good supervisor and subject coach can and will persevere. Essentially, you’re made to go back to the simplest, in a way superficial, version of language. On the more practical side of things, ICLON offers a very hands-on track. You spend most of your time observing or teaching your own classes in schools that are associated with ICLON. This means that before long you will be thrown to the wolves; 11-17 year old wolves with “Instas” and “stickbugs” (don’t worry, I don’t know what that second one means either). Your ICLON supervisor will offer you as much support as they humanly can, but your day-to-day interaction will primarily be with actual secondary school students and your subject coach.

So what did COVID-19 change regarding this internship? The online classes were well organised from the get-go, and are by far the least intrusive or significant of all the changes. Where matters get frustrating and difficult, however, is in the schools themselves; not only are you often expected to project your voice loudly from within the confines of your muffled mask, it is also impossible to interact with the students in a very meaningful and personal way. Most schools simply aren’t large enough to have students so far apart that you, as a teacher, can actually safely manoeuvre into the back of the class. Instead, you might find yourself confined to a desk, marked with high-visibility tape, as though you had accidentally stumbled into a crime scene. You may also find half your class to be missing; confined instead to small little boxes on your not-always-state-of-the-art laptop screen. Hybrid teaching and social distancing certainly take their toll on a job that is inherently close and personal. Things turned even more grim as schools started closing and all but those in their final years were sent home. This made teaching and studying at ICLON incredibly difficult.

It was during this period that the flexibility, empathy and humanity of ICLON shone through most. The supervisors, professors, and supporting staff were all more than understanding as us students collectively panicked and wailed as our prospects of actually teaching dwindled by the day. Assignments were altered to ensure that we could show our progress within the limiting confines of online teaching and social distancing. For most, this was a success, but for others, the additional stress of COVID-19 on top of an already challenging degree proved to be too much. Additionally, schools, drowning in their own problems, regulations, and creative solutions, tended to forget about their interns unless they made themselves known.

To sum up, trying to become a teacher in the time of corona is undeniably challenging. My experience, and I doubt I am alone in this, was extremely educational and worthwhile, but in hindsight, would I recommend this to anyone else? Frankly, I don’t know. On one hand, COVID-19 has added significantly more stress and difficulty to this degree, yet on the other hand, stress and chaos are the cornerstones of education; between schedule changes, meetings, and policy changes, no teacher ever enjoys a long period of stability. If my very poor sales pitch has somehow warmed you to the idea of becoming a teacher, let me leave you with these thoughts to help you conquer this trial by fire: be prepared to re-learn everything you thought you knew; be humble, and understand that sometimes there is a reason they’re telling you that the thing you want to do won’t work. Enjoy every second you get to spend with your students, they are little beings of infinite potential, and their

approval is heart-warming. Be passionate, no matter how often your passion falls on deaf ears. Finally, if you ever plan on doing this, make sure you don't do it for money, fame, or gratitude - you'll be given little to none. Do it because you love it, and do it because it's a bloody good thing to do.

Corona Anxieties

By Dominika Kurowska

I spoke with my sister recently. Concerned, she asked how I am holding up, having not seen the inside of a classroom in over a year and with my social interactions limited to visiting my girlfriend every two weeks. To her surprise, as well as my own, I am holding up rather fine. I told her I am very busy and hardly get bored. She was surprised, and said it is a rare thing these days, but it was no surprise to me: I can keep myself busy fairly easily. In a way, being home all the time and not having to present properly during classes is good for me. I have attention issues; I can't just sit for two hours, taking notes, I won't learn anything that way. Needing more stimulation, I will start scrolling on Instagram or play with the idea of ordering the contents of my cart. When I am home, however, and my camera is off, I can take on a crochet or embroidery project. This way, I can actually handle classes, and multitasking means I save time, which I can spend on commission work: the only potential income I can count on now. When I was seventeen I spent a month home with a leg in my cast, during which I learnt sculpting, jewelry making, and the basics of painting. It was the most creative I've ever been up until now. From one project I go onto the next one, barely managing to tackle piles of fabric, yarn, paint. My sister was concerned about my anxiety and depression, worried that I might sink deeper into despair. Thing is, I am in a much better place now than I was before 2020. I live constantly in a state of emergency with a dark cloud of fear over my head. That did not change when the pandemic came, but it did gain shape: it was a more tangible economic and health crisis. Now, it also became a collective experience. I no longer feel like the only mad one, like Cassandra seeing the catastrophe before everyone else. If everyone lives in fear, suddenly, it is normal. I may see fewer people now than ever, but I am connected to many more people than I used to be, because now everyone knows how I feel. I am no longer an alien.

The economic crisis will bite me in the ass, I know it. The world is changing around me and I am helpless in face of those changes. I should be terrified, paralysed. I have lived with the thought that a doomsday scenario would be the end of me for as long as I can remember. Yet, I am not only surviving, but in a way I am thriving more than ever. Perhaps this is the magical combo: fear the worst, and when it comes and you're still standing, you'll suddenly be free.

Perhaps. Mastering crochet also helps.

Staring into the Void

By Aafje Baarslag

The day the first lockdown in the Netherlands started was the same day I was supposed to meet my bachelor thesis supervisor to evaluate the mess that I was working with: a topic so specific and hard to research, I didn't know what I was doing. His words from a week prior, whether I should be writing a thesis at all if I could not even properly word my topic, still haunt me to this day. However, I never got to face him as everything, including the smaller University Libraries, closed down. My supervisor, who was not the most keen on digital mediums or any communication at all, never contacted me to schedule another appointment. At least this way, my writing wouldn't be judged as I continued working on my thesis by myself.

It was in this week that the duality of a country in lockdown became most apparent to me. While I was unable to enter my course's special library to borrow a couple of books that I needed for research, the furniture company I work at made the highest profit in ages. After all, working at home caused a surge of interest in desks, chairs, and garden lounge sets; things we had plenty of until the first resupply date was five months away. No one in the world cared that these stores were the prime location for a virus to spread. One customer kept coming back up to four times a week because his chair broke. Another one kept inching closer and closer to take a look at the parasol in my hands while holding one themselves. Week after week I wondered when the stores would finally close and I'd be able to go home and cuddle my dog. That moment never came. Our store only closed for two weeks so we could help the others in the area. It almost felt like the virus did not exist.

In those times I learned it was easier to neglect my university assignments and take on the extra hours that were needed at work instead. After all, no one would miss me in an online class where connection issues were more and more present (a fair excuse too when your entire neighborhood of a couple thousand students is suddenly relying on one poor internet point). Working forty hours a week, skipping classes and writing papers in whatever spare time there was seemed like a much better idea than trying to follow the final classes of my degree. Unsurprisingly, my hobbies suffered significantly from the extra stress I threw upon myself.

I didn't talk to my thesis supervisor again until late May, two months after that planned pre-lockdown meeting. Even then, it was no more than short emails and feedback, most of which referred to the old sources mentioned while all newer material was kept behind the locked doors of the university. I will always wonder if the grade he gave me was a sign of pity given the circumstances.

A year later, the situation remains almost exactly the same. The libraries continue to stay closed while stores open up again. The main difference this time being that I do talk to the supervisor of my current thesis and my hours at work mostly sit at a simple seven a week. I do not wish for a repeat of last year. As much as I love my job I prefer to sit in a library with my thesis materials in hand. But I must bitterly conclude that it seems more important to flood the stores than to open up the usually empty study halls. It seems I have thrown away my tuition fee to stare into the void of my laptop at home to end my final year at the University. This should have been one of the best times of one's life, and I can only hope the students after me can truly experience that.

Pets & Pyjamas

By Michèle Hoekstra

Studying during COVID-19 has been nothing short of a challenge. Facing the same four walls every single day while staring at the same computer screen is not exactly stimulating to the senses. Not being able to visit the University Library or study together with friends while discussing what classes we liked. Trying to stay focused in online lectures while your housemates decide to vacuum-clean the entire house, your neighbours are in a never-ending renovation and the doorbell rings non-stop for package deliveries. No, studying at home has not been easy. It has been lonely, boring, demanding, distracting, and most of all: stressful. The study load has seemed heavier than ever and motivation has been down the drain. When my computer decided to stop functioning I thought I was ready to throw in the towel. But with literal blood, sweat, tears, and litres of coffee I've survived another year of being a student. And I can say with pride that I have spent most of those student days in my pyjamas looking at all the pets that came to visit my classes through fellow students' screens.

Working as a Literary Agent in Times of Digital Developments: An Interview with Lori Galvin

By Geertje Hoogenboom

Lori Galvin works as a literary agent for the agency Aevitas Creative Management, which has offices in six major cities (New York, Boston, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Seattle, London) and represents a great variety of writers and genres. As an agent, Galvin represents writers and helps them negotiate deals with publishers. She represents adult fiction (primarily thrillers and women's fiction) as well as non-fiction (cookbooks and personal development). I talked to her on the 23rd of October 2020 about her job and the effects of digital developments on the world of publishing.

Hoogenboom: Why did you want to become an agent?

Galvin: I had been working as an editor before I became an agent. The last decade, I worked as a cookbook editor, which after ten years became somewhat monotonous. I was ready for a change. I knew I didn't want to edit at another publisher, even if it was a different kind of book, so I tried to think of other avenues where I could still use my editorial skills as well as learn a side of the industry I didn't know much about. Becoming a literary agent was the perfect solution.

H: How did you become an agent?

G: I spoke with many people who knew the agenting business, so I could hear about the positives and the negatives—it helped that I already worked in the publishing industry. I was also lucky to have a former colleague who had made the switch from editing to agenting. She gave me an informational interview and then shortly after I was asked if I wanted to join the same agency. Relationships are so important in publishing!

H: Can you walk us through what a typical working day looks like for you, or is there no such thing as a typical working day for an agent?

G: It's almost never typical. My most typical day is Monday because I have standing meetings that take up most of the day. I try to block out two hours every morning for reading/editing, but that doesn't always happen, so I end up reading or editing on the weekend.

The reason why I don't really have a typical day is because my clients' needs are all different as their books are at different stages—I have clients who are working on their manuscript or proposal prior to selling; clients whose books are sold and are working with their publisher during editing, or layout; clients whose book is out and they're working on publicity. I can be called in during any of these stages to help. Yesterday, for example, I emailed and texted with a client in a different time zone who received her page proofs to review and she didn't have the latest version of Acrobat on her computer. The files got corrupted when she sent them back to the publisher. It was really frustrating for her because she had to do it all over again with updated Acrobat. There wasn't much I could do except lend an ear to allow her to vent; this is also part of an agent's job. I also reviewed a contract for a client who has been commissioned to write a novel by a Hollywood book-to-film/TV agency. They provide the concept and she writes it accordingly. I've never worked with an agency like this so I had questions I had to review with colleagues. Additionally, I

had to make sure my client could write her own books outside of what she's doing for the agency. And of course, I spend a good amount of time reading queries and looking for prospective authors every day; yesterday was no different!

H: Agenting is definitely a multi-faceted job. What do you like most about it?

G: Selling a book! It's very gratifying to find an editor/publisher who is just as enthusiastic about a project as I have been and to know that they'll help make the manuscript even better and that they will deliver it to a broad audience. I also enjoy the editorial process—helping the author get the manuscript or proposal in shape so that we can submit it to editors.

H: What makes you decide to take on a client?

G: I fall in love with the book and the author. The agent/author relationship is often compared to a marriage, so I have to make sure the client and I are a good match both business-wise and personality-wise.

H: How do you know you are a good match?

G: I schedule a meeting with a promising author to see if we match. It's always important to explain to authors how this business works and what they can expect of me, but also what I expect of them!

H: Does your agency also play a big part in who you can take on?

G: Yes. If I have an author I am considering taking on, the agency has to agree to it first. I also like to consult my colleagues; I value their opinion, and not only those of the other agents. Aevitas prides itself on negotiating foreign rights and movie rights for the books it publishes, and so I like to consult those departments about the possibilities for a book.

H: The range of books you represent is quite broad: thrillers, cookbooks, women's fiction. What

do you think are the advantages of an agent having broad interests? Is there something to say for focussing on one specific genre as well?

G: I think today, agents must be diverse in the genres they represent—it's just too risky to put all your eggs in one basket... the only exception I can think of is celebrity books. I think it's good to have a mix of fiction and non-fiction too because non-fiction is often sold on a proposal, which might be fifty pages, whereas with fiction, you need to sell a full manuscript. The fiction market is also very competitive and a riskier proposition for publishers.

H: The digital age brings lots of new possibilities to the field of publishing, such as self-publishing, online publishing, audiobooks, etc. Is there a specific digital development that you are excited about?

G: I've become well acquainted with audio books since COVID-19 began, though I don't use it for work—I mainly listen to books on my morning walks and also when I clean around the apartment. I do use ebooks for work; I download submissions to read on my Kindle, although as a civilian reader, I still prefer the experience of reading a printed book.

As for digital developments in publishing: I still remember a time when it could take the publisher over a week to prepare a book for the printer, and a time when we did have a digital version of a text but you couldn't properly search it for words or images. In that sense, what I think is great about digital developments in general is how much more nimble we can be in the publishing industry, especially because, as far as industries go, publishing can be quite slow; it takes eighteen months on average between selling a book to a publisher and the book hitting the shelves, although publishers are always looking for ways to speed things up, especially for 'timely' books.

H: Are there any challenges for agents caused by these digital developments?

G: Yes! Ebooks aren't as profitable for authors as printed books. In some categories, like cookbooks, it's not so bad because the ebook format sells a fraction of what the print books do. That's because digital copies of these books aren't nearly as good in quality or readability as the print version. But for novels, especially commercial novels, the author may sell more ebooks than print and thus make less money than if they'd sold the same number of print books. At the same time, those ebooks may be purchased by new readers or those who have grown up on devices, so at least the author may be growing their audience.

Ditto for audio. Once audiobooks became popular—and that has been quite a recent development, really helped by Audible, which is now owned by Amazon—many publishers wanted audio rights included in the purchase of the book—whereas before agents could sell audio rights separately, just like film and TV rights. Most big publishers have audio departments that produce audiobooks. Having the same publisher who produces your print/ebook produce your audiobook can be a good thing distribution and publicity wise. However, publishers often fail to increase advances to account for those audio rights. It's definitely a point of contention.

H: You mentioned that you've started listening to audiobooks a lot more since COVID-19. How has COVID-19 impacted your job?

G: It's been a tough year, especially in the spring when no one really knew what was going on and suddenly everyone was working from home. It took everyone a while to adjust. I sold a novel fairly quickly over the summer but otherwise, it's been a very slow year. Some of my projects are dark and that's not something people have wanted in this crazy year. Instead, what sells is more

light-hearted and escapist works, also known as 'uplit'; this is a trend that was already on the rise in the USA due to the stress of our political situation, but it's been given a boost due to COVID-19. I've also started looking for more nonfiction projects.

Apart from the projects I'm taking on, there's also the fact that our office closed. This means I'm working from home 100% and I miss seeing colleagues in person and the usual office chit-chat about our projects. We do meet on Zoom, so there's that.

There are upsides, though! I don't have to commute—the subway here can be frustratingly slow in the winter. Also, I've attended conferences virtually that otherwise I may not have been able to attend because I couldn't afford the flight and hotel.

H: Do you still read for pleasure? Has your job as an agent influenced the way you read?

G: I absolutely still read for pleasure—though it's audiobooks most of the time to give my eyes a chance to rest. Alternatively, I try to reserve 30-45 minutes each night to read a print book before I go to sleep; I try to avoid screens in bed.

I'm constantly tagging books to read related to work in some way because it is my job to know the market. I keep an eye on what's getting a lot of buzz—though I find that just because something's trending doesn't necessarily mean it's good. I also follow a lot of book people on social media and I'm always on the lookout for writers who are with a very small press and may be ready to get an agent. ■

To see which authors Lori Galvin represents, you can visit the Aevitas agency's website aevitascreative.com and click on her profile. She also has an active Twitter account @galvinlori where she often shares book tips, upcoming conferences, and other literature-related insights.



The Shrinking of the Scholarly Ranks

By Megan Zahneis

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When a smattering of doctoral programs announced last spring that they wouldn't admit an incoming class in fall 2021, the idea felt drastic. To some, it felt desperate. But as the summer and fall wore on, more departments announced that they, too, would close their application portals. Nor were the pauses limited to small programs at less wealthy institutions; doctoral programs at seven of eight Ivy League schools and a coterie of other high-profile institutions decided to forgo new cohorts. A list of admissions suspensions maintained by *The Chronicle* since September now includes 131 programs. Still more programs admitted smaller cohorts than normal.

The rationale for the moves was near universal: administrators wanted to use the funds they would've awarded to prospective new students in admissions packages to ensure current students could stay on track. Students already working toward their degrees, after all, faced myriad disruptions to their education: locked-up labs and libraries, canceled travel, frozen grant funding.

These twin phenomena—an admissions standstill and a shaken-up research enterprise—might seem relatively minor when set against what else the pandemic has wrought. Budgetary carnage. Possible college closures. Downstream threats to college completion.

But, surveying the years following the pandemic, observers of graduate education acknowledge an alarming possibility: that, in the United States, frozen admissions, curtailed graduate cohorts, and stalled-out research could severely squeeze the ranks of professional researchers for at least the short term, and maybe longer. In other words, the pandemic may have set about a

shrinking of the scholar class.

Wait, hold on. Aren't the admissions pauses temporary? It's not that simple. Though shaving spots off a doctoral program's admissions target might be intended as a temporary measure, building programs back up to pre-pandemic levels could be unrealistic in some cases.

That's because belt-tightening across the academy has left administrators "feeling that their hands are tied," says Joy Connolly, president of the American Council of Learned Societies. Program leaders, she predicts, are "going to have just a hugely hard row to hoe in justifying up the administrative ladder, or to their fellow deans, that there is real, strong justification for keeping up the numbers."

For public universities, whether they can make that case will depend, in part, on state-budget plans that will be finalized this spring, says Suzanne T. Ortega, president of the Council of Graduate Schools. Reductions in state funding could result in the loss of teaching assistantships or other forms of university-provided support for doctoral students. But by and large, "any program that depends on institutional resources to support students is likely to have downward pressure on class size," Ortega says. She speculates that programs could feel that pressure for two more years.

If and when graduate programs declare themselves open for business, attracting students who've put their education on hold is no cinch. Suzanne Barbour, dean of the graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says she expects schools like hers that historically haven't had to compete too hard for classes may find that changed by the pandemic. Programs may need to "change their

recruiting strategies, their advertising strategies to some extent, to make it clear to potential applicants that our programs are viable," she says. And even well-resourced institutions like her own may have to change their tune. "Sometimes we can get a little bit complacent because the students just come," Barbour says. "We may have to work a little bit harder for them in the future."

Data collected by the Council of Graduate Schools indicate that undergraduate students who'd planned before the pandemic to pursue a PhD still plan to do so, but say they'll have to wait a while. Maintaining contact with those students, Ortega says, is crucial. "I worry that if we're not smart about staying in touch with them, we will lose them."

That may be particularly challenging when it comes to international students, who, Barbour says, have deferred fall admission at a higher rate than usual. Their reasons for doing so were obvious—an inability to travel because of the pandemic, difficulty obtaining visas, concern about the political situation in the US. Some who deferred for fall-2020 admission asked to do so again for January 2021. "At some point, students are going to stop deferring and say, Forget it, I'm not going to the US to do my PhD," says Barbour. "I think that we have to worry about that."

Whether by cohort reductions or would-be students leaving the pipeline, graduate education will reach an eventual new equilibrium that may not match the graduate-student populations of the last decade, says Earl Lewis, who was president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 2013 to 2018 and is now director of the University of Michigan's Center for Social Solutions. "By the time we get to '25 or '26, we may look back and realize that we've reached a new plateau, that it was not as high as it was in 2010, let alone 2015," Lewis says.

Even though they were the supposed beneficiaries of admissions pauses, current graduate students face disruptions that could affect their professional prospects. Traditionally, a graduate student's trajectory hinges on their funding—particularly in the hard sciences, where

federal grants often bankroll the work that forms a dissertation. The pandemic exposed the inextricability of degree progress and funding when labs shut down in 2020. "If the grant is paused, but the grant has to keep paying the students, but the science hasn't gotten done, how is that going to work?" asks Chris M. Golde, a longtime scholar of graduate education who works as a career coach at Stanford University's career-education center.

Federal agencies will shoulder much of the pressure to end that cycle, say Golde and Debra W. Stewart, a senior fellow at the research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. "Whether this is a 12-month or 10-month delay, or whether it is a five-year delay, is in part a question of money in federal investment," says Stewart, who is a president emerita of the Council of Graduate Schools.

Ortega, Stewart's successor at the council, says funding agencies have taken important strides to create flexibility for primary investigators, but uncertainty remains for early-career researchers seeking grant funding for new projects because in many cases, agencies are prioritizing funds requested to finish existing projects.

The future trajectory of that all-important federal investment is uncertain. COVID-19, Ortega says, is also likely to increase the rate at which other countries outspend the US on research and development.

That's because other nations have been able to reopen their labs and rebound more quickly from COVID-19 closures than the United States has, giving them a jump on American researchers, says Holden Thorp, editor in chief of the *Science* family of journals, citing China, Singapore, Australia, and Germany as examples. "All of these places are getting more research done in the same amount of time that we are, and so, yeah, that probably is a big threat to the United States's hold on the research enterprise," Thorp says.

Countries that have managed to control COVID-19—Taiwan and New Zealand among them—may also make more attractive destinations for young scholars, says Luis A. Echegoyen, the 2020 president

of the American Chemical Society. “If I had a choice and I was a postdoc now, I definitely would not come to the US, not at this point, until things somehow clear up.”

On average, 67 percent of institutions’ STEM research was disrupted by the pandemic, according to a survey of 300 graduate-school deans conducted by NORC. “One thing that we don’t know is, will the federal government do anything to try to make up for all of that lost research?” Thorp says.

Some STEM programs are managing to thrive amid the uncertainty. Take Emory University, which has a strong reputation in public health. In the past year, Emory has seen an 11-percent increase in the volume of grant submissions, racking up a record \$831 million in research funding. At the same time, graduate-school applications are up, particularly in the sciences—Emory’s nursing program fielded a 60-percent increase in applications—marking what Deborah Watkins Bruner, Emory’s senior vice president for research, calls a “halo effect” highlighting researchers’ work during the pandemic. But Bruner sees past the halo. “Adrenaline and opportunity,” she says, may account for some of that productivity. “But,” Bruner says, “what we know about human stress is that adrenaline cannot sustain us over the long run.”

Applications, too, could slow down as the lingering stresses of the pandemic discourage students from traveling for a doctoral education, Bruner says. That concern may be most acute for international scholars, who make up 46 percent of Emory’s postdoctorate population.

The University of Texas at El Paso’s chemistry department is seizing on the flagging job market to hire four new faculty members, says Echegoyen, a chemistry professor there. “You have to be very opportunistic, in a way.”

Echegoyen’s team has been opportunistic in other ways, too, using time outside the lab to catch up writing on papers and review articles. That proved a welcome way of coping with pandemic life. “People don’t have anything to do better than actually do some work as they just sit

at home,” Echegoyen says. “It’s really the only useful thing to do.”

But during the two months they were locked out of the lab, Echegoyen made sure to keep in regular touch with his team. He wanted to ensure that his students were “not mentally disconnected from reality and depressed,” and that they knew he supported them.

Without such support and mentoring, early-career scholars could flounder. Several doctoral students who participated in focus groups for a joint report from the American Educational Research Association and the Spencer Foundation reported delays to their work. One student had to put his dissertation on hold because he was unable to access restricted data at his university during campus shutdowns; another reported altering the scope of their dissertation, shifting from a practical framework based on data collected in the field to a more theoretical approach.

In a project as all-important as the dissertation, those sorts of pivots can be devastating, says Golde, the Stanford career coach. “I think there is a lot of loss there of people’s projects that were two-thirds of the way finished or conceptualized” for researchers who haven’t yet gone into the field and fear they never will, Golde says. “I don’t know how one tallies that up, but I think there’s definitely loss there.”

The already-solitary experience of being a doctoral student, too, has become all the more isolating. One doctoral student in the AERA/Spencer report described what they called “fake working.” “The other day, I was at my computer almost from 9 to 9,” the student said. “I would have never done that under normal circumstances, but I had to get things done. But my brain was everywhere.”

The pandemic’s stresses take an added toll on international doctoral students, who are more likely than their domestic peers to have to abandon their studies. While 32 percent of NORC study respondents expected a moderate decrease in domestic-student retention, more than three-quarters anticipated either a moderate or large decrease in international-student retention. Those figures don’t bode well for

STEM fields, where international students make up a “very significant portion” of the research enterprise, Stewart says.

Many doctoral students are balancing current stresses with uncertainty about next steps in their careers. “One of the conversations that I have been having with mentors just in the last couple weeks is about, ‘Am I going to try to potentially extend my time in the doctoral program for another year, so as not to graduate into what is bound to be, like, the worst, job market ever?’” one student in the AERA/Spencer report said.

The academic-job market has suffered for years, but austerity measures imposed by the pandemic promise to worsen that crisis at many institutions. Stewart notes recent news from William Paterson University, which is considering eliminating a quarter of its full-time faculty members’ jobs to ease a budget deficit, and Ithaca College, where a proposal calls for eliminating more than 100 employees.

“When you slash faculty numbers at that level, that’s going to have an impact if it becomes a trend across the country,” Stewart says.

Graduate-program leaders, too, anticipate having to cut costs. Two-thirds of graduate deans in the NORC survey, for which Stewart served as primary investigator, expected budget reductions in their programs. Faculty-recruitment efforts were most likely to absorb those losses, the deans said, with 63 percent saying they’d need to make major cuts in that area.

For students hoping to land one of those coveted professorships, setting their work apart could be a more difficult task in the pandemic era. As some students are forced to delay completion of their dissertations, a publication bottleneck could manifest itself in the next several years, says Lewis, the former Mellon Foundation president. He envisions “all of a sudden, this big bulge of people, particularly in trying to get manuscripts out.”

Lewis and Thorp hope allowances will be made for situations like those. Flexibility and understanding, Thorp says, will be key for academic gatekeepers of all sorts—whether hiring committees weighing a

candidate’s delayed graduation date or grant funders’ willingness to overlook a potentially yearslong gap in a scholar’s productivity.

Such flexibility has been one bright spot amid all the upheaval in graduate education. For example, the shift to remote work has prompted archivists to open more digital access to materials. At Chapel Hill, Barbour says, librarians have worked feverishly to scan and digitize materials for students who couldn’t hit the stacks in person. “Before that, to do that kind of research, you had to be the kind of person who could basically drop everything else in your life and jump on a plane and fly to wherever to access the archive,” Barbour says. Those access improvements will be especially useful in the long run, she says: Demographic shifts point to an older graduate-student population whose day-to-day lives may make travel-based research unrealistic.

The nature of scientific research makes that kind of digitization more difficult, but Stewart notes a similar positive development in laboratory science: a movement away from equating student quality with the number of hours that student logged at the bench. In Stewart’s time as the graduate dean at North Carolina State University, she says, many faculty members believed that “the very best students were those who were there when the faculty arrived and there long after the faculty left.” That notion is problematic, Stewart says, because it disadvantages entire populations of students—under-resourced students who hold down a second job, for instance, or those who have families.

Lately, though, limited access to labs has dismantled that concept. Lab spaces have had to operate at reduced density and with more “intentionality,” Stewart says; students who didn’t need to actively use lab resources might instead work from home on data analysis or writing.

Universities’ pivot to remote work—and ubiquitous use of videoconference software like Zoom—could ease the way to increased collaboration, says James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association. Grossman envisions

regional consortia of four or five doctoral programs, each of which would admit smaller cohorts to ease their tight budgets. Those programs' students could meet virtually for joint graduate seminars, perhaps augmented by in-person meetings once or twice in a semester. Grossman doesn't know whether such a model would work, but, he says, "it's at least thinkable, and it was not thinkable a year ago." Global cataclysm makes many things "thinkable," including the ever-elusive prospect of wholesale reform of graduate education.

Advocates of such reform have often met with disappointing results, as their efforts have "dwindled or fizzled out," write Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch in their book *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*. They and other experts are quick to rattle off a list of systemic issues that have plagued graduate education for decades: a dwindling academic-job market, a disregard for nonacademic positions that could employ doctorates, nebulous degree-completion timelines. "There were people writing about it in the '90s, the '80s, the '70s, the '60s," Golde says. "Like everything, the ratchet just keeps getting tighter."

The tumultuous events of 2020 and 2021 may have tightened that ratchet irrevocably.

"At some point, something has got to give. And I think we may be at that point," says Maria LaMonaca Wisdom, director of graduate-student advising and engagement for the humanities at Duke University. "If a global pandemic doesn't do it, maybe nothing will."

But reimaging doctoral education is a daunting task, even without a pandemic raging, and not many are willing to take it on.

During his five years as president of the Mellon Foundation, Lewis says, he'd welcome presidents, provosts, and chancellors to the foundation's offices on the east side of New York City. "I would say, I'll give you all the money you need if you will engage in a whiteboard exercise, if you go back to your school and say, 'We want to redesign this institution for the second half of the 21st century, and everything is on the

table," Lewis recalls.

But he got no takers. It was, he says, "the hardest dollar I ever tried to give away as president of the Mellon Foundation." "I'd be second," Lewis says several friends told him. "But no one was willing to be first."

Sure, Lewis would like to be optimistic about the changes the pandemic could spur in doctoral education. But, he says, "I'm not so sanguine. I've run this experiment now long enough to know that we are guardians of the status quo." ■

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Unlocking Cultural Heritage during Lockdown and Beyond

By Peter Verhaar

Next to being a global health crisis, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the various measures that have been taken to curtail the spread of the virus, have undeniably had far-reaching consequences for the cultural heritage sector. The implications appear to have been most dramatic for museums. According to a survey conducted by UNESCO in May 2020, 90% of all museums worldwide were forced to close their doors following government-imposed measures to maximise social distancing at the beginning of the crisis (UNESCO 13).¹ Because of these strict virus containment measures, affecting both tourism and the international transportation of works of art, many of the physical exhibitions which were scheduled to open in 2020 needed to be cancelled or postponed.² During the short period in which museums were allowed to reopen in 2020, the number of visitors was understandably much lower than before the pandemic. The number of tourists had diminished considerably because of the advice against non-essential travel, and Dutch museums were allowed to admit a limited number of visitors only, within dedicated time slots. With many of their traditional sources of revenue dissolving, various museums are currently struggling to survive financially (NEMO 7).

The global outbreak of the coronavirus also resulted in a major disruption of the services of public and academic libraries. All Dutch libraries were forced to close their doors in March 2020. Almost all of the on-site activities, including courses and symposia, needed to be cancelled or postponed (Martzoukou 267; Burgt). Many libraries fortunately managed to continue to facilitate the lending of books despite the physical restrictions. A large number of public libraries had implemented a service in which books could be reserved using the online catalogue, and in which books could subsequently be collected without being in

contact with other people. Leiden University Library made use of its existing self service system based on lockers which enabled visitors to pick up books while maintaining social distance. Such 'contactless' forms of access could not always be realised in the reading rooms of Special Collections departments, however. In many cases, researchers were denied physical access to rare objects such as manuscripts, early printed books and old maps. After some of the measurements against the virus were relaxed in the second half of 2020, most academic libraries allowed visitors to book spaces in their reading rooms again.

Faced with the inability to facilitate physical access, many libraries and museums have valiantly begun to intensify their efforts to enable digital and remote access to heritage materials. COVID-19 has unleashed a period of frenetic activity, in fact, resulting in a profuse miscellany of digital resources, including virtual tours, vodcasts and online games. The rise of these online offerings has auspiciously been monitored by a number of scholars and organisations. UNESCO, for instance, had already documented more than 800 activities in response to the outbreak of the pandemic in early May 2020 (UNESCO). Chiara Zuanni has compiled a database documenting the digital resources that were developed by museums during the coronavirus pandemic, and she collected data about activities in a range of different categories, including "Social Media Initiatives", "Educational Content", "Streaming Content", and "Games". The locations of these initiatives have also been visualised using an interactive map (Zuanni). The *Network of European Museum Organisations* has conducted a survey among 961 respondents from forty-eight countries, which showed that 80% of the responding museums had increased their online activities, and that 16% of the museums had expanded the budget for the development of new

¹ The duration of these closures varied from country to country, however, ranging from several days to several weeks or months. In the Netherlands, museums were temporarily closed for visitors during the first lockdown in between 15 March and 2 June 2020 and again during the second corona wave in between 15 December 2020 and 5 June 2021.

² Museum Boerhaave in Leiden has presciently prepared an exhibition named *Contagious! ('Besmet!')*, focusing on the outbreak of infectious diseases and their impact on daily life. Its original opening was scheduled on 15 April 2020, but this date obviously needed to be postponed because of COVID-19.

digital resources (NEMO 7). Incidentally, such overviews of digital initiatives have revealed a great global disparity in the nature of such online activities. Only 5% of museums in Africa and the Small Island Developing States were able to develop new digital content after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. The institutions having sufficient resources to develop new digital exhibitions or virtual tours were mostly located in Western Europe and Northern America. Institutions in Africa or the Arab States mostly chose to intensify the promotion of existing digital resources (UNESCO 15-17). COVID-19 laid bare a poignant divide, insulating the wealthier institutions from those which appear to lack the required financial resources to invest in online access.

The manifold activities that were initiated during the pandemic appear to have been born out of two distinct motivations. On the one hand, institutions felt the need to react immediately and pragmatically to the challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis. In many cases, institutions aimed to ensure that, despite the numerous limitations, existing services could be delivered to all visitors in roughly the same ways as before the crisis. The existing digitised collections were also promoted more prominently as an alternative to the physical collections that had become blockaded. Symposia and lectures that had been planned already were often streamed live or converted into vodcasts (Martzoukou 268ff), and physical exhibitions which needed to be cancelled because of corona were occasionally transformed into online exhibitions. Beyond this urgency, on the other hand, many institutions also began to consider the consequences in the longer term, and started to seize this unprecedented moment in time as an opportunity to rethink their mission and their role at a more fundamental level. Rather than trying to continue business as usual, libraries and museums have also worked on innovative ways of engaging the public, developing applications and approaches that can improve upon the status quo before corona.³

Surveying the broad range of activities that have been launched during the pandemic, it may be argued that corona has fostered innovations and activities within four main areas of interest.

1. Institutions have offered access to rich contextual information about objects,

moving beyond the mere provision of scans and metadata;

2. COVID-19 has spurred experimentation with the technologies that can be used to represent the material properties of heritage objects digitally;
3. Institutions have further explored the entertainment value of cultural heritage;
4. Institutions have collaborated more closely with the public on the creation and the preservation of relevant heritage materials.

This article discusses a number of the newly created resources in detail, and also speculates on the impact of these initiatives, as well as on their value for a post-COVID-19 society.

Contextualisation

For many heritage institutions, the process of digitisation principally entails the creation of digital reproductions of physical objects and of structured metadata describing these objects. The results of such digitisation processes are generally made available via repositories and online catalogues (Nauta, 55ff). Using the fixed fields that are available in standard metadata formats, however, it is mostly impossible or impractical to capture more elaborate information about the history, the social context and the reception of heritage materials. During the pandemic, heritage institutions have made available a myriad of digital resources offering rich historical and contextual descriptions of heritage materials. Initiatives such as these can be seen as an exponent of the task of heritage institutions to educate and to enlighten users.⁴

Capitalising on their expertise in the field of video conferencing, a capacity which staff members needed to develop out of necessity, many heritage institutions have ramped up the creation of videos containing descriptions or explanations of specific collections. Leiden University Libraries, for instance, has published a series of videos named “Van Kluis naar Kussen”,⁵ which offers viewers the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes of its Special Collections Department. In each video, curators, researchers and students are invited to discuss a specific collection, to highlight a number of treasures, and to explain how these materials can be used in research and in education. The Rijksmuseum has likewise developed a series

named “The Rijksmuseum from Home”,⁶ in which staff members discuss some of their favourite museum objects. A notable characteristic of these videos is that they have all been recorded at the actual homes of employees, and that the lectures of the presenters frequently strike a very personal tone. The enthusiasm of the speakers and the intimacy that is conveyed help to counteract the private and individualistic nature of watching videos at home (Tissen).

Next to such streamed or recorded videos, libraries and museums have additionally offered access to contextual information via online exhibitions. Since physical exhibitions often needed to be aborted or delayed, many institutions chose to re-use the contents that had been prepared already to develop digital equivalents of these physical events. In such virtual displays, institutions can present collections of related objects in combination with short or extensive prose texts, in which authors can write freely about the production process, the provenance or the significance of these objects, among other aspects. The Kunstmuseum Den Haag has created digital versions of many of the exhibitions that were shown on its premises. These online exhibitions consist of images of a number of selected objects, accompanied by explanatory texts.⁷ The exhibition “Young Rembrandt”, which was on display at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 2020, was also supplemented by an online exhibition which offered access to many of the texts written by the curators of this exhibition.⁸

The digitisation of the Bilderdijk Room in Leiden University's Academy Building in May 2021 forms another striking example of a digital resource offering rich contextual descriptions.⁹ The room was named after Willem Bilderdijk, one of the main Dutch Romantic poets. Next to the high resolution images displaying the room and a selection of items from the Bilderdijk collection, visitors of the platform can also read informative descriptive texts about the history and the contents of these materials, and listen to readings of letters and poems by Bilderdijk.¹⁰ The platform offers a good demonstration of the value and the significance of contextualisation. In addition to offering basic information about the objects in the collection, the digitised Bilderdijk room effectuates a very engaging form of access which stimulates visitors to learn and to respond.

Representation of materiality

While contextualisations can help visitors to become conscious of the history and the meaning of heritage objects, they generally fail to trigger an appreciation of the materiality of heritage objects. The direct encounter with a physical object in a museum is often valuable and appealing precisely because it enables us to experience the volume, the dimensions and the colours of these materials close by. Unique physical objects typically evince a sense of authenticity, and it is precisely this sense of uniqueness or ‘realness’ which Walter Benjamin appeared to be alluding to as he wrote about the ‘aura’ of works of art (Benjamin). The fact that such objects are part of a physical display within a heritage institution, with selected objects being placed in vitrines and on pedestals, often augments such a sense of authenticity and singularity.

During the last few decades, various heritage institutions have attempted to replicate or to approximate the experience of the physical encounter with material objects digitally. Such experiments have been driven by recent technological innovations. There have been important advancements, first of all, in the field of 3D scanning. Techniques such as photogrammetry, scanned models and volumetric models can now be used effectively to represent the spatial dimensions of material objects via point clouds (Kate). Equally important, clearly, are the technologies in the field of virtual reality and augmented reality that can be used to present such detailed spatial recreations of objects and of locations to users. Technologies such as these can be applied very productively within the context of cultural heritage. Kenderline has discussed a range of immersive and interactive digital environments with associated visual and sonic techniques which can give users the sensation of “embodying” or being present at actual heritage buildings and archaeological sites (Kenderline).

As the access to physical collections was repeatedly barred, COVID-19 has clearly heightened the urgency of these types of experiments. A large number of institutions have put considerable efforts into the development of interactive digital environments replicating both the physicality of heritage materials and the buildings in which they are housed. Whereas

⁶ Rijksmuseum. *Rijksmuseum from Home*, rijksmuseum.nl/en/stories/rijksmuseum-from-home. Accessed 22 July 2021.

⁷ See, for example, kunstmuseum.nl/nl/tentoonstellingen/anderszorn or kunstmuseum.nl/nl/tentoonstellingen/glansen-geluk.

⁸ Ashmolean Museum Oxford. *Young Rembrandt*, ashmolean.org/youngrembrandtonline. Accessed 22 July 2021.

⁹ Universiteit Leiden, *Bilderdijkkamer en collectie online te bezoeken*, 31 May 2021, universiteitleiden.nl/nieuws/2021/05/bilderdijkkamer-en-collectie-online-te-bezoeken. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁰ The digitisation project resulted from a collaboration between Leiden University Libraries, the Bilderdijk working group of the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, and, importantly, the project *Things that Talk*.

³ Rees Leehey notes that “there is a desire to revert to ‘business as usual’ as fast as possible and on the other hand, an ambition to fashion a different way of living that rejects the failed premises of the old normal.” See: Helen Rees Leahy, “Cultural Access and the ‘New Normal’,” *Cultural Practices*, 2020, culturalpractice.org/article/cultural-access-and-the-new-normal.

⁴ A survey performed in Italy showed that museum directors view it as their main task “to educate users and enlighten them about the past”. See Deborah Agostino, et al. “New Development: COVID-19 as an Accelerator of Digital Transformation in Public Service Delivery.” *Public Money & Management*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2021, pp. 69–72, doi: 10.1080/09540962.2020.1764206.

⁵ The title of this series of videos may be translated as “From the Stack Room to the Cushion”. The cushions, in this context, are obviously the support materials used to protect the items that can be consulted in the Reading Room.

applications in the field of virtual and augmented reality typically demand dedicated equipment such as the Valve Index or the Oculus Quest, many museums have instead tried to represent the spatial dimensions of objects and exhibition rooms at a more modest scale as HTML5 pages on laptops or tablets.

Many people, perforce confined to their homes, received invitations to embark on virtual tours of museums such as the Louvre in Paris or the MOMA in New York. *Hastings Contemporary* even used a telepresence robot during the first lockdown to offer virtual tours of the museum.¹¹ In November 2020, the Mauritshuis in The Hague also announced that it had digitised many of its exhibition rooms together with large parts of its collection of paintings.¹² Visitors were invited to wander across the building, replicating the experience of a journey across a brick-and-mortar museum. They could also zoom in on specific paintings, at a level that would be nigh impossible with the physical objects. For a number of paintings, the museum also provided access to infrared scans of objects. The infrared scan of *Het aardse paradijs met de zondeval van Adam en Eva* by Jan Brueghel de Oude and Peter Paul Rubens reveals that the two dogs that can be now seen close to the middle of the painting were initially painted on a different location. King et al. have analysed the vocabulary that was used in the texts accompanying virtual tours and exhibitions of British museums, and observed frequent occurrences of words denoting movement or physicality. They argue that, through words such as these, viewers can experience the sensation of being on an active journey throughout the museum (King et al.).

Solace and diversion

As has been noted by many, COVID-19 is not solely a global health crisis (Pfefferbaum). Practices such as self-isolation and quarantine have clearly had mental and psychological consequences as well. Ostensibly in an attempt to

combat these negative effects on mental health, many libraries and museums have begun to emphasise the capacity of art and culture to bring solace and comfort to human beings.

One notable trend is that GLAM institutions have started to use objects from their own collections in existing or newly developed online games. The Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Luxembourg launched an educational game in 2020 in which players were asked to match pictures of eggs to the animals that came out of these eggs.¹³ The Lakenhal in Leiden has set up a 'Thuisatelier' ('Home Studio') with a range of creative assignments conceived by professional artists. Each of these assignments were inspired by objects that can be found at the museum.¹⁴ Items from institutions such as the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the Muséum des Sciences Naturelles in Angers can be visited virtually in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, developed for the Nintendo Switch.¹⁵ The Getty Museum has also developed a IIIF manifest converter which makes it possible to open any IIIF-compliant image to be used in the *Animal Crossing Art Generator*.¹⁶ Although the educational value of some of these games is questionable, the aim to offer distractions via enjoyable activities during the lockdowns certainly seems laudable.¹⁷

Bidirectionality

Bartolini has argued that many of the digital resources that have been developed during the coronavirus crisis largely followed an approach in which content was broadcasted unilaterally to their audiences. She also noted that a number of institutions, by contrast, have implemented a more interactive and collaborative form of engagement, in which people were invited to participate more actively in the creation and the curation of content (Bartolini). During a time in which many people felt spiritless, or needed a break from depressing news headlines, many of the existing cultural crowd-sourcing activities received much renewed attention. Numerous

blog posts and social media messages¹⁸ began to share links to platforms such as the Smithsonian Transcription Centre,¹⁹ the Zooniverse,²⁰ or the Dutch website *VeleHanden*.²¹ Such platforms could provide people with an interesting and potentially addictive set of tasks, made particularly rewarding through the realisation that these tasks also accomplished something useful for the GLAM sector. A number of institutions have also enhanced their presence on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (UNESCO 16). Given the fact that 45% of the world's population had access to social media in 2019, such social media can enable heritage institutions to reach larger audiences (Agostino). The Rijksmuseum Twitter account had 241.000 followers before the start of the first lockdown in May 2020, and this number grew to 255,500 in July 2021. The number of followers of the Mauritshuis's account grew from 27,000 to 32,800 during the same period.²²

Ever since the first announcements of the socially disruptive measures that are needed to counter the pandemic, many people have also started to share their experiences of self-isolation online at their own initiative. Life during lockdown has given rise to countless outbursts of reflection, anger and calls for acquiescence on a variety of online channels. Obviously, such photos, web pages and social media posts documenting people's responses to COVID-19 can eventually be of great historical value, and a large number of agents have fortunately decided to curate and to preserve these born-digital materials. The Historical Museum in The Hague has begun to document the cultural impact of the coronavirus by curating large numbers of photographs, movies, diaries and material objects. This 'corona collection' was created by museum staff in close collaboration with volunteers and professional photographers, who collectively represent the uncertainty, the sorrow and the creativity that resulted from the lock down period.²³ The National Museum Wales has likewise set up a platform to stimulate people to share objects that reflect their experience of the

pandemic in Wales (Knott). Given the ephemeral nature and the sheer quantity of such materials, the aim to curate these materials also raises various questions about what and how to preserve (Arvanitis).

Arguably, one of the most compelling developments to emerge from the crisis in the cultural sector is the massive traction of participatory movements on social media. The hashtag #tussenkunstenquarantaine ("Between Art and Quarantine"), which identifies an initiative that was started by Anneloes Officier on Instagram, encourages people to replicate works using objects found at home. In May 2020, more than 50,000 replications had been posted already.²⁴ The immense popularity of this project reiterates the notion that the experience of culture can bring solace and diversion during times of hardship. The initiative inspired the Getty Museum to launch a similar movement under the hashtag #gettymuseumchallenge.

Digital access to heritage beyond COVID-19

The activities that have been discussed above are by no means new to the GLAM sector. Many institutions have already been experimenting for several years with platforms for user-generated content, with immersive and interactive digital environments and with means of contextualising heritage objects. It is clear, nonetheless, that the corona crisis, and, more specifically, the predicament that, for many months, digital access has in fact been the only form of access, has served as a pressure cooker for many of these developments. Libraries and museums were forced to realign services and to redesign platforms hastily, and the urgency and the imperative nature of such adaptations also functioned as catalysts for innovation. The crisis seems to have made institutions more agile and more flexible, for the time being at least, quickening the incubation and implementation of new ideas and inventive adroit services.²⁵

At the time of writing, it is still uncertain if, how and when our current society can make a

¹¹ Hastings Contemporary. *Robot Tours*, hastingscontemporary.org/robot-tours. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹² Mauritshuis. *virtueel Mauritshuis*, mauritshuis.nl/nl-nl/verdiep/de-collectie/virtueel-mauritshuis. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹³ Musée national d'histoire naturelle. *Participez à la grande chasse aux oeufs du 'natur musée'*, mnhn.lu/blog/2020/04/participez-a-la-grande-chasse-aux-oeufs-du-natur-musee. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁴ Lakenhal. *Museum De Lakenhal open Thuisatelier*, lakenhal.nl/nl-verhaal/museum-de-lakenhal-opent-thuisatelier. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁵ @Museum_Angers. "Muséum fermé ? Pas de problème, notre musée est ouvert sur Animal Crossing et on vous en propose une visite guidée Mercredi 8 avril à 16h ! La visite sera animée par un de nos médiateurs ! plus d'infos

#AnimalCrossingNewHorizons #ACNH #CultureChezNous." *Twitter*, 6 April 2020, 6:36 p.m., twitter.com/Museum_Angers/status/1247201441674035201?s=20. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁶ Getty. *Animal Crossing Art Generator*, experiments.getty.edu/ac-art-generator. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁷ Although it is strictly speaking not an example of a digital resource, the initiative of the Stedelijk Museum in Schiedam to commission local artists to create works of art that can bring consolation, appears to be relevant in this context too. See: stedelijkmuseumschiedam.nl/troostkunst-uit-schiedam/.

¹⁸ Open Objects. *Useful distractions: help cultural heritage and scientific projects from home*, openobjects.org.uk/2020/03/useful-distractions-help-cultural-heritage-and-scientific-projects-from-home. Accessed 22 July 2021.

¹⁹ Smithsonian. *Smithsonian Digital Volunteers: Transcription Center*, transcription.si.edu. Accessed 22 July 2021.

²⁰ See, for instance, zooniverse.org/projects/bldigital/living-with-machines.

²¹ Vele Handen, velehanden.nl. Accessed 22 July 2021.

²² These historical numbers have been collected by consulting the archived versions of Twitter profiles on the Internet Archive's *WayBackMachine*, available at archive.org/web. Accessed 22 July 2021.

²³ Haags Historisch Museum. *Corona-collectie Den Haag*, haagshistorischmuseum.nl/tentoonstelling/corona-collectie-den-haag-in-lockdown. Accessed 22 July 2021.

²⁴ In June 2021, the hashtag #tussenkunstenquarantaine brought together more than 70,000 posts, see instagram.com/explore/tags/tussenkunstenquarantaine/. Accessed 22 July 2021.

²⁵ Martzoukou concurs that COVID-19 has "created radical shifts for Higher Education institutions, some of which, under normal circumstances, would have taken years to materialise due, for example, to logistic, operational or bureaucratic hurdles, or simply because of a managerial or higher-level strategic resistance to "new ways of thinking."" See Martzoukou, p. 69. A similar argument is presented in Agostino et al.

transition back to a state of normalcy, although the inchoate effects of mass vaccination programmes seem mildly reassuring. By the same token, the nature of the digital transformation of the GLAM sector is still precarious. While it is clear that COVID-19 has led to an unprecedented willingness to experiment with innovative digital technologies, this enthusiasm may also dissipate when libraries and museums can finally resume their on site services fully. The pandemic may also demonstrate all the more clearly that the physical encounter with the material objects remain indispensable and that any digital and online surrogate will inevitably result in an inferior experience (Alexis).

These uncertainties can be addressed and attenuated, to some extent, by evaluating the impact and the appreciation of the digital resources that have been launched since the start of the crisis. Heritage institutions generally aim to make sure that anyone who is interested in studying their collections can do this in a convenient and a meaningful manner. The relevance and the impact of digital initiatives can consequently be evaluated by considering the degree to which these services and applications manage to engage their users.

Phenomena such as impact and appreciation cannot be measured directly, but, in the digital age, there are a range of quantitative data which can potentially serve as proxies for such phenomena. The impact of the presence on Twitter can potentially be gauged, for instance, through a count of the number of likes and retweets. In the period between 15 March 2020 and 1 June 2021, the Rijksmuseum has posted 628 tweets. These were liked 109 times and retweeted twenty-five times on average. There were twenty-six tweets without any likes and thirty-six tweets without retweets. To place these numbers in perspective, they can be compared to a period immediately before the pandemic, from 1 January 2019 to 15 March 2020. Before the pandemic, tweets were retweeted thirteen times and liked forty-one times on average. The likes and the retweets of the tweets posted by the

Mauritshuis, the Van Gogh Museum and the Kröller Müller museum display a similar pattern during this time frame. The number of likes increased by 59%, 42% and 98% respectively. The number of retweets of messages posted by the Mauritshuis grew by 195%.²⁶ The 23 videos in the Rijksmuseum From Home playlist have been viewed 4.815 times and liked sixty-two times on average.²⁷ To compare the situations before and after the lockdown more extensively, I have compared the statistics of sixty-three videos that have been published after the start of the first lockdown and fifty-eight videos that have been published before this date.²⁸ The videos that have been published after 15 March 2020 have been viewed 10.757 times on average. For the earlier videos, the average was 3.493 views. The Rijksmuseum's most popular video focused on the secret compartments of luxury desks, and it attracted 86,376 views. The more recent videos were liked 96.7 times and received 7 comments on average. The pre-COVID-19 videos were generally liked 14.8 times, receiving 0.8 comments. While it may not be entirely fair to compare the playlists published before and after COVID-19 because of the differences in nature and subject matter, these statistics do suggest a considerable increase in the level of user engagement since the start of corona.²⁹

The number of likes that are awarded to the tweets and the videos of the large Dutch museums are dwarfed, nonetheless, by the number of users that appear to have followed the movement identified using the hashtag #tussenkunstenquarantaine. The Instagram account has 263.476 followers, and the 245 recent posts that can be downloaded using Facebook's Developers API have been liked 7,168 times on average, with 157 comments. Interestingly, the Rijksmuseum tweet which was retweeted most frequently during the pandemic was a post about the #tussenkunstenquarantaine initiative.³⁰ This specific participatory movement started by users not affiliated with a heritage institution is clearly very successful in attracting large audiences. This single example suggests that, for heritage institutions, it appears

to be more productive to participate in activities that have been initiated by users already than to try and attract audiences to their own social media channels.

The data that can be extracted from social media platforms evidently paint one small part of the picture only. Since the start of the pandemic, various studies have been conducted on the use of the digital offerings of heritage institutions during the pandemic. A study conducted by the Museums Association in the Netherlands has shown that 22% of all Dutch people had made use of digital resources offered by heritage institutions, and that a majority of these visitors had also rated such encounters positively (Raad voor Cultuur 9). Analyses based on the usage statistics of the servers of museums indicated a pronounced rise in the number of visitors. In the NEMO survey, 15% of the responding surveys reported a 25-35% increase in online visits, and 13% reported an increase of 40-55% (NEMO, 14). The Louvre in Paris even reported a threefold increase during the first few months of the pandemic (UNESCO, 15). During several rounds of consultations with staff members of heritage institutions, it was also reported that the audience had also become much more international (Heijkoop). A study carried out by the Audience Agency in the United Kingdom interestingly focused on the attitudes and motivations of online users. The survey revealed that 29% of all the respondents visited a website of a cultural heritage institution at least once a week, while 34% of the respondents had never visited a website of a museum prior to the pandemic. Respondents indicated that they engage with digitised heritage because they want to learn, to be entertained, to boost their mood or "to reduce stress or anxiety" ("The Audience Agency Digital Audience Survey").

Studies conducted in the Netherlands also clarified that it became easier for museums to reach people with physical disabilities (Raad voor Cultuur 10; Heijkoop). Helen Rees-Leahy has added, however, that there is a certain acerbity in this finding. While people with physical disabilities have actually been demanding improvements in digital access for decades, their requests were granted only after large numbers of healthy people found themselves deprived of access to culture as well (Rees-Leahy).

Whereas heritage institutions typically aim to effectuate "universal access" to their collections (Kahle), and to ensure that individuals of whichever background or skill level can interact with these materials, studies of the use of the digital resources that were made

available during the COVID-19 crisis indicate that it continues to be difficult to reach certain groups of people online. Heijkoop argues that COVID-19 has resulted in a closer connection with a smaller network (Heijkoop). People in the age group of 55 or older are generally not as proficient in the use of digital media as younger people, and that there is subsequently a lower level of engagement with digitised materials among these individuals (Tissen; Heijkoop). At the same time, elderly people felt hesitant to visit physical museums during the corona crisis as well, because of the health risks involved in visiting confined spaces and touching door handles (Museumvereniging). It needs to be stressed, additionally, that still only 55% of all global households is connected to the internet, and that, in the least developed countries, only 19% of the population can access the internet (World Economic Forum). Next to the digital divide separating affluent institutions from those which struggle to invest in the access to digitised resources, the inability to use or to access online information, among elderly people or among people living in developing countries, forms another clear obstacle to the democratization of digital access to cultural heritage.

Any conjecture about the future of the digital transformation of the GLAM sector would be incomplete without a consideration of the ways in which resources can ultimately be funded. Various reports have indicated that the financial consequences of the corona crisis have been particularly severe for museums, as these institutions are largely funded through admission tickets and commercial activities on site (UNESCO 13). About 60% of the museums reported a loss of €20,300 a week on average (NEMO 2). In a study conducted by UNESCO survey, it was found that about 60% of the self-employed museum professionals have lost employment (UNESCO 18). About half of the museums that were analysed in a study carried out by NEMO expected that they needed to discontinue specific projects and services in the future because of a lack of funding (NEMO 10). In spite of such financial hardship, many institutions have also invested heavily in the development of digital gateways to their collections. The resultant digital resources have mostly been made available without any charges. Given the dire financial circumstances of heritage institutions, it is unclear whether the free provision of digital services can be sustained, especially since such services usually demand continuous maintenance (Agostino 70). Tissen argues that it is no longer sustainable to rely

²⁶ These numbers have been collected using the Twitter API on 22 July 2021. See: developer.twitter.com/en/docs.

²⁷ The data have been retrieved using the Youtube Data API on 22 July 2021. See: developers.google.com/youtube/v3.

²⁸ These videos have been taken from the Youtube playlists named "Rijksmuseum Sessions," "Rijksmuseum in 60 Seconds," "Rijksmuseum From Home," "RijksmuseumUnlocked," "Tentoonstellingen," "Rijksmuseum College: Van Middeleeuwen tot Mondriaan," "Education" and "Past Exhibition." Accessed 22 July 2021.

²⁹ Agostino et al. likewise found that the hundred largest Italian state museums all increased the number of daily posts after March 2020, and that the number of followers also expanded accordingly. This development did not coincide with an increase in the number of likes and comments, however. See Agostino, et al., p. 70.

³⁰ @Rijksmuseum, "Instagram-account #tussenkunstenquarantaine heeft iets heel leuks bedacht:

Kies je favoriete schilderij

Vind 3 dingen die in je huis rondslingeren

Maak je eigen versie van het schilderij

Inspiratie nodig? Onze collectie is online te vinden: <http://rijksmuseum.nl/rijksstudio/>." *Twitter*, 19 March 2020, 2:31 p.m., twitter.com/rijksmuseum/status/1240631929516457984. Accessed 22 July 2021.

exclusively on revenue generated from physical visits (Tissen). It is important for museums to develop new business models for their online activities which would enable them to develop and maintain the initiatives sustainably. Institutions may choose to continue the free delivery of services, in line with the philosophy that arts and culture ought to be accessible to anyone, but such a scenario would probably demand considerable financial support by local and national governments. Agostino et al. note that institutions can also implement a 'freemium' service, in which part of the content can be accessed free of charge, and in which visitors only need to pay for more advanced services, such as, for instance, an online audio-tour (Agostino, 70). As yet another alternative, libraries and museums can invite visitors to make regular voluntary donations. Using platforms such as Patreon, Culture Fix, or the Dutch Petjeaf, users can express their appreciation for a service through a membership which entails a periodical monetary contribution. Digital initiatives have become vital for the durability of the cultural

sector, and the many activities that are needed to maintain these initiatives clearly need to be funded, come what may.

Regardless of the abiding uncertainties, it is evident that the corona crisis has led both to challenges and to opportunities for the GLAM sector. On the one hand, the decisions to close the vast majority of heritage institutions and to restrict international travel has resulted in enormous financial difficulties. Libraries and museums, on the other hand, have also proven to be highly resilient. The need to develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of this calamity have simultaneously released remarkable creativity. It has truly been inspiring and heartening to observe that, in spite of the disruptive restrictions, institutions have continued to feel committed, and perhaps even more strongly than before, continued to ensure that audiences can still experience the intellectual stimulation and the historical sensation that can ensue from the encounter with cultural heritage. ■

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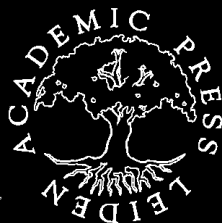
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