Alexandra James

“We’re still waiting.”

Australia, Melbourne, 24 March – 25 June 2020

My name is Alexandra James – I’m Australian sociologist, working as an Early Career Researcher at a Melbourne based university. Like many of my fellow Gen-Y’s in Melbourne, I live in a share house – only a few days ago, my housemate hastily returned to her home country in fear of border closures. Should we go into a lock down, I will now be sharing my house with one other, a person who at this point is a complete stranger to me, but with whom, in a lockdown situation, I will become undoubtedly well acquainted.

I was holidaying in Japan only a little more then a week ago – I returned early due to a death in the family, and in so doing, only just missed the forced isolation rules that have been implemented in Australia. At the time of my return, there were still less than 100 cases in Australia. Where time seems to have lost all meaning, dragging as I stay at home with my dog, and flying as hour by hour the situation changes – my experience of the corona virus is measured from my return from Japan.

The following are my personal thoughts, feelings and experiences during the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tuesday, 24 March 2020

Today, nothing happened.

It’s been a week since I’ve been asked to work from home, since I began to watch rolling news coverage, since my reality has become one of watching and waiting. But today, the news has slowed. There have been no new policy announcements.

Without a doubt the coronavirus cases have increased, but they have stopped reporting national figures. Its as though we're in a strange twilight zone, where suddenly the pause button has been pressed and we're caught mid-pose. Our entertainment venues have closed, so have our gyms. But all else remains open – we can shop, we can congregate over our takeaway coffees, many still can go to work. **It's as though life goes on as normal, but underpinning this is an extreme unease.**

For a week now, I've been on tenterhooks – watching the rest of the world, Europe in particular, and waiting for our own lock down – when will our country respond in the same way? On Sunday, a lock down was called – it finally created certainty in an uncertain situation, it felt that finally, the worst had indeed happened, the plug has been pulled. But then, within hours, our politicians backtracked. So, we are still not in lock down, we are at a half way point – we are waiting, for us it is not yet real. **Australia has always been the lucky country, we have escaped unscathed from many global crises, will we escape this too?**

There is a constant dissonance between my analytical reading of the present situation, and my lived experience. It is, of course, entirely feasible that our society is soon to be fundamentally altered in ways that I can only imagine. But at the same time, I can't grasp what such a reality may look like, and so I recede to the certainty that I must be overreacting. Nonetheless, a gnawing feeling remains, the notion that nothing – no world system, lasts forever, and what we are about to face is not just a health crisis, it is a crisis of being. These are the thoughts with which I'm left as I sit at home, unable to work, unable to relax, unable to do much of anything. Today, nothing happened, we're still waiting.

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

I woke up exhausted today. It was a level of sluggishness that was all but impossible

to shake; even my attempts at positive self-talk were only half hearted before I soon relented to the stupor within which I remain.

I began with my new morning routine of checking the news – watching the live streamlining from our state premier who delivered a more compelling address than our prime minister last night. The gravity of the situation is both sinking in and unfathomable at the same time.

My sense of time is starting to disappear – I eventually sat down to work around midday, but had forgotten to eat. Now at 6pm, I'm still trying to plod through my expanding to do list, but remain in my fog, unable to focus, jumping from one task to another and then back to the news.

Thursday, 26 March 2020

Today was a better day. **I'm learning to negotiate being in this new normal and the days are starting to adopt new routines**. I managed a walk this morning, a strategy I think I'll utilise more frequently for increased productivity – I managed to focus today until almost lunchtime.

An evening run showed a Melbourne more active than ever before – perhaps because the gyms have closed, people are forced to venture out for exercise. Or perhaps the housebound now exercise as a means to escape their four walls. Regardless, the crowds of endorphin fuelled exercisers at the tan did not point to a country in crisis.

The percentage increase of coronavirus cases is diminishing – its dropped from a 25% increase per day, to 20%. A part of me is starting to wonder if this is as bad as it will get, perhaps it will all disappear now and it will go back to being okay?

Although, they also revoked all staff security clearance today – we're officially no

longer able to access our university campus.

Friday, 27 March 2020

I have more hope today. Our Prime Minister addressed the nation after lunch and congratulated us. Today, no new restrictive measures will be put in place for the community. It's making me wonder if this is it, if we're winning, if we could be South Korea, if our lives won't experience any fundamental disruption. At least, no more so than has already occurred.

Another day, another step towards whatever this new normal is – it's beginning to feel okay.

Saturday, 28 March 2020

It's as though society has entered a collective, forced state of mindfulness. As people increasingly want for things to do, places to go, a noticeable shift had taken place where people use time and space differently. People seem content to just be in the moment, sit in public spaces, public parks, and enjoy the sun. I too am beginning to bask in this strange nowhere space, where life feels paused.

I know I write this from a privileged position, in country that is not (yet) experiencing the horrors of the US and Europe. As a person who has not (yet) lost my income. But I am not the only one questioning our societal structures, our usual way of life, wondering if there's ways to achieve pause without need for a pandemic?

Monday 30 March 2020

As off midnight tonight new restrictions will come into place – no gathering of more than two people who do not live in the same house, and no leaving the house except for essentials, fines apply. And I should be taking this seriously. All of this time, I've been waiting for stricter and stricter conditions. Perhaps if lock down had indeed come a week ago, when the state premier announced it and I felt fear, and nausea and sadness, then I would have taken it seriously. But it was revoked, and instead we've had these incremental restrictions on movement. Which is undoubtedly good for gradual adjustment; perhaps too much so. Now, I'm not entirely sure of the state of play – will they really fine us for being together? For not being in our house? My partner lives in a different house – as does my housemates girlfriend – does this mean we will be fined for having our partners stay at our house? There are surely too many share houses in Melbourne to make this situation manageable. I feel so well adjusted to this new normal that in fact my focus has returned – I'm rushing toward deadlines, unwilling to be distracted during work hours, indeed wishing my work day was longer – where did it go? Corona and all its effects have, inexplicably, shifted away from my consciousness today, just as things have become more serious.

Wednesday 1 April 2020

I have many mixed emotions today. I started my day with an 8km run – my first in some time. It felt wonderful to run, and I was again reminded of the extreme privilege with which I navigate this situation. I am fortunate to live in a city wherein I can still enjoy watching the sun rise over the water, as it glints off the skyscrapers, and I remain free.

But at the same time, whilst everything remains, on the surface, the same, there is an undercurrent of change. It is like eating a familiar dish which now has a taste you can't quite identify.

Police patrolled my running track, enforcing the new two-person rules. And I, for the first time, became cognisant of what may lie ahead. Public space is the only place available to us for exercise now. However, as people increasingly avoid the street and indeed stay home, these spaces are more and more deserted. I was sworn at in a sexualised way today as I passed a man walking along the track – this is the first occurrence of this sort, as Melbourne's most popular running track is usually safe for women, all time of the day and night. But I fear, that as the city empties out, as people want for things to do, have crises of identity and experience job losses, that no longer will any public space be safe for women on their own. And I refuse to be in a position where I am reliant on my partner to accompany me – that would be a step too far down this slippery slope of gradual loss.

It is funny though, the first loss seemed the most extreme, the most difficult. The loss of access to my work, to my colleagues, to my routine. But thereafter loss has become routine in of itself. Another day, another change, another restriction. If you had told me just a few weeks ago that I would be confined to my house except for groceries and exercise, that state borders would be closed, that I would be cut off from my family, unable to see my friends, and, most of all, that I would agree with these measures, I would never have believed you. The circumstances under which this would occur would have been entirely unfathomable to me.

I also would never have believed that I would become a lawbreaker. But here I am. Today I saw my partner – he has been my partner for 2 years and in many ways, carries me through this process – perhaps we carry each other. I live with a stranger, I'm apart from my family, and my partner is in the same situation. But by going to the others house, we are law breakers in our State. They tell us restrictions will be in place for 6 months or more – for this amount of time we are to be separated from everything. **I am now on the wrong side of the law. Yet another new experience of this new normal.**

Alexandra James

Friday, 3 April 2020

I'm extremely tired today.

The type of tired that makes it difficult to think, to care, to get up the motivation to move from bed. I've dragged myself through the morning, to my computer, only to be less than moderately productive. I'm hearing my colleagues and friends speak of similar feelings – how is it that we have this collective lethargy?

I can't quite fathom my own exhaustion – I'm sleeping in, walking every morning, not living a particularly taxing life. But I can't shake this complete exhaustion, with a feeling of tightness in my chest which makes even breathing exhausting.

Sunday, 5 April 2020

After attempting to explain it away, deny it, avoid it, and hide it, I can finally admit that I'm experiencing stress. Perhaps an extreme level of stress, coupled with anxiety and grief. The tightness in my chest is emotional, as is the sheer exhaustion of getting from one day to the next.

The fact that I may be experiencing such emotion doesn't quite make sense to me – my life is good. Isn't it? I'm spending more time with my dog, my partner, my plants. Engaging in many creative activities. I'm far from Europe, from the US, and the unfolding horrors there. But, if I were to hazard a guess, I've also, in the midst of the coronavirus, lost myself, and all the things that normally keep me sane. And all of this is embarrassing to admit. I feel like a failure, as though I have crumpled in the least taxing of circumstances.

A part of me hopes that I feel such distress because I am quickly coming to terms with our new reality, becoming comfortable in the certainty that the past is over.

That there is no moving on, but only moving with – with the knowledge that what has transpired will never be undone, it will never be over, it will accompany us to the future. But the bigger part of me knows that I feel things keenly, that where others are not yet afflicted with this anguish, I am in a deep state of sorrow with not a remedy at my fingertips. Nevertheless, I will pull out all the stops, yoga til the cows come home, fix external disasters with internal bandaids, anything, just to rid myself of this feeling in my chest.

Monday, 6 April 2020

If the world didn't feel like it was ending before, it certainly does right at this moment. I was home alone this evening as the lights began to dim, flicker, turn off, only to restore to flickering. This was followed by fire trucks screaming down the street. I should mention, I live on a ground floor apartment and presently have water somehow running down my living room wall. Now, don't get me wrong, the house is nowhere near as disastrous as it sounds – a beautiful mid-century with parquetry floors. But, at this moment in time, secure is a sentiment which does not resonate with me. I'm quite aware of my quandary now – should there be no power, with my phone battery on 9%, what do I do? There's nowhere I can go, not even to my office. How do I work tomorrow? How do I contact people? I'm really rather stuck. Of course, the logical course of action at this point was to proceed with my diary entry by candlelight and wait for the remaining 49% of my laptop battery to slowly peter out.

Prior to this occurring, I had intended to write about walking – the activity which now consumes me daily, for hours. Today I set off walking toward the city, only to be met with an eeriness, where the abandoned gave way to a new Melbourne – a city ruled by whatever remains when all the sensible citizens stay away, where the solitary people watch each other, wondering what type of crazy brought the other

here. Albeit armed with my camera, I did not feel safe. The city is no longer a place for people, its soul disappeared along with the masses.

(Photo below is of Flinders St station – what is usually the busiest intersection in Melbourne, taken at lunchtime).



Photo by Alexandra James (source: https://justhowyourfacelooks.tumblr.com/)

Tuesday, 7 April 2020

I have no doubt that, to an outsider, my emotional state seems to be that of a rollercoaster. But today was a relatively good day. Daily, I'm writing extensive to do lists; inclusive of everything from walk the dog to write an ethics application. These

are, more than anything, keeping me on track, keeping me focused, helping me to return to some sort of work productivity.

This evening, much like every Melbournian and his dog, I went for a walk around the tan. The tan has become the collective gathering place of every housebound Melbournian desperate to burn off their culinary pursuits now that they reside in veritable isolation. Although, I'm not entirely sure that this aids in our social isolating attempts. For how long this can continue, it remains to be seen. They've closed gyms, playgrounds, restricted activities of more than two people – will the tan soon succumb?

Thus far, Australia has been successful in 'flattening the curve', or so our politicians tell us. And it seems, by and large, we are indeed out of the woods. Our numbers of coronavirus are steadily growing, but at a diminishing pace. It makes me wonder that perhaps, for Australia, this won't be devastating, that it won't actually get bad. Whatever bad means in these circumstances. But, what are the chances that the virus will continue to spread? That our modelling allows for things to get just bad enough, that people around me will get sick, that the people I love might get sick? What are the chances that this continues, but just at a gradual pace?

Thursday, 9 April 2020

This morning, on my routine walk with my dog, I was chastised for sitting on the park bench – I had simply forgotten that, in this new normal, this is a no-no.

And as the corona curve flattens, my world becomes increasingly uncertain. Today was the first I learned of my own, perhaps imminent, job insecurity. Arguably, perhaps I had been living under a rock until now. Although I had also believed the reassurances of the "higher- ups" – more fool me. Nevertheless, all I can do, for the time being, in don blinkers and focus on the job at hand, whilst I still have one.

Alexandra James

I'm also donning blinkers in relation to our governments expenditure on 7000 ventilators. To their construction of hospital services on football ovals. I've been told this is precautionary – but what horror are we about to face if this might reasonably be required?

Sunday, 12 April 2020

Undoubtedly, my experience can be juxtaposed with those on the other side of the world – I believe this is a necessary preface and caveat to what I am about to write. Whilst I may not be entirely cognisant of the happenings in other countries, I am sensitive of the vastly different experience of others within the present circumstances– and my heart goes out to those encountering the horror and havoc that the virus is wreaking.

But here, things are different. As each week slips by, I feel myself entering a new phase – my current phase is one of incredible calm and peace. It as though society has slowed, life has become simpler. Perhaps a type of simplicity that many of us were craving – those who were nostalgic for times gone by, when time was spent on useless but creative pursuits, where we were not on a never-ending hamster wheel striving for achievement, success, and whatever else has made the neoliberal world turn.

Suddenly, time has slowed. It has given way to space for pondering, a questioning of my life's trajectory, and a state of being that is certainly more present, content, and at peace.

Wednesday, 15 April 2020

Alexandra James

My days have now entered a routine of morning walks, attempts to work, and occasional bouts of stress. Whereas before it was coronavirus and its impacts that consumed with me concern, it now has become the more mundane matters of life. Indeed, the new normal of coronalife is no longer new, but merely normal. However, life in this state certainly brings new challenges.

Only days before the lockdown commenced, a stranger moved into my house. Where new housemates always bring their own navigational difficulties, this is no doubt amplified by our inability to leave the house for work, play, or anything except the permitted 4 (exercise, shopping, medical care, compassionate care). Small issues usually accumulate over time and loose significance in the larger scheme of life. But in our case, time has shrunk, and small issues occur daily.

Where the stresses of the world have had me gazing outward, I have been grateful for my sanctuary. But today, my sanctuary became a prison that I was unable to leave. I attempted to work from my bedroom and became cognisant of my limited options – unable to even retreat to a park for some space, I seriously debated the possibility of my moving back to my mothers. No longer does my home feel like a home, it has lost its comfort and is instead a place of tension. But with current restrictions, there's also no "opt out" option for the person living in my house – they will have to remain until we can again move about freely.

As I attempt to grapple with these circumstances, I of course descend into the spiral of what must be every academics tendency to over-analysis and self-reflection. Whilst my pride dictates that I maintain that my housemate has committed grave crimes against me, I'm not quite certain that such crimes may be, under usual circumstances, merely a mild offense. Nevertheless, these actions are certainly provoking a heightened stress, one surpassing what would constitute my usual response. Indeed, my emotional turmoil is recognisable in a myriad of different ways – such as my crying on morning walks when a familiar tune wafts through my headphones. I am certainly in a state of fragility, as though my being seeks to reflect

the state of world.

Thursday, 16 April 2020

Today I witnessed the beginning of the end. It was my first encounter with the cracks in the system, cracks which will undoubtedly become chasms in the not too distant future.

I'm not certain of the level of detail I can provide, given the potential publication of this diary, but my university – much like others – is in the process of significant change in order to ensure its viability. And this is just the beginning.

It feels as though today, I witnessed the end of my profession.

Monday, 20 April 2020

Weekends have taken on a new significance in these times of wonder. Before corona, weekends were optional, often I worked. Now, I depend on my weekends to recharge and heal from the emotional turmoil of the week. These days, weekends seem to stretch for endless hours and on Monday mornings I wake confused as to why I am suddenly required to return to my desk. The irony is, that with so much time at home, one would think that weekends would be indistinguishable from the rest of my week. But instead weekends are underscored by feelings of complete freedom, of nothing to do and nowhere to go.

Although this weekend, I did venture out – as did the rest of Melbourne apparently. I spent Sunday on my bike, enjoying a popular Melbourne trail – but never until coronavirus has it been quite so popular. Indeed, bikes were backed up at road crossings, unable to overtake pedestrians, and people walked, ran and lounged in the

sun. Pandemic you say, what pandemic?

Sunday, 26 April 2020

I cannot quite fathom that a week has passed since my last entry. This week has been somewhat of a blur. I'm vaguely aware that I have been attempting to trudge through my workload, a seemingly endless to do list. I'm cognisant that I have not done so with great success. But I am unable to tell you the particulars of this week, this week where the days seemed to melt into one another. At the end of it all, this week has felt like endless failings, of things not quite achieved, of nothing brought together – of my life in shambles.

A recurring image I have attempted to bring to mind this week is that of a horse donning blinkers – in order to achieve a semblance of normality, where I work, exercise, eat somewhat healthily, continue to clean my house, or care about much of anything, I need to focus on what is in my immediate vicinity. Over the course of this week, through hopes and hopes dashed, it has become apparent that the university sector is, to put it bluntly, fucked.

With a decrease in revenue and a government unwilling to assist, the sector is set to loose somewhere between 21,000 and 30,000 jobs in the next 6 months. Call me a pessimist if you will, but without drastic change, I'm certain this will lead to the closure of universities. Perhaps even my own.

While Australia is beginning the path back to normality, with today certain states announcing easing of restrictions, it feels as though the end of my world is just beginning. I'm watching in slow-mo as the university sector collapses – and all I can do is stand by and wait. For me, academia is so much more than a job – words fail if I try to explain its significance and role in my life. But this week, like the last, I'll don my blinkers, focus on article revisions, ethics applications, work, even though the

building I'm in is burning to the ground.

Tuesday, 28 April 2020

My life is in constant flux, from in a state of chaos to calm, and then back again. Daily, I am torn between my desire to be productive, to achieve my goals, and the need to return to bed, close the blinds, and do nothing at all.

Sunday, 3 May 2020

I live for the weekends. Weekends are the epitome of relaxation, with nothing to do other than bask in jazz, drink wine, eat food, and maybe meander down to the park. It's a time during which I'm almost able to forget that the week exists. The pre-corona version of myself typically worked weekends with very little to distinguish the different days of the week. But now, everything has changed. Tomorrow, I will, as always, start my week anew – dedicate myself to a profession that I'm not entirely sure will be waiting for me at the end of all this. Although, it seems redundant to speak of an end – life doesn't present us an end, but, instead, a series of continually evolving circumstances.

This week, other Australian states began their road to recovery, or normalcy, or whatever the word is for escaping our hibernation but not yet realising that life as we knew it has vanished before our eyes. But this is not the case for my state, viewed as the most restrictive of them all.

Around me, there is a palpable sense that people are tired of the restrictions; where we once sought to bend the rules, now they are openly flouted. Public discourse indicates that we have a fish-like memory, eagerly forgetting the circumstances our

draconian measures saved us from. And throughout this, our state has seemingly become a political football, as our left wing Premier refuses to bow to the relaxed restrictions the right wing Prime Minister wishes to impose. But rumblings of a second wave, experienced by our Asian neighbours, have our state stand firm. And for this, I am grateful.

There is no road map from this point on, I am not aware of any other country with circumstances that mirror our own. The possibility remains that we may indeed eradicate virus from our shores. But it is just as likely, I believe, that virus peaks will come in waves, accompanied by reoccurring restrictions. For now, we continue to observe the process unfolding.

Tuesday, 5 May 2020

As the weeks ebb and flow, my mood follows suit. The weeks continue in a state of mundanity with an undercurrent of now familiar tension. However one may have imagined the experience of living through a pandemic, the reality is that it is characterised by the ordinariness of everyday life; work and worry.

Whilst I have achieved a stronger semblance of balance this week, returning to my work with greater vigour, I sense the unease of uncertainty as people begin to clamour for a return to normality and definitive timelines. But tell me, can you give a pandemic timelines?

Thursday, 7 May 2020

We're fast approaching a change in lockdown restrictions – there are indications

from government that definite changes will occur on the 11th – a mere 4 days away. But in a life now characterised by drastic change, I'm realising that I'm not looking forward to more. Whilst I recognise that our conditions right now may not be optimal, I have, despite my whining, established a routine. I've found daily joy in the little things, and I'm now nervous that more change may alter the careful balance I've managed to construct.

Monday, 11 May 2020

A part of me wonders if reality will mimic a dystopian fiction, if we will be held hostage to a never-ending virus, if our lives are fundamentally altered forever. Today we followed the rest of the world and eased some restrictions. At the same time, China is reporting a rise in cases – the feared second wave. Quite frankly, if China is unable to contain the virus, I have doubts that any other country can manage it. And so, without a vaccine – which I believe will take not months, but years, to eventuate – will our lives enter a cyclical rhythm of restrictions, gradual easing, and then back again?

As off tomorrow night, we will be able to gather in small groups and engage in outdoor activities. For some reason, this doesn't feel like a fundamental shift. I miss my old life, but having a dinner party in our new reality is far from my mind – what shall we discuss, the day we spent working from home? Our Netflix binge? The mundanity of the four walls within which we sit? Now that we are permited to socialise, it's the thing furthest from my mind.

Tuesday, 12 May 2020

For those accused of being the centre of their own universe, I can relate. It's a funny

thing to feel as though your world is ending and to check the news, only to find no mention of it. Of course, I understand others aren't as interested in the world of "higher ed" as I am, aren't as invested as I am, and, granted, VC's emails aren't necessarily breaking news worthy. But as I watch my world being dismantled, piece by piece, job by job, I, perhaps foolishly, expected that others would also take notice.

Whilst I have had many emotions during the course of corona life, this is the first time I have felt powerless. As schools are given the green light to return, I remain at the behest of my university which mandates we work from home – trapped, albeit in a gilded cage. And now as the academic firing squad rears up, I am waiting, hoping, that someone will end this madness, will prevent our industry from collapsing, our expertise being wasted, and our knowledge lost; but there is silence, we are not breaking news, and no one is coming to our rescue. #savehighered

Monday, 18 May 2020

Now, more than ever before, Monday's are the worst. Each week I start with enthusiasm, only to find my energy drained before I even open my first email. Leaving the house is my only mechanism in trying to combat the exhaustion that washes over me. Today, now that some public spaces are now available to us, I opted for working in the park which sufficed for as long as daylight would allow. However, the winter sunset is fast approaching and it is already becoming difficult to do activities outdoors, such as exercise, after work finishes at 5pm. I long for the gyms to reopen – and hope that I will be able to shake this lethargy when they do.

Tuesday, 26 May 2020

It's as though I'm back to the beginning of my story. Around me, people are going to

work, playing golf, having a hit of tennis, and generally going about their lives. It's as though normality has returned for others. But I am still waiting.

My days are spent within these same four walls, with, in reality, no end in sight.

Monday, 1 June 2020

Because the things that matter the most to me are unlikely to open for some weeks, if not months, I have not been taking note of the dates associated with the easing of restrictions. So it took me by surprise this morning when I was asked at my usual cafe if wanted to sit at a table with my coffee. Unfortunately, being the first day of winter in Melbourne, it was a rainy, blustery morning and my drenched dog would not have been impressed with waiting outside while I dine.

To compensate, this afternoon I hastily made an appointment for a massage – a service I've been intently missing as I crouch daily over my laptop. It was not a long massage, and I did not stay in the area to do more than pick up some more take away dinner, but those blissful 40 minutes outside of my apartment were one of the most amazing things I've experienced in weeks. For the first time in months, I feel like myself again. Like a weight has been lifted. Like our city is coming back to life.

Tuesday, 2 June 2020

For the first time since beginning these entries, I'm writing from a place with different walls – walls different to the off white ones of my home, sparse, with the occasional art work, walls overlooking the garden. Today, the walls are that of a café. The music is pumping old classics, school children are passing by with their oversized backpacks and private school blazers, and, whilst admittedly I could live

without the extra traffic, I couldn't be happier.

Many of us found new routines, adapted to the restrictions, and even wish to hold onto the valuable quiet time we learned to incorporate into our lives. But, now that I am finally out of my house, I realise how much I value my 'before' life, and how much I've missed it. I'm so far from being able to return to normal life, but a morning stint in a café gives me hope.

Thursday, 4 June 2020

Despite the easing of some restrictions, the cracks are beginning to appear in my life. Indeed, perhaps they were merely cracks, and now they are chasms. The continued restrictions on my movement – being denied access to my office, unable to return to my regular sports – are increasingly frustrating and, as they were designed to be, isolating.

All around me, my friends and my partner, have returned to work – already for weeks in some instances. **It is difficult to explain to them the intense loneliness of working from home, particularly when I have no other outlet. When not at work, the bulk of my life was spent with friends in a climbing gym. Now it feels as though I am utterly alone, with no one to talk to in the days, and no where to go**. Given that so many have returned to work, the injustice of continuing to keep me at home, for whatever reason, is bewildering to me.

As this occurs, the university sector is plunging deeper and deeper into despair. Yesterday, I awoke to find my workplace as front page news – https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/race-to-shore-up-la-trobe-university-as-cash-crisis-bites-20200602-p54yun.html.

There is a pain associated with watching your profession be etched away at, until

there is nothing left. The people loosing work didn't just train for decades to get there, they likely gave up everything for it.

Friday, 12 June 2020

It has been now two months since I returned from Japan. It feels like the longest two months of my life – not measured merely by events, but emotions. An ordinariness is starting to return to life now. Working from home is still a difficult task, but helped by visits to cafes in the morning. It as though the chaos of corona is retreating; on some days the rolling coverage is no longer the headline news. I had thought there would have been a rush to restaurants and national parks upon their opening, but this does not seem to be the case. Instead, there is hesitancy. And it is this hesitancy that I also relate to; although there is a gradual reopening, for the most part places still seem inaccessible – the idea of seeing a friend for dinner now seems foreign. I'm sure this will change in time, but for now, unless it is my local café, I also stay home and sit with my lingering isolation.

Thursday, 18 June 2020

The thing that baffles me amidst this crisis, is an ever increasing move toward neoliberal ideology. One might have thought that as the world crumbles around us we would provide increased support, compassion, and community. Instead, it feels as though we are left to our own devices; required to be compliant with the system from which we receive no support.

Today, I could not bring myself to work. How can I explain to those not in academia the utter torture of remaining alone, trapped within my four walls, with an unfinished journal article, day in, and day out. Intellectual labour is hard, I don't

know anyone that finds it easy. It is the very essence of pushing your mind forward against invisible barriers, whilst, at the same time, battling against our own weaknesses. It requires a mental strength that can be difficult to summon on the best of days. To be home alone and left to conduct these battles, without the amour of the workplace is beyond exhausting.

My status is such that I am not essential to the university; neither in stature, nor physical presence. I have been informed that I will be working from home until at least the end of the year. In total, that will be a 9 month stretch of isolation.

I have no avenue in which to vent my outrage beyond the words on this page – so here is the full brunt of it.

At this point in time, I hold the government and universities fully responsible for the damage they are currently inflicting on their workers. In attempting to curb a pandemic, they have forgotten the other pandemic that runs rife in our society – that of our mental health crisis. They are in the process of conducing a mass social experiment, of which the consequences are likely to be unseen but widespread. We have been subjected to the ultimate isolation wherein all access support has been withdrawn by what was already a faceless bureaucracy. It is beyond irresponsible for our leading organisations and societal actors to implement draconian measures without providing assistance to those that remain subjected to their will.

Drawing on the one skill and resource at my disposal, I have trawled my university intranet for loopholes, for an access point, for a way to reach into the machine and find answers, or express my discontent. Where I have previously achieved success in this way with opaque government entities, my own university proves impenetrable. Resources on Google fared better, in at least they acknowledged the impacts of corona virus and the conditions associated with working from home. But in each instance, governmental departments and NGO's alike, framed these circumstances as the individual's responsibility to handle. I'm infuriated that these sources shift the

responsibility of this pandemic to those of us with the least access to resources and power. As we undergo pay cuts, increased workloads, stress of a pandemic, and isolation, the most powerful organisations have been alleviated of their responsibilities and instead the answer to my ills is merely do to more yoga, be more mindful, or get a better chair. Throughout this crisis, it is the voice of the individual, of their cries for help, their needs which has been silenced and stifled. There is a new depth of powerlessness that has accompanied this pandemic, and my only recourse is limited to the words on this page.

Thursday, 25 June 2020

Over the past week, there have been significant developments. Both for the good and for the bad. And just as I have found freedom, it is at risk of being snatched away.

After what seems like an age of eternity, as off Friday last week, I returned to that which keeps me sane, my passion in life – rock climbing. Having this component back in my life, after more than 2 months without it, has fundamentally shifted my feelings toward life and working from home. Now, I can't even imagine returning to the office. I savour being at home, moving between climbing, cafes, and work, and I have a renewed vigour and determination for work.

At the same time, there is now an upsurge in corona cases within my state, my city. We are the only place where this has occurred and the rest of the country has dubbed us as 'virus plagued'. And whilst I would rather be in my virus ridden city than anywhere else in the country (here's looking at you South Australia – https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/17/victorias-daniel-andrews-scorned-by-south-australians-after-border-sledge-backfires), there is a new apprehension in the air. People are again wearing masks, the trend resurfacing in a way that has not been visible over the past few weeks. There is talk of shutting state

borders, isolating us from the rest of the country, or perhaps just isolating the hot spots of virus infection in our city. And now there are rumblings of a second state lockdown.

This is a timely place to bring to an end my story. I have lived through the first lock down, documented within these pages. And now, we look to the second.

Perhaps, this will be the first of many. Perhaps, we will continue to live in our dystopian reality where a virus plagues the earth, forcing us to return to our homes in reoccurring spells. Where our individual liberties are breached for the good of society. Where protests occur on an increasing basis. Where financial inequalities widen, between those of us who have work, and those that do not. And where we have no toilet paper.

I imagine the next few months will be some of the most interesting in my lifetime. It is anticipated that September will bring new, severe economic challenges, and a vaccine does not appear to be on the horizon still for some years.

But, if I have learned anything, it is that no matter how dramatic the story, no matter how it might appear in the history books, or on the front page news, life, lived daily, is actually rather mundane. And change, no matter how large, unexpected, or fast, moves incredibly slowly. And we adjust, day in, day out. Life is not lived in the headlines – but moment to moment.