



What the Pandemic Means

Perspectives from the Trinity Long Room Hub
Covid-19 Blog Collection



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

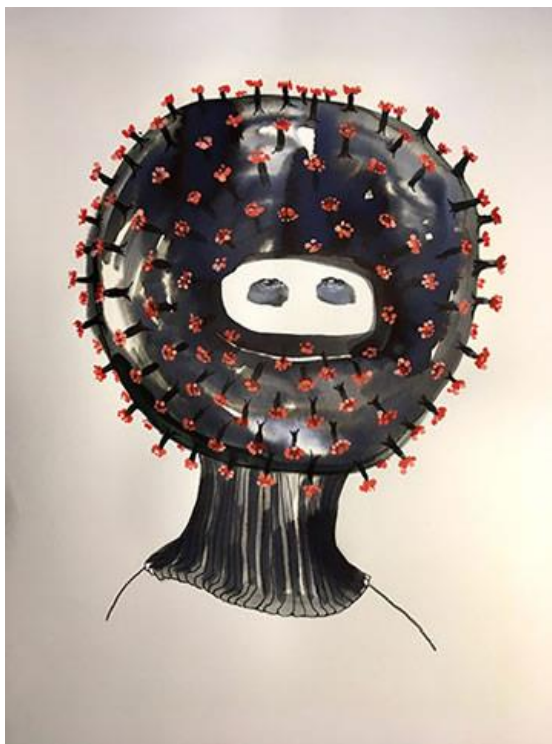
Trinity Long Room Hub
Arts & Humanities Research Institute

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, when the pandemic hit our shores, we were told to stay home. We listened to public health advice and to experts debating the measures required to protect us. Scientific terminology crept into our daily conversations. But in addition to the ongoing uncertainty about the long-term impacts of the virus on our health, many of us were struggling with the uncertainty that now emerged in our everyday lives. What did the pandemic mean to us, beyond its medical impact, in a cultural and social sense?

To consider this question, the Trinity Long Room Hub launched a Covid-19 blog series, in which contributors reflected on how we might cope with the loss of physical contact and human connection (Courtney Helen Grile, p.16) and how we could feel both ‘urgency and fatigue’ (Jacob Erikson, p.8). We heard from author Caitríona Lally on how our understanding of ‘essential work’ changes at a time like this (p.5), and Sam Slote talked us through Ulysses as a guide for navigating the pandemic as we celebrated ‘Zoomsday’ (p.23). Lorraine Leeson highlighted what it means to be deaf during a global health crisis, (p.45) and Eve Patten drew on post-war literature to reflect on what might come next: ‘A Tale of ‘Afterwards’” (p.53).

In these and other blogs from the series, we looked to language and literature, to art and creative practice, and to many other humanities disciplines in search of precedent and perspective on what the pandemic means for us as humans. We are pleased to be able to share these blogs with you in this shortened collection.



Notes and Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all our contributors from Trinity College Dublin's nine Arts and Humanities schools, partners of the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute.

The artwork in this collection is by Rita Duffy, who was artist in residence (remote) at the Trinity Long Room Hub during the pandemic and in the months previous.

The Trinity Long Room Hub Covid-19 Crisis Blog ran from March 2020 to December 2020.

This collection has been edited by Aoife King, Communications Officer at the Trinity Long Room Hub.

For more information, please see www.tcd.ie/trinitylongroomhub

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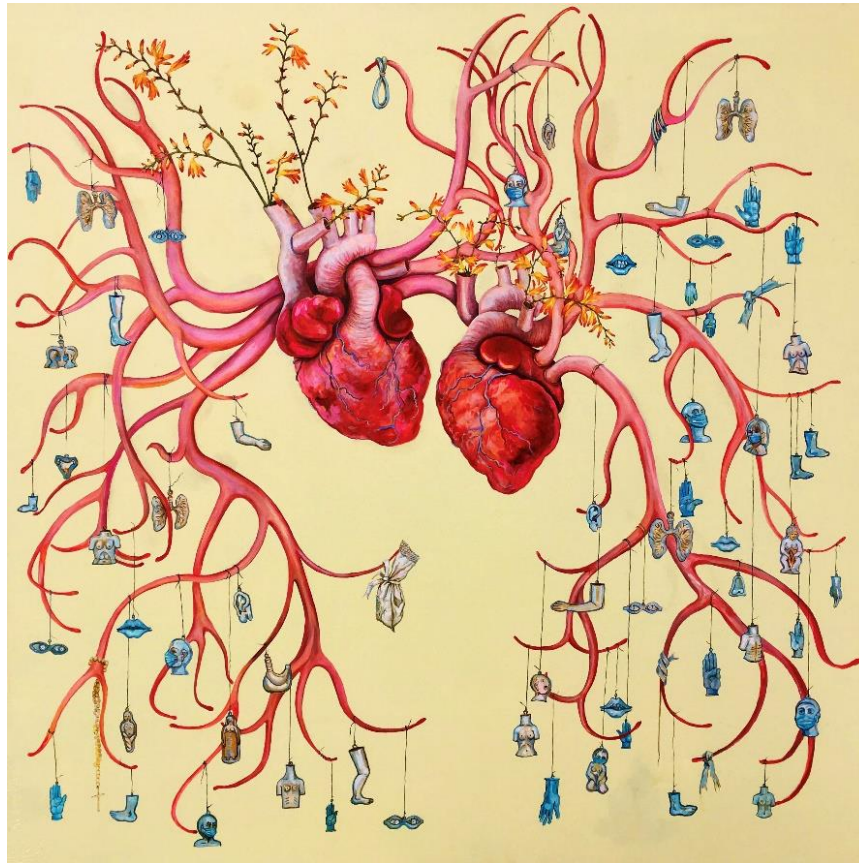
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Anatomy of Hope

