Sonia Yuhui Zhang

„When I am awake, I spend a lot of time staring at my roommate's cat."

USA, New York City, 28 March 2020 – 25 May 2020

I am a graduate student at the New School for Social Research studying anthropology. My parents and I decided to stay at home in Shanghai until the second week of Spring semester so that we could celebrate Chinese New Year together. When I boarded the plane to New York at the end of January, there had been about 60 cases in Shanghai and my parents and I haven't left our apartment for weeks. A week later, I was told that a member of my late grandfather's family died of COVID-19 in Wuhan. I spent the first half of the semester commuting from Bedstuy, Brooklyn to school in Union Square, Manhattan for classes (it's about 50 minutes one-way). I have also been in touch with my family scattered in various cities in China.

Since COVID-19 in New York elevated as a public health crisis in Mid-March, I have been staying at my Brooklyn apartment which I share with five other people (including fellow diarists Isabel Arciniegas Guaneme and Volkan Eke) and one cat.

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My Brooklyn neighborhood in April. Image by the author.

2020.3.28 Sat

I have been missing my sleep window in the past week. I get extremely sleepy at about 9, but it feels too early for bed, and it's about time my parents in Shanghai wake up and start texting me. Are you and your roommates staying in? Remember to drink water and exercise. What's your temperature? Tell us if you are scared. After a mixture of replying and playing Animal Crossing, I go to bed at 12, struggle until 1, then open my eyes and realise I'm no longer tired.

In the 1-hour-struggle for today, I kept thinking about the messages I received. My late grandfather's partner sent me a long message about how her family coped with the nearly three-month-long quarantine in Wuhan: only ordering grocery delivery, going downstairs wearing hats, masks and gloves, sanitising everything before

entering the apartment, letting bags stay on the balcony for at least two hours before opening them. It's so difficult, but protecting ourselves was the only thing we could do for the nation, she said.

My aunt sent me short videos of her demonstrations of covering door handles and toilet flush with tissue paper. Sanitisers don't kill the virus instantly, of course tissues are better. Now in our elevators the buttons are sanitised several times a day, but I still only touch them with a tissue. They can survive on metal surfaces for days!

At a time when the stabilisation of knowledge is not nearly in sight, those with experience claim the truth.

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I Skyped with my parents at 10 a.m., trying to not look like I had about 4 hours of sleep. My mum hurried to the dining room and showed me her calligraphy practice book. The characters look like they came straight out of the example copies. I have never seen her holding a brush until the quarantine. My dad stood behind her and very proudly patted his almost non-existent belly: "I have lost so much weight!" He said he started reading history books and has been taking notes. He hasn't written anything in decades.

Maybe I can pick up my painting a little bit. But after I play Animal Crossing.

2020.2.29 Sun

Last night before bed, I joined Vera List Center's online dance party. I clicked on the Zoom link and my former boss immediately said Hi to me on the chat window. It was a strange sight: clubbing music paired with videos of police cars, perhaps suggesting police brutality. It's a Center for Art and Politics after all. On the right hand side,

there is a gallery view of participants, mostly in their middle ages (the same demographics as their usual, physical events). Some put on strange picture backgrounds and wobble their heads to the music, some wear their party clothes and dance with lights in their hands, some stay in their lounge wears and stare amusedly into the camera. Without the sweat and fake alcohol you get in a nightclub, without the long commutes and the ID checks, people seem to have loosened their cool conduct and started to make funny dances. It was a good laugh.

After one hour and a half the party got hacked and I was asked to unmute myself. Not sure if it's VLC or the hacker. I put away my laptop and started playing Animal Crossing, the funny club music still wobbling in my head.

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My roommates asked me today if I am wearing masks in the kitchen because of them going out for groceries, and whether I will feel safer if they wear masks too. It made me feel sad. It is true that I get nervous every time I hear them using the apartment door, and I try to not go out of my room until unpacking is finished. But I also gladly take the delivery boxes they bring up. Wearing masks for me have always been perfectly normal: people at home wear them when having a common cold; some of my female friends put on a mask simply when they are not happy with their looks. I thought people here were stubborn to find it hurtful and offensive. But hearing my roommates asking me whether they should wear it still makes me feel I have imposed some unfair standards onto them, that I am using my judgemental acts to put pressure onto the house.

2020.2.30 Mon

I'm not sure if I am influenced by the zoom meetings or simply hit a long enough time, today I started to feel like I rather get some air than scrolling through endless

emails and messages. Even though I have work to do, I feel all my time has been meshed into a lethargic blob. Even playing Animal Crossing has become a bit of a repetitive business. I was slowly reading a passage in The Book of Disquiet: “I’m sleeping while awake, standing by the window, leaning against it as against everything…And I don’t know what I feel or what I want to feel. I don’t know what to think or what I am.” But Pessoa had the choice to let himself adrift walking in the street. His whining turns into relentless expression and a committed masterpiece. I read only to ease my guilt from idleness.

2020.4.1 Wed

Half way in a Zoom meeting, I realised it is precisely a year since my grandfather passed away. If he is still alive, he would be living in the neighbourhood only a few blocks away from the seafood market where the COVID-19 outbreak started. Perhaps it’s lucky that he didn’t have to go through that hospital system breakdown in his last days, my parents said. I agree with them, but I still wish to have messages with my grandfather. He would have a lot to say about quarantine life, he would write long articles and save them in his secret mobile autobiography.
In my room, there is a miniature hourglass sealed in a plastic block, beside it is a Chinese idiom written in old-fashioned font: ”Be content with oneself”. I found the block on the floor of my grandfather’s flat in the morning of his memorial service, and my family said I can take it with me. Perhaps he would suggest the same if he is still alive. The thought made me feel better.

2020.4.2 Thur

I woke up in a cheerful mood. Funny comments from yesterday’s Zoom happy hour still makes me laugh, and I noticed that today is sunny. I took out a kaleidoscope I

brought from Kyoto and aimed at the sky. It's prettier than what I would see if I go out into the sun.

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Laundry and grocery shopping are my least favourite housework, but today I was excited because it would be my first time leaving the apartment in three weeks! The sun was still shining when Volkan and I stepped out of the gate at around 3:30, there were only a few people in the street and some were wearing masks. Wonderful masks!

The excitement lasted for less than five minutes. When we crossed the street, wind started to blow and a box of trash flew towards us. I felt some particles in my eyes. In the supermarket, Volkan pushed me around (caringly) so I will not be too close to other people, while others seem to not care about squeezing past us. The floor was moist and covered with black prints of shoes. Shopping baskets were put onto the floor then stacked together at the entrance. It made me think of the Tsukiji fish market I once visited, when a friend had to push me all the time so I didn't get run over by the merchants' mechanic carts full of dead fish eyes staring at us.

After we returned to the apartment, I took a bottle and frantically sprayed everything: the door handles, the shoes, the shopping bags, the surfaces of every single grocery item. Volkan sighed as I stopped responding to him. My roommate's cat made a big fuss, meowing and jumping. I guess my roommates could only smell bleach instead of their food. With all reasons to feel bad, I was just glad about finally being at home.

2020.4.3 Fri

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Sonia Yuhui Zhang

2020.4.4 Sat

I woke up from bad dreams and felt extremely tired. Yesterday night at 10.04 I saw my mum's message that there is a 3-minute silence practiced in China for the dead from the pandemic. I missed it. Over this week people who I haven't spoken with for ages reach out to me and ask about New York. It's worse than Wuhan in January, they say. Hearing that the precautions in zero-increase cities are way more meticulous than New York at the moment, the epicenter of Covid makes me worry more.

My high school chemistry teacher messaged to check on me, himself now working as the principal of an international high school in Shanghai. The reaction to Covid in the West is very disappointing, he says, not just the ineffectiveness of their public health interventions, but also the ways in which their media portray South Korea as a successful example of combating COVID-19 but remain skeptical of China's progress. He does not occur to me as a particularly nationalist person; he is more concerned about how this global pandemic is erasing the image of America and the European countries as the stronger civilisation. He keeps texting as if it is a monologue. Perhaps people will be less obsessed with sending their kids to study abroad; the explosive growth of international schools will come to an end. The world will be shuffled, and so will my career.

2020.4.7 Sun

Today I cried a lot after my favourite character died in a show, then I started to notice my sore throat and headache. I am not sure if I am just "worried sick" about the explosive growth in New York cases and the chances for going home getting even smaller, or if I actually caught a cold. From the "Melancholy" course that has

now moved online, canonised scholars write again and again that people can get ill from sheer idleness.

2020.4.6 Mon

I woke up feeling angry about my headache, my sore throat, and my hands and feet that never seem to warm up. Then I became determined to freak out about the apartment floor. My roommate's cat strolled into my room as usual, but this time I grabbed her and wiped her feet with my face cleansing cloth for sensitive skin (brutal, I know). She struggled out of my arms and licked her paw, her ears immediately turning backwards. „Disgusting!" She looked at me, left, and came back in five minutes. She walked along the edge of my room and sat behind me, a path without my arms' reach.

When I started the Zoom meeting on collective diary writing, the cat cleaned herself with utter thoroughness and commitment. I am always amazed by how her sleepy drools smell yucky but when she showers her saliva has a flowery scent. Usually this is the time for pettiNg. She would extend her neck and start purring. But this time she shunned from my hand. Then she fell asleep, a foot dangling out of the bed. I put my hand on her feet and she immediately put her hands over it. „Those are my feet. I take care of my own feet. "

2020.4.7 Tue

What was supposed to be a nap became a heavy dream. I was in a volley ball field, the ball flying high in the air, ready to drop towards me. I know it would break my arm but I have to take it for the team. Then I felt myself lying in the bed, the enormous heaviness of the volleyball pressing me into the depth of the mattress. I tried to move

my lips and eyes, but they were sealed. I finally forced one eye open and saw my roommate soaking everything from the fridge in water mixed with soap and bleach. I wanted to get to the kitchen so I can sanitise my items on my own, but my arms are in the bed. I felt my muscles dissolving and bones softening.
I woke up with a worsened headache, my body without strength to move.

2020.4.8 Wed

Today at noon I saw a bug flying around in the bathroom. It made me realise it's already warm enough that insects are waking up, coming to life. Soon spiders and centipedes will start crawling into my room; I will have to count on my roommate's cat's hunter instinct to not encounter them. I remember at the start of the COVID outbreak, when it was only happening in places where winter is cold and long, everyone was hopeful about the warm weather killing the virus in a few months. Yesterday the WHO just published colourful leaflets saying it won't be the case. In an email exchange, Nick mentioned that many of us might get COVID before having a vaccine. This seems to be a general belief now. I wonder what summer will look like this year. I wonder whether one day COVID will show up in an ethnographic story of multi-species coexistence.

2020.4.10 Fri

Today I got a Facebook message from a fellow student: "our research is really getting put to the test these days isn't it? :)". The group chat he wrote in hasn't been active since we shared a class at the New School two years ago, where we had a project that investigates the relationship between technology and loneliness. We couldn't come up with a method to pursue a study of loneliness itself, so it ended up being about social life, or "togetherness" through technological means in general. I couldn't

remember the conclusion of the project very well – something pretty generic, like facebook friends are not as good as face-to-face friends.

Under the quarantine loneliness and isolation seem to be constant topics to pay attention to, so relevant to my research yet I have no idea how to grasp it. Thinking about the quarantine in China, loneliness and social distancing were rarely on the radar for discussion; instead, social media was taken over by psychology articles on how to deal with the traumatic effects of the absence of distance, of being exposed to tragic stories and violent images on the internet every single day.

2020.4.11 Sat

Skyping with my parents usually makes me feel more anxious about Covid than usual; they remind me too much of the numbers on the media and the details of daily life that I have already become numb to. There are always more precautions to be taken, and it's important that my roommates all follow the same standard. "Staying healthy is ten times more difficult for you than for us back then!" My mum said half-jokingly, then told me how I should develop my leadership and inspire my roommates to take care of each other. I don't know how to think about this suggestion – leadership? How am I going to ask my roommates for precautions that no one else thinks would be effective? Isn't leadership just arrogance? Maybe I will understand my mum if I went to business school instead.

2020.4.12 Sun

My prospect of going back to China is getting grim. I'm less worried about China's travel restrictions towards non-citizens. Even if they lift it, international flights are only getting riskier: yesterday there was a surge of imported cases of 52 people, 51

coming from the same flight. My dad also reminded me that if I go home over summer I might not make it back to school if the U.S. does not remove their travel restrictions. Am I going to spend the next three months in this house too? I enjoy spending time with my roommate's cat, my cooking skills are improving and I have started to sense myself getting into an organised routine, but the thought of spending the next three months without seeing my parents still hurts me.

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I was reading Haruo Sato's "The Sick Rose" for tomorrow's class. A lot of it is a man's monologue about his life in the countryside. Thick tree branches were wicked. Crawling insects were graceful. Crisp air was inhaled with utmost jealousy; withered roses were cared for with morbid tenderness.
The thought of going into the summer heat in the book made me thirsty. I kept proposing outing plans to Volkan. Let's do laundry tomorrow. Let's buy some flowers. Let's get milk and cookies. But the Weather App says tomorrow will be pouring rain.

2020.4.13 Mon

I really like the sound of rain. I woke up at 11 am. Outside the window is a perfectly grey sky; the only thing on schedule is cooking food and the Zoom meeting with fellow COVID diarists. I would take my time to finish the novel before looking at the online lectures for this week. I put on a sweater with a lot of colours.

At the Zoom meeting, we started with an exchange on recent interactions with COVID, mostly with the idea of it. Then an unfinished discussion on how to go about this omniscient narrator; Nick asked if anyone read the book he recommended and we shook our heads with guilty smiles. I can't tell if the meeting was frustrating or hopeful for each person, but the thought of writing something beyond my own universe at this time feels very fitting.

Half way through the meeting, the room became incredibly hot and humid; when I opened the window, I realised the rain had stopped yet the sky looked heavier. My roommate's cat woke up from the corner of my bed and jumped onto the window. Within a few minutes, rain started pouring down. The sound is so overwhelming, it makes all my thoughts silent. The cat rose her head towards the sky, her eyes slightly closed, breathing gracefully. The pouring sound disappeared. The sun gleams in the pale blue sky, pieces of white cloud move quickly. A cooling breeze comes in. The trees and flowers must look like crystals. Even the trash-infused roadsides will look shiny. Maybe this is the start of the summer days.

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Volkan and I took a walk outside after the rain. It was warm (20C) and the streets were tranquil. So few people. The soaking wet trash stays on the ground. Out of the people we passed by, most wore a mask. We tried to open Duane Reade's door, a woman smiled and told us they are queuing, a short line where people are so far apart. After about 20 minutes, a staff with gloves, a mask and a sunhat let us in. We bought chips, milk, ice-cream, cookies, sparkling water, orange juice. Everything but essential goods. The counter staff were in masks and gloves too, wiping everything; we had to pass the items down the hole of the huge plastic board that blocks us and them.

It's my first time walking in my neighbourhood feeling safe and cheerful.

2020.4.14 Tue

I woke up in haste from an afternoon nap to join a Skype chat with my college friends, all from the UK living in the UK. Haven't seen them in years, I feel nostalgic and a bit sad.
"I haven't seen anyone for three weeks. I really appreciate that we can talk to each

other like this, so I don't get crazy." One of them said after I told them my research is on loneliness. I was thinking about what to make of this. Everyone's experience out of the lockdown, quarantine, social distancing, is completely different: of course someone thinks it's suffering, and of course someone will call it cleansing and productivity. If it manifests in boundless ways, then what would be the point of studying a phenomenon like this? Is there anything collective about this? Is this a sufficient category for analysis?

2020.4.21 Tue (written in retrospect)

The presence of home has been very strong in my apartment room lately. My mum has shipped three packages to me so far, full of masks and gloves safety goggles. The latest package had two protective suits in it, "wear it if you go on a plane," my mum says on Skype proudly. I have been seeing photos of students returning to China in white suits at the boarding gate and in the plane – looks like a shot from the movie "Contagion". My parents keep telling me reassuring things back home and we spend most of the time talking about protective measures, but I know little of their work situations. Are they really okay?

2020.4.25 Sat (written in retrospect)

At today's Skype with my parents, they suggested that I should take advantage of COVID to reflect on myself, the choice of studying loneliness and doing a PhD program. At our age we always think why didn't we change our minds back then, they say. Sounds like they don't want me to agonise over the same things when I get old. I tried to take it seriously, but can't help but think they are projecting their mid-age crisis on me. Or am I already too stubborn to be reflective of my own decisions? Am I old, already?

2020.4.26 Sun (written in retrospect)

I napped until 3.30 p.m., and Volkan suggested we should go out while the sun is still there. It shines beautifully outside, and there isn't any trash to bring down because my four roommates have already been out today; no one wants to miss the good sunshine. My head was still heavy and a bit painful from an excessive nap, but as soon as we went under the sun we were skipping and dancing in the street, my plastic gloves making a very funny sound. A man was sitting at the stairs with a big scary dog behind him; he said hi and wished us safety. We ordered a huge pizza and discovered restaurants we have never heard of before. It was a nice sunny afternoon.

2020.4.27 Mon

I have been slacking the past two weeks. I'm pretty sure I've lost it. Instead of sleeping in the night and working in the day, I have been sleeping periodically like my roommate's cat, the "poor creature forever in quarantine". I stopped looking at the news. Reading for class goes into one of my eyes and immediately flows out from the other. I have no thoughts about them and no memories of them.

When I am awake, I spend a lot of time staring at my roommate's cat, crying a little bit when I want to. She is not even my cat, but I have spent the majority of my past year in this apartment with her. She is very vocal – I wake up with her meows and howls and wows, she purrs loudly, and when I run into her resting on Volkan's chest she will look at me with a sharp "Ah!" then run off. Her pupils can be very small like a hunter, and very big like a SnapChat filter. When I was writing my PhD applications at 4 a.m. last semester, she would come in, stare at me, go to sleep, then get crazy over the birds chirping outside the window. I decided I should write an application that a cat can understand, but that didn't work.

Before the quarantine, I would let her into my room and chase her out when my roommates are back home; in this way we all get to see the cat for a fair amount of time. With the lockdown, however, we are constantly at home and the boundaries have been breached. She is spending less time with her parents, and she would sleep at the mat or bench outside my room for a while if I keep my door closed. Maybe I should stop seeing her so as not to upset my roommates, but I really like watching her breathe in a ball shape when she sleeps. I can't believe if I move out after June this will be the end of it – no more meowing and barging into my room, no more furry face with so many questions and demands. I would occasionally visit my roommate, stroke the cat for a minute or two, and when I leave she will stand under a chair in the corner, eyes staring adamantly at the floor.

2020.5.1 Thu

On Tuesday I started the game "Ancestors: The Humankind Odyssey" and have been unable to stop. I probably slept for about 15 hours in total over the last four days. In the game I am an ape – or a clan of apes – in prehistoric times trying to survive the jungle, pass generations, and eventually evolve into other hominid species. I could hear nothing but sounds of animals howling, the trees and foliage in the jungle all looked the same, and before I could orient myself a wild boar dashed over and killed my clan members. Sometimes I get killed myself too; then the system immediately switches to the next surviving member trying to run away from blood and roars. It trains you to forget about the individual.
I have only felt this much fear and stress in nightmares. Crawling amongst the trees make me risk starving and falling to death; going by the stream for foraging makes me vulnerable to predators. I can hold certain keys to decipher my senses of smell and hearing, but that takes time too and the signals in my field are overwhelming. How did the first hominids ever make it out of the jungle? How many clans were killed, species went extinct before they figured out stone axes and wooden sticks to

scare off predators? What did it take for evolution to take the path it has, so that now Homo sapiens can kill off their ape relatives?My fingers were sore and they were shaking with the PS4 handle.
After four days of almost non-stop playing I am still at a very elemental level in the game; my school work is lagged behind and I am rushing through my readings and writings; there is no way I could play this game in a normal semester. Is it laughable that I used the concentration window granted by Covid lockdown for a survival game rather than reading for my research? It probably is... I have to get back to work soon.

2020.5.3 Sat

At today's Skype my mum jokingly said I have a look of having given up on life; but then she follows by saying it's okay because the whole world has been like this, wiggling their way to mid-2020 without noticing it or remembering it. Life in Shanghai seems to go well; restaurants are reopening, consumption is surging, and the temperature is rapidly approaching 36C. It's summer.

My parents have recently taken issue with my facial expressions; it has been a long-standing preoccupation of theirs but it became a bit vocal when I was trying to send a photo of myself to the NSSR research blog. The few photos of myself that I like were accused of showing a round, unsophisticated face; they ended up making me choose a photo where I wasn't looking at the camera. I was a bit upset yet they kept pushing: I show too much of my teeth when I smile, I should place the camera above me when I speak in video, I should practice speaking to the mirror...their worries seem particularly justified because of how much communication is done using video cameras these days.

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Volkan woke me up from my nap so we could go out for a walk in the sun. I noticed

that my preparation for going out has become much faster and more casual: changing all my clothes, putting on a cap, sunglasses, a mask and some gloves no longer feel like a large operation. The sun was very warm even at 5 p.m.; quite a few people were walking without their masks but it didn't make me feel as tense as before. I also haven't been sanitising my apartment's bathroom and kitchen as frequently; maybe once or twice a day at most. Things have started to get a bit chilled and tepid.

2020.5.5 Mon

I have gotten good at killing predators in my evolution game; I will take my clan with sharp wooden sticks and gang up on a wild boar couple, feeding on their carcasses even though we have not evolved the ability to digest them properly. It's terrifying to see my characters brutally butcher animals that were just chilling in the sun, and it feels less like an evolution simulation than a first-person shooting game. This awareness has put me back into daily life a little bit; I replied to a lot of emails before 4 p.m. and feel like I have accomplished a lot. I also had some pleasure reading for class.

2020.5.9 Sat

I can't believe I am graduating next week; I said to my parents on screen.

2020.5.15 Fri

The graduation recognition ceremony yesterday was a good one: I put on my favourite dress, did make-up, made cocktails with Pimms, ginger ale and fruit pieces.

The Pimm's bottle is a birthday present from two years ago, when my friends from the UK visited me for the first time. Almost half of the cohort is in my apartment; we decided to watch the ceremony together on TV in the living room and we laughed a lot at the disconnections, at the chat window and at each other. My parents were a bit upset about getting up at 6 am to find a bad streaming service that they can't open. Oops.

Today's commencement is more or less similar, though it felt less intimate and relevant. Just two months ago, when I was in Juliana's car, taking a ride from Troy, we were talking about how we can buddy up at the ceremonies if our parents don't come along. Now Juliana is in Vermont with her family, her smile looking as peaceful as always on the video screen. I'm in my apartment with my cohort, typing things to our family on messenger apps. Volkan would have been back in Turkey, but here he is passing me cakes, holding my hand and taking photos of us. My roommate's cat sits at the corner of the sofa with a sullen face; she is obviously annoyed but she can't help but stay close to humans.

I still think it would be nice to dress up in our gowns, go up the stage and get our papers in a fancy auditorium. But this is good.

2020.5.16 Sat

My parents sent my graduation photos to the family group chat, and my aunt made a video with strange music and animation effects. It's a bit embarrassing but I am relieved that they seem proud. Their persistent suggestions that I should reconsider my enrolment decision has made me worry a lot lately. I asked them about it in our video chat and we cleared things up.

Apparently my mum has done mini surgery to her eyes so she won't have to wear glasses. She said it felt easier than going to the dentist, but if that's true, why

wouldn't she tell me before doing it? I feel insecure about being so far away from them once again.

My dad is very optimistic about international flights recovering in summer. He says things in Shanghai are returning to normal rapidly, himself already having dined out three times. My mum says her school will formally reopen at the end of May; the end-of-September extension is cancelled. I will make it back home in time for eating rice dumplings and Yangmei, they say. I wish I could go back too. Being with them will clear the worries and misunderstandings that accumulated over time. It would be nice to be able to run downstairs, visit the library, go to cafes and malls again. Only that I never do these things when I go home.

2020.5.19 Tue

I wrote my last final paper until 8 am on Monday and completed the bibliogaphy this afternoon. The professor for this course said everyone gets an A even if they do nothing, and my final project is more like a research assistance project about a Chinese poet. But yesterday I realised its relevance to my research and became a bit absorbed in it. Hence the all-nighter.

I do think I deliberately left the project until the last minute for fun, since I haven't been sleeping so irregularly for a while. But I end up regretting this: I feel terribly sleepy and dizzy all the time since Monday, and I feel like I have become stupid.

During the time, some kind of intense fear and pain were there. So many long-standing things get let out under the name of covid. It ferments and explodes in the apartment space like rotten fruit.

Sonia Yuhui Zhang

2020.5.21 Thur

Staying at home so much has made us become such greenhouse plants. My mum said today's the first day of the year where she had an in-person class: she doesn't have to wear a mask; some students wore one at first but by the end they all took them off. But her feet ache a lot from wearing high-heels. She's no longer used to it.

I was the same at graduation last week, my eyelid getting itchy instantly after I applied the eyeliners. My eyes kept blinking without control, messing up the mascara. Feeling dehydrated the day after drinking two glasses of mild drinks. When things recover, there will be lots of embarrassingly slow recoveries to do.

5.23 Sat

I woke up at 11, extremely sleepy, called off the Skype chat with my parents and went back to sleep. Then I woke up again at almost 3 and saw Volkan's desk almost completely empty: ants have invaded his room and no matter how many rounds of vacuum killing he does, they keep coming back. He had a packed day of readings planned out and seem very stressed. Someone jokingly said the cat isn't doing her job. When a cat that bites comes over we pet her and think she's adorable; when harmless ants crawl around we feel disgusted and obliged to kill them all.

We ended up buying insect killers from the grocery shops; everyone is wearing a mask now and more or less consciously walking in a distance from each other. But the shops have already cancelled the entrance limit, at least the two we visited. Things are relaxing very quickly.

In the late evening, I had a video chat with a college friend whom I haven't spoken with for more than two years. He and I both agree that the lockdown and the intensity of catch-ups we do bring overwhelming nostalgia. I keep thinking what would I have become if I didn't concentrate on my studies and did an internship at a bank instead; if I insisted on working with the NGOs instead of reapplying to grad-

school; if I was confident enough to run the restaurant with my family in Shanghai; if I didn't have covid as an excuse to stop looking for alternative job opportunities. The possibilities and room for regret are overwhelming.

5.24 Sun

My parents are very optimistic about flights increasing in June and school moving online in the next semester; they didn't complain when they saw my roommate's cat hanging out in my room, saying that she might know that we are parting soon.

5.25 Mon

At around 2 a.m. my roommate's cat suddenly became agitated and started pounding at the corner of my room restlessly and intensely. I turned on the lights and squatted beside her, but I couldn't see anything. After half an hour her mouth is full of dust and hair; I wiped them off and she looked at me softly when I petted her, but as soon as I go back to bed (which is a futon spread on the matted floor) she turns to the corner again, eyes wide open, ready to jump.

I eventually dozed off with melatonin and woke up at around 10; the cat is fast asleep at the other corner of the room. There were brown, hard pieces scattered under my tea table, the spot where she likes to rest at. There were also pieces on her fur. A black ink-like dot was on one of her paws; when I took her hand and wiped it with a facial cloth she didn't resist. Maybe there is an ant colony behind my wall; maybe she sees someone that we can't see. It's all a bit strange.