A specially commissioned artwork by Rita Duffy, Artist in Residence at the Trinity Long Room Hub 2020

We are all of us, connected. And a cruel wind has blown us inward on fearful Covid breath. The robust heartfelt kindness and romance of community reassures us all will be well. Ourselves alone, the ghost of a memory flits through my head. Superstitious ribbons and rags impaled on thorns, suffering on, offering it up, enduring at all costs doing the right thing. Amulets threaded with nostalgia plead for a better future, a borderless place both snug and wide open. With a doorway never needing to be closed. I want to imagine not the threat of freedom or its tentative, grasping fragility, but the concrete thrill of borderlessness.

Jogging in Lipstick

Rita Duffy, Artist in Residence, Trinity Long Room Hub

It is indeed the strangest of times. I had been working as a visiting fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub in Dublin, provoking and disrupting the 'southern comfort' zone, back when borders and Brexit all seemed very important. Then, wham, from beyond our wildest sci-fi imaginings came the virus!



I can't read facial expressions hidden behind the breathing muzzle..."

I wander through the computer looking at news reports and press photographs; interviews seem too jarring and voices on Twitter say the same things over and over. My phone is pinging with images and effort-filled humour that occasionally hold me in wonderment at human ingenuity.

I take time to settle my early morning thoughts, just looking out the bedroom window at the cherry tree in full glorious splendour, a tangle of branches and all the small pink blossoms waiting to burst forth. The Dublin sky seems bluer and the day ahead more plausible after my short visual meditation.

Back to the computer, avoiding the fear-filled news reports, I find myself on Ebay. A 'Jigsaw' dress with an oriental print hangs on the back of a stranger's door. It's beautiful. A summer frock that I imagine wearing, walking the beach on a warm July afternoon, not a care in the world. I buy

it, and then recognise the cherry blossom print on cream silk as a manifestation of the tree outside my bedroom window. My purchase of a pre-owned garment is an act of hope.

Most of the time, I've been working away here trying to make sense of the new normal. Drawing my way through the fear and uncertainty, anchored firmly to the drawing board. It's all I can really do to make sense of what I am living through, waiting for

the big waves to hit. Home baking is improving; we make food and deliver home-made pizza wrapped in tinfoil to the doorsteps of neighbours. The nourishment of friends is essential. My sons have been digging in dark Fermanagh soil, they have sown a multitude of crops. I am reassured no one will starve and proud of their industry and practicality.

I've taken to jogging on a daily basis. I put on lipstick before I go out, I'm not a natural runner but I must survive. I am advised it's good for my mental health to exercise. I go out and turn left on a route that takes me down to the Memorial Park. This park contains an extensive monument to the dead of the First World War; designed by Lutyens, it is a well-ordered quiet place. I pace myself and try to forget my feet as I struggle round the circular garden. I pretend it's my grandfather's pocket watch and he is watching me from his grave in the Somme. I stop for breath and observe the magnificent beauty of a magnolia tree about to bloom, a



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granite orb is held effortlessly amidst its branches, countering the image in my head of our planet, stone heavy with fear.

Enjoying every excuse to stop, I've begun to take note of the discarded plastic gloves I see on the ground. They form a silent sign language spelling out some collective message. The peeled off plastic holds a memory of hands, cauterised social encounters with fingers inverted pale and accusing. Strangers pass me at a 'safe' recommended distance. Some people wear masks, cautious and untrusting. I can't read facial expressions hidden behind the breathing muzzle, we are all of us capable of biting.

Originally published on 1 April 2020



Cleaning an Empty University

Caitríona Lally, Rooney Writer Fellow, Trinity Long Room Hub

Every year when summer exams finish, Trinity housekeeping staff start their spring cleaning. With fewer students and staff on campus, offices, lecture theatres, and libraries are thoroughly cleaned before conferences start and international students arrive and a new rhythm sets in. Every year, that is, but this one. Trinity closed to students and staff mid-March and the world of housekeeping changed. Overnight, we had become ‘essential workers’, with letters to prove it, even if our wages didn’t show any sign of this essentialness. Skeleton cleaning crews have continued throughout the lockdown. With a one-year-old and two-year-old at home, going to work for my rostered days feels like a break, even as it poses logistical childcare challenges.



Overnight, we had become ‘essential workers’...

Front Arch is now closed, so at 6am I knock on the door and the security guard opens from a safe distance. I collect the keys to the Museum Building; I’m the only cleaner in there and I turn on the lights

and check the toilets. There’s a ‘Marie Celeste’ feel in the rooms, the airless smack of a place abandoned in haste. There are woollen cardigans hanging on chair-backs and gloves left on desks, relics of a season long past. Diaries lie open to that week in March when the country stopped, timetables taped to walls give details of classes that never happened.

Cleaners are usually told not to wash cups and plates in kitchens -- not to be 'giving them bad habits' -- but staff departed so suddenly that their plates and cups were left dirty, and it doesn't feel like giving anyone bad habits to wash them.



Cleaners are not supposed to wipe the blackboards but I figure those equations have had their day...”

Office clocks in the building are still set to winter time: it's disorienting to think you're an hour behind when you glance up. There are desks in semi-circular formation from the last lecture in the Drawing Office and chalked equations on the blackboards.

Cleaners are not supposed to wipe the blackboards but I figure those equations have had their day and wipe them off, in a reverse *Good Will Hunting* manoeuvre. When a bulb goes in a kitchen, I ask the maintenance man to change it, saying superfluously 'no rush.'

One morning in April I walked the length of the Arts Block during my break, hoping the coffee dock was open, then settling for a bag of crisps from the vending machine instead; when you're up at 4.30, 9am is lunchtime. The stillness and silence were eerie, the hum of the vending machine the only sound. I waved to the attendant at his post, feeling like we were the two last soldiers standing after a grisly battle. There were days in April and May when the only people I'd see in Trinity were the security guard on the way in and a different guard on the way home six hours later. It's bizarre working in almost total silence, hearing only the creaks and cracks of old wood, the hiss and gurgle of the pipes, the rhythmic thud of

the clock in the Museum Building's main hall, where I'm watched over only by the huge skeleton of the Irish elk.

Cleaners are used to the College being quiet in the early mornings, but emerging from the Museum Building at midday to total silence is striking. I see foxes many mornings, and the squirrels eye me as if I'm invading their habitat, which in a way I am. I miss chatting to my colleagues. A cleaner I work with left some presents for my kids in the tiny housekeeping kitchen, a room so small it can no longer safely be used for breaks. In return, I hid some sweets and a magazine for her, in a box under the table, and she reciprocated with more little treasures: in this way we are carrying on a socially-distanced chocolate conversation.

It's June now and there are signs of life on campus again. Small petals and leaves work their way in to offices through closed windows, construction work on the cobbles in Front Square has resumed, the occasional staff member appears as though from unseasonal hibernation - I feel proprietorial, eyeing them the same way the squirrels on New Square look at me. Maintenance men are measuring safe distances for students in lecture rooms; a room that holds 70 will now hold just 12 students. I struggle to wrap my brain around the logistics of this - I'd rather do manual work than the mind-addling task of trying to arrange the timetabling of tutorials or cleaning schedules.

As the academic community in Trinity have had to get used to online teaching, so the housekeeping community will have to get used to new cleaning practices when term starts in September. Cleaning has taken on a new significance; it will doubtless be done more often and more extensively, and I reflect - having lost a job in a previous recession - that at least I may be in a pandemic-proof occupation.

Originally published on 24 June 2020

Are we there yet?

Jacob J. Erickson, Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics,
School of Religion, Trinity College Dublin

In the last weeks, the days from my window have begun to blur together a little bit. Where I'm sheltering in place, my partner and I recently mistook a Saturday for a Tuesday. While we keep a somewhat organized working schedule, a sheer malaise of time and space is beginning to set in. In the midst of the actual grieving for the loss of loved ones, in the grief of the disruption of daily lives, and the anxiety of future unknowns—in the midst of all of this change—a bit of weariness is hitting as well. We're living in an odd space of simultaneous urgency and fatigue.

As an environmental ethicist, as knowledge of, and governmental response to, COVID-19 emerged, I was entering a sabbatical dedicated to the diversity of emotional responses associated with the climate crises of our day. Reflections on the phenomena of eco-anxiety and anger, climate grief and environmental despair, denial and fear filled my research notes as I began to ask how the energy of emotional affects shapes, empowers, or subverts ethical action for the sake of our common planetary life. We see these affects in politics, in questions about whether or how to raise kids, in last year's climate protests, or in our everyday anxieties about the ecological future of earth. I've been calling such things the "ethics of planetary feeling."

Climate affects, emotions, and feelings present us with a lot to process, but the experience of what scholars of climate grief call "apocalypse" and "recovery" fatigue is pressing in my mind. Climate researcher Per Espen Stoknes popularized the language of apocalypse fatigue, arguing that rhetorical strategies which attempt to motivate climate action by pointing

out the facts of environmental losses or potentially bleak futures actually overwhelm us into feelings of powerlessness. And in the wake of the effects of the present crisis, apocalyptic-turned-recovery fatigue continues to inscribe itself in our bodies as important decisions are made about what comes next. As clinician and climate emotion researcher Leslie Davenport points out, recovery fatigue can inhibit our ability to act. This kind of fatigue makes it difficult to make the most ordinary of decisions. We feel unmotivated, we can't concentrate on everyday realities, and forget daily tasks or facts. One may feel even further disempowered to make decisions by spiraling moral complexity or feel like action doesn't matter much anyways. Ethics becomes exhaustion. Sound familiar?

Recovery fatigue is in need of ethical and energizing communal storytelling beyond doom and gloom. Indeed, such stories might highlight and create political resilience to navigate the weighty fog of these emotional atmospheres. Most importantly, we have to tell a different story about the creativity of time. Recovery from loss or a fundamental change of life is a creative process of grieving full of contradiction that advances into the future and not a one-time fix or clear event. There will be no time when society is back to "normal," and normal wasn't good for everyone anyways. What is considered normal is just an economic or political story told, and many other more stories might be recalled, crafted, and remade for this time and place. The process of remaking ourselves personally and politically in new ways will continue for a while.

Secondly, we've been given a powerful vision of what it looks like when society radically invests in a different material story to tackle large-scale ethical problems head on. Not all current changes are desirable, of course, but we know that change is possible and doable. That change might empower us to think and act together to respond to, say, climate change for the sake of a smart and sustainable planet. We've been given a glimpse of a different world. Difference is possible, and that's actually, remarkably exciting. What kind of historical lessons, visions, and new forms of ethical

society do we wish to invest in to motivate a reimagined future? How might we rethink our political orders, democracy and economy for the sake of a livable planet?

At the end of the day, scholars of climate grief turn to one of the most powerful ways that our human species bears with uncertainty and learning—we play, seriously. Humans engage in forms of creative practices that help us work out the ironies and contradictions of the moment. We create works and stories that uncover injustice, respond to violence, and tend to vulnerability. We imagine together, with all the difficulty and messy human baggage that brings, of how better to be part of this planet. Sometimes, in the midst of fatigue, creativity offers us agency. Humor can be profoundly revelatory, point out absurdity, and instigate profound change. Play is what artists, storytellers, and humanities scholars do remarkably well. We need to think about what serious playfulness means amidst the seriousness of this crisis. In the face of perceived dead ends, that playfulness might help us bear our planetary feelings, as the old Psalm says, from “mourning into dancing.”

Originally published on 26 May 2020



Protecting our Human Rights

Donna Lyons, Assistant Professor of Law, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin

Born of noble and benevolent ideals, international human rights law has been as criticised as it has been celebrated. While the doctrine of human rights has existed for centuries, our current global framework of human rights protection came into being following World War II with the establishment of the United Nations (UN).

Rather unfortunately, disillusionment with the UN system of rights protection has increased steadily over the past five decades. Indeed, some of the greatest challenges facing our world, including social and economic inequality, the plight of refugees, and environmental degradation, have not been adequately resolved by the international human rights project. Consequently, many scholars, legal practitioners, and advocates now look elsewhere for solutions to large-scale societal challenges.

The coronavirus pandemic may be a turning point in this trend. The World Health Organisation (WHO), a specialised agency of the UN founded in 1948, has swiftly taken centre stage in advising and guiding policymakers and the public through this period of uncertainty. The current pandemic requires a coordinated global response, and it may be that this gaping need will encourage the community of nations to turn

towards the UN, including its numerous human rights mechanisms, rather than further undermining an organisation already in a state of crisis.



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Covid-19 has caused governments to introduce tailored limitations on some of the most basic rights of individuals, including the rights to liberty, travel, freely associate, practise religion, privacy, work, education, and healthcare. In addition to coordinating a medical response, the UN might also very usefully coordinate

national approaches to constraints placed on rights as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Two major international human rights treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (ratified by 113 and 115 countries respectively) provide a roadmap for the permissibility of domestic rights restrictions under international human rights law.

The Preamble to both Covenants emphasise that the individual, ‘having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs’, bears a responsibility to strive for the observance and promotion of the rights within each Covenant. The treaties view rights and duties as interconnected, and the well-being of the community as inherently linked to the well-being of the individual. Therefore, derogations from and limitations on rights are permissible under certain conditions.



...international human rights law has been as criticised as it has been celebrated.”

Regarding ‘public health’ limitations in the ICCPR, the State must be facing ‘a serious threat to the health of the population or individual members of the population’ and the measures taken ‘must be specifically aimed at preventing disease or injury or providing care for the sick and injured’ (Siracusa Principles).

Article 12 of the ICESCR explicitly recognises the importance of prevention, treatment and control of epidemic diseases as a facet of the right to health (elaborated upon in General Comment No. 14). The Covenant’s principle of ‘progressive realisation’ requires States to take steps, to the maximum of their available resources, to achieve progressively the full realisation of rights within the Covenant (Article 2), which, even under normal circumstances, provides a degree of flexibility in the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights.

The ICESCR contains no formal derogation provision but allows that States may place limitations on economic, social and cultural rights ‘as are determined by law only in so far as this may be compatible with the nature of these rights and solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society’ (Article 4).

It is clear that international human rights law – the ICCPR and ICESCR included – provides guidance on the permissibility of curtailing individual rights both in peacetime and during a state of emergency. The current health crisis requires a coordinated worldwide response, and on account of their germane content and global reach, the international human rights treaties and associated monitoring mechanisms may see an increase in political and public support. Should this occur, the monitoring mechanisms will require better resourcing, structuring and leadership to overcome their myriad adversities, both internal and external.

We enter a new era, and it is an excellent opportunity for the international human rights regime to lend oversight to national public health-related controls. If successful, this will also provide the international human rights framework with a firm training ground for addressing other collective priorities – social, economic and environmental – facing our world. Engaging with these immense challenges will require levels of solidarity, collective action and cooperation which the Covid-19 pandemic primes humanity to begin in earnest.

Originally published on 14 April 2020

Seeking Connection

Courtney Helen Grile, PhD Candidate, School of Creative Arts,
Trinity College Dublin

I remember being optimistic in early March that if we closed down for six to eight weeks we would be able to get on the other side of things. Now, almost eight months later, it is easy to see my naivety in light of the ongoing current of the pandemic and the global deaths that continue to climb. The impact of this pandemic is global, local, social, and personal to us all. As a socially engaged artist and researcher in the field of Drama, my instinct is to think about the loss of connection that occurs through face-to-face encounters, both large and small.

While I do marvel at technological and online innovations, I also firmly believe that we lose so much that we need as human beings when we lose the ability to share space with others—have a coffee/drink with a friend, attend a concert or festival, and celebrate holidays with our extended families.

Within my research, I advocate for the idea of applied drama praxis as a potential means for operating within the public sphere and the idea that this needs to happen in the physical presence of others. Ironically, I was beginning my research on why physical presence was so important as the initial lockdown was starting. The aura that Walter Benjamin references



...we lose so much that we need as human beings when we lose the ability to share space with others.”

in his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in regard to works of art is easily translatable to human relationships and connection. Benjamin writes, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” Extrapolating from that the idea of the “unique existence” of a collective group of people in a certain place at a moment in time, a singular experience occurs – though each person will experience it individually (as well as collectively) and take away different meanings – that cannot be replicated through mediated or digitised means. Sensing the heartbeat of another human being in close proximity is not something that can be replicated.

Additionally, I discovered that what my body felt and instinctively understood about face-to-face encounters can be also explained through phenomenological approaches like kinesthetic intersubjectivity and kinesthetic empathy. Having to use technology to interact with others is often a disembodied experience. Largely, when we interact through platforms like Zoom and Facetime, we sit, we are seen from the shoulders and up, and we look into a screen. Not only aren’t our bodies interacting with the people we are speaking with through body language, proxemics, and haptics —we often aren’t using our bodies much at all as they remain fairly stationary and inactive during these online encounters. Essentially, we aren’t able to connect with our whole selves. Digitised alternatives to live, in-person communication are not able to replicate the wealth of information an individual is able to process in the physical presence of another. Sound transmits, but it is altered and has taken on a slightly different note. It might also be cut off, interrupted, choppy, or filled with static. A picture transmits, though again possibly altered: coloration, pixilation, etc. The information one is able to take in visually is stagnated by a fixed frame and the loss of peripheral views. Scent and touch/feeling are lost altogether.

Any shared taste through food or beverages shared by the group is also lost. Meaningful connections made through eye contact are abandoned in this space.



...when it is safe to gather again, the little moments that had before been taken for granted in communion with others will be cherished, celebrated...”

As a human being who requires and thrives on physical connection and sharing space with others, the past months have taken a toll. In addition to losing in-person connection with my fellow colleagues and friends (who know me as a hugger and usually indulge me!), my family and partner

are back in the US. The easing of lockdown restrictions provided me with a small respite from the disconnection I was feeling by allowing me to “elbow bump” (connection!), take walks with (kinesthetic empathy!), and see/speak to people in my life that I had only been able to see and hear translated through technological means.

Despite being on my backup reserves of connective energy, I remain optimistic. Optimistic that when it is safe to gather again, the little moments that had before been taken for granted in communion with others will be cherished, celebrated, and sought after. Optimistic that the solace people have sought through the arts during the pandemic will be

reflected in a revitalised interest and engagement in these activities. Optimistic that computer engineers and programmers might learn how to make interactions through technology more human because of the wealth of knowledge produced during this time. And finally, optimistic that we might emerge from this with the intention of creating a more intentional and healthy way of living instead of falling back into old, pernicious routines that had been our “normal.”

Originally published on 18 November 2020

Education Transformed

Professor Ann Devitt, School of Education and Academic
Director of Learnovate, Trinity College Dublin

Since 12 March, schools, universities and all education institutions in Ireland have been physically closed but virtually open. Educators from their homes are working hard to ensure continuity of learning for their learners young and old in their homes and are trying different avenues to achieve this. This crisis has forced educational systems across the globe to move online and is likely to transform what teaching and learning looks like in the coming years. The relatively slow pace of change in embedding digital learning in schools has suddenly accelerated.

Educators, even those who were slow to embrace technology, are suddenly finding themselves running online classes and managing student learning online. The development of educators digital skills could have a really positive impact on how we integrate technology and learning in the future.

But at this moment in time, when the academic year is drawing to its close and we are facing into great uncertainties for next



“This crisis has forced educational systems across the globe to move online and is likely to transform what teaching and learning looks like in the coming years.”

year, it is worth pausing to reflect upon what we want our future of learning to look like and what we can learn from our Covid-19 experiences. Educational theory over the decades has grappled with how and where learning “happens” and how and whether the context in which learning takes place relate to learning. An ecological perspective on learning, like that of Leo Van Lier or Bronfenbrenner, challenges the notion that learning takes place essentially in the brain of the individual and is only indirectly related to the context of learning. From an ecological perspective, learning emerges in and through a learner’s verbal and non-verbal interactions with the elements and individuals in their learning context over time. This interactive structure can be seen, for example, in the close engagement of an infant with their caregiver through eye gaze, facial expressions and gesture but also in the asynchronous interactions of the peer-reviewed scientific article where authors enter into dialogue with knowledge and others in their field through citation and discussion.

As John Dewey wrote in 1916, “education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth”. Education should not therefore follow a “banking model” of filling learners up with knowledge. And yet, we may be in danger of re-establishing this very model in our collective move online.

Policy and practice in recent times in Ireland has moved to a more active, interactive and creative teaching and learning environment. In the sudden move to virtual learning that happened in March, all educators and learners instantly lost the social context of their usual learning environment. This is not just about children missing their classmates or people missing their friends. It is a fundamental element of the teaching and learning process that became suddenly absent and has not been fully replaced, as suggested by preliminary findings from a study of teaching and learning practices under Covid which is funded by the TCD COVID rapid response initiative.

Initial findings indicate that the most common modes of engagement tend towards the transactional--sending work and sending feedback--and away from the dialogic, active or interactive. Whilst this reflects the intensive efforts of our teachers who have moved to teaching online in a virtual instant (pardon the pun!), it is important that we as educators re-establish the rich, active, interactive practices of our face to face teaching in an online environment. As one of the teacher participants commented “[I] miss the conversation that is so important in class that pushes the learning”

In this uncertain future that we are facing where we may not have the physical proximity of the classroom for learning, we have to remember that we are all at the heart of it still human. We are driven by our social nature and we learn through our interactions with each other and with our environment. In the online learning space, it is essential that we do not forget this. We must learn to bring ourselves, our relationships, our engaged interactions with us online so that we do not revert to a learning model of passively filling our learners with online content.

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Stuck in the Middle with *Ulysses*

Professor Sam Slote, School of English, Trinity College Dublin



Ulysses archives the
bountiful, ephemeral
quotidian.”

Ulysses is written on a human scale. Even with the abstractions of the ‘Ithaca’ episode, it remains grounded in the human and the everyday. *Ulysses* is filled with the kinds of mundane experiences that many of us missed in our various quarantines: randomly meeting people in the streets, going to shops and pubs, eating out, chatting amiably, and so on. *Ulysses* archives the bountiful, ephemeral quotidian.

The death of the Blooms’ son Rudy is just one of the reminders that the everyday is fragile. But, *Ulysses* also shows us that there is humour and even joy amidst this fragility. As Bloom thinks as he leaves Glasnevin, ‘Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life’.

Towards the end of the book, when Bloom and Stephen go out to Bloom's back garden, Bloom shows off his astronomical knowledge, such as it is, and points out phenomena of ever-increasing scales: 'to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten, of allotted human life formed a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity'. Attention next turns to the other

direction, to 'dividends and divisors ever diminishing without actual division till, if the progress were carried far enough, nought nowhere was never reached'. The human parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity, fullblooded life as Bloom calls it, lies in-between these two realms of scale, the cosmically vast and the microscopically miniscule.

The Covid-19 crisis has certainly drawn attention to the fragility of our in-between. In quarantine we are besieged by forces on both the macro- and micro- scales, stuck within a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity in-between two forces. On the micro-scale we have the virus. While it is a complex point as to whether viruses qualify as living beings, they do exhibit the fundamental impulse of life: the transmission and perpetuation of genetic information. For this they need to use humans: we are the vehicles for their survival.

According to the English biologist William Hamilton, besides viruses, this is what our very genes do: use humans as expendable carriers in order that they might propagate. Directly following from Hamilton, Richard Dawkins famously coined the expression 'the selfish gene'. Seen in this



...our life, for the moment, is an exercise in trying to abide ambiguity.”

way, the selfish virus is a rival to our own DNA in that both exploit us for their own ends. In ‘Oxen of the Sun’, a drunken Stephen actually groks on to something like Hamilton and Dawkins’s point, but his masculinist perspective locates the propagational agency onto the sperm rather than the gene: ‘We are means to these small creatures within us and nature has other ends than we’. Seen from the gene’s perspective, humans are but the means for the propagation of genetic information.

We’re also confronted by a macro-force that likewise exhibits a kind of selfish viral logic. We call this force capitalism. Various politicians and commentators called for an easing or ending of quarantine in order to get the economy back on track. To take just one example, in April the

Lieutenant-Governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, implored an end to quarantine because ‘there are more important things than living’. Or, as Bloom awkwardly but trenchantly relates in ‘Eumaeus’, it’s all ‘a question of the money question’.

Like the virus, capital thrives on human hosts for its propagation without regard for whether individual hosts live or die. Like nature, capitalism is not on the side of humans, it is a human endeavour, but it is not human, it has other ends than we. If we can say that capitalism is like a virus, then the converse analogy also holds: the virus is entrepreneurial, it exploits resources ruthlessly in service of its own propagation.



Ulysses shows us that life is difficult, but in its difficulties there can be joys.”

And so, we're stuck in the middle between selfish micro- and macro-vectors tearing away at us. What we have here in our human scale is each other and warm fullblooded life. We're alone, with others. As the song says, 'stuck in the middle with you'. And in this pandemic, I've been stuck in the middle with *Ulysses*, which at least is not much of a change for me.

As readers of *Ulysses*, one of the things we're used to is the idea of living with ambiguity and the unknown. I'm not just referring to the formal complexities of *Ulysses*, but rather in that how *Ulysses* shows us that life is difficult, but in its difficulties there can be joys. One of the lessons of *Ulysses* is to learn how to tolerate what Nietzsche calls the 'rich ambiguity' of living. In living on in the shadow of SARS-CoV-2, there are many unpleasant uncertainties that we have to deal with; our life, for the moment, is an exercise in trying to abide ambiguity.

Originally published on 17 June 2020

Words for Social Change

Kristina Varade, Visiting Research Fellow, Trinity Long Room Hub

“When the human realm seems doomed to heaviness, I feel the need to fly like Perseus into some other space. I am not talking about escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I feel the need to change



...I feel the need to change my approach, to look at the world from a different angle.”

my approach, to look at the world from a different angle, with different logic, different methods of knowing and proving.”[1] Italo Calvino’s essay on “Lightness,” included in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, seems particularly timely given our current

reality. In my Dublin apartment, altogether contemplating the more or less total loss of my tangible sabbatical fellowship research and proposed projects, the situation of my aging parents alone and isolated in the U.S., and the degeneration of my country into preventable mass death and government-provoked anarchy, it is hard not to be weighed down by the gravity of the present. Writing and research seem shallow and self-indulgent at this time of great change, and so instead I find myself instead pausing to contemplate my place in the world and how to make it a more socially just and responsible one. Yet, as Calvino finds, there is a way out of the quagmire of uncertainty, a way to move forward, to change the

approach with the intention of improvement and self-growth. One of those ways is through the means of considerate language.

Language was what brought me to Dublin in the first place this past New Year's. I was ready to fulfil three separate fellowships concerning Irish and Italian comparative literature. It seemed as though these disparate disciplines and languages were finally coalescing and bringing my long, arduous niche academic pursuit to fruition. Words flowed freely; in Irish, English, Italian, and in a patchwork quilt of other languages at the college too.

Then Covid-19 hit. And for better or for worse, as Umberto Eco has described, so did a 'fiume di parole/a torrent of words.'

Words, obviously, became our *modus operandi*. No longer could we rely upon the physical gaze or touch. Indeed, these human aspects could have instead been physical markers of our demise, due to the gravity and pernicious nature of the pandemic's spread. So, what to do?

"Can't bring back time. Like holding water in your hand," Bloom laments in *Ulysses*. As the days flow into one another under lockdown, time escapes us. And yet, Bloom also escapes these depressing facts of life through memory. Indeed, as we celebrate a very different sort of Bloomsday this year (the terms 'Zoomsday' being bantered about), we should be cognizant of time passing and consider alternative methods to foster meaningful connection. For the most part, we are still physically absent in each other's presence. And yet, in many ways, we are more connected than ever



Language is
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before. These are manifested in both delightfully retro and undeniably futuristic ways.



...in many ways, we
are more connected
than ever before.”

Thinking about language, we have returned to letter writing, sending care packages and ‘snail mail.’ I can’t tell you how many of An Post’s complimentary “Grá” postcards I’ve

sent over the last couple of months, along with birthday cards, thank-you’s, get well and sympathy cards for lives altered or lost by the virus. Opportunities for knowledge building and professional development is at an all-time high, in which platforms like Zoom help to democratise education and exponentially widen opportunities for academic growth. One month ago, a general presentation at a typical conference panel would have had less than a hundred people and would have been strictly located in a fixed place; now, through online videoconferencing platforms, the possibility for participation, as well as the locations from which these participants derive, is seemingly endless. Language programs such as Duolingo are more widespread than ever, as are social media games such as ‘Words with Friends.’ And thinking about the popularity of Sally Rooney’s series ‘Normal People’ during lockdown, it is inevitable that a televised “Conversations with Friends” will be the natural progression. Because that’s what we are presently tuned into. Changing the approach. Virtually perfecting the art of conversation.

Language is the one thing we can rely upon to keep us in touch, and we have a responsibility both to listen and to choose our words wisely, no matter the format. We are challenged to use language for meaningful social change and to listen carefully to the people whose words and voices

have been marginalised for far too long. Losing discrete social cues of touch, smell, and subtle aspects of sight via social media and teleconferencing, we increasingly rely upon our words to create connection to our partners, colleagues, students, family members and friends. And while I've lost a great deal in the tangible reality of research and critical enquiry, much more has been gained through collegiality and the building of personal and professional relationships. How was this accomplished? In a word, through language.

Originally published on 1 July 2020

The EU and the Pandemic

Rory Montgomery, Public Policy Fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub

The European Union has been heavily criticised for what many see as the slowness and inadequacy of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly so in Italy, which so far has suffered most, just a few years after what it justifiably saw as a lack of solidarity in the migration crisis and, maybe less justifiably, in the euro crisis. But disappointment and frustration are being widely expressed.

Is this fair? And if so, how can the EU perform better? Governments are responsible for the organisation, management and funding of their health services. Maintaining public order is also for them alone. So neither the Commission nor the Council – where Member States meet together – can issue instructions, for instance to a policy outlier such as Sweden.

Where the EU can play a central role is in the management of the unprecedented economic and financial effects of the crisis, which are worsening day by day. Unemployment is soaring at an extraordinary rate, and governments will rack up enormous debts in supporting business and workers. The EU's normal rules on government support for business and on budget deficits were quickly suspended – there is no way they could have been obeyed or enforced in any case.

The most important player so far has been the European Central Bank. Its role is to ensure that financial markets and the banking system continue to function. It is determined to apply the lessons of the euro crisis. After an early gaffe by its President, Christine Lagarde, it has stepped up to the mark, cutting already low interest rates further and boosting the money

supply by committing to buy close to €1 trillion of government bonds. Like other central banks internationally, it may well have to do more.

Member States are responsible for their own public spending. Massive rescue and stimulus packages have been announced by several of them. But they have not so far been able to agree on how the EU can or should support weaker countries – again, above all Italy for the moment. The aim is to ensure that all governments can borrow sustainably and at similar low rates. While so far bond markets have functioned quite well, and there is no immediate threat to any country, that is not guaranteed to continue. It was Ireland’s eventual inability to fund itself at affordable rates which drove us into the 2010 bailout.

There seems to be broad agreement that the €500m European Stability Mechanism established in the eurozone crisis can be used to back national borrowing. But the key question is whether the EU needs to go further by issuing bonds in the name of all Member States, for which they would



Perhaps the EU’s greatest challenge will be to contribute to economic recovery after the pandemic.”

be collectively liable – debt mutualisation. In simple terms, in effect, whether financially stronger member states should directly support some spending by weaker ones.

This debate first flared up during the euro crisis. Issuing so-called “coronabonds”

is now supported by a group led by France, Italy and Spain, and including Ireland – which incidentally has reverted to its position during the euro

crisis after a period aligned with more hardline governments. But this is anathema to more fiscally conservative countries, which would pick up most of the tab, including Germany and The Netherlands. They argue that such an initiative is not necessary at this time, is legally prohibited, and would be opposed by their own publics. Even if introduced temporarily in a crisis, they fear that *c'est le provisoire qui dure*.

The failure of leaders to agree on this issue at last week's European Council, and the reopening of eurozone crisis fault lines, made the European Union seem impotent and divided. This blow to European solidarity outraged public opinion in Italy and some other countries, to the point that the very future of the Union has been questioned.

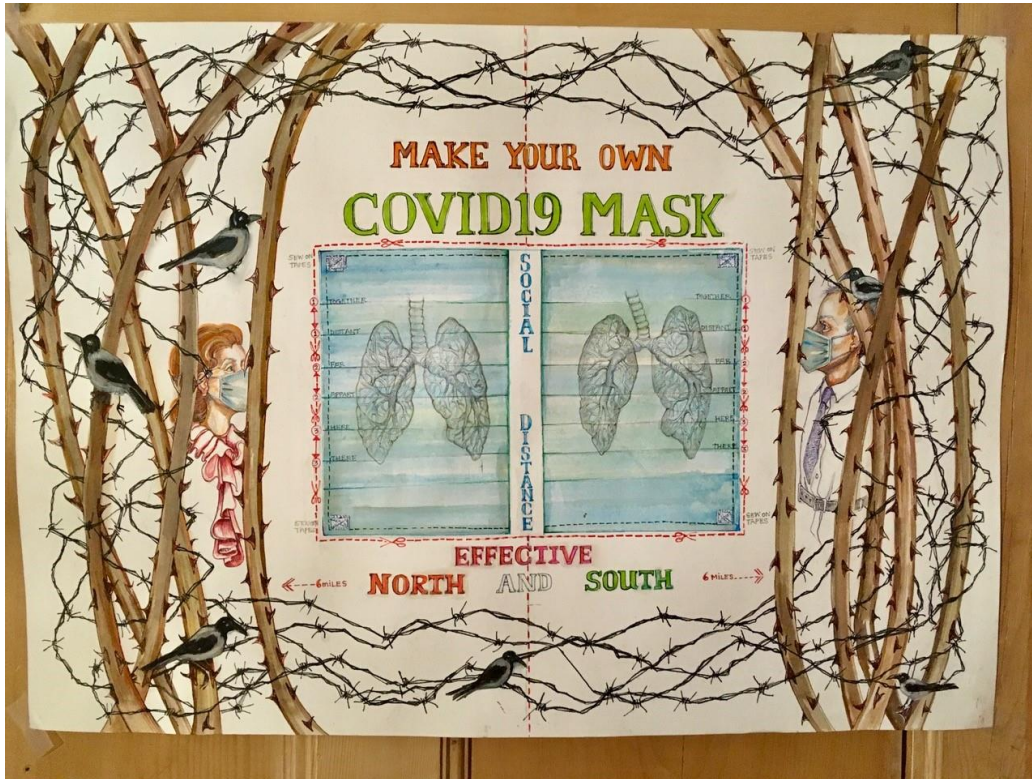
Perhaps the EU's greatest challenge will be to contribute to economic recovery after the pandemic.

Really fundamental questions will need to be confronted sooner or later. The debt mutualisation debate will not go away. It will be extraordinarily difficult to agree how quickly and how fully to reinstate the rules on state aids to business – where the State will have intervened massively - and on budget deficits and public debt - which will have exploded. The EU will also need to ensure that the single market in goods is fully functional, and that barriers to movement are lifted. The consequences of the crisis will dominate EU business for years. Many of its core achievements – the single market, competition policy, the euro, and borderless travel – will be under at least some pressure.

The pandemic is, for now, a public health crisis first and foremost. Even if it cannot play a leading role, there is more the EU can do. But its main responsibility will be to help to staunch the economic bleeding, and to help create a basis for recovery. It can only do so effectively if institutions and member states work together in a spirit of mutual responsibility and solidarity--and are seen to do so. Attitudes and words matter, as well as

policies. Belief in the EU, already damaged in many countries over the last decade, cannot be allowed to ebb away.

Originally published on 6 April 2020



Worship in a Time of Pandemic

Sahar Ahmed, PhD Candidate, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin

In the final pre-COVID days, just before Ireland went into lockdown on the 13th of March, I attended a Sunday service at St Ann's Church on Dawson Street in Dublin. As a Muslim, I'm not usually to be found at any church on any Sunday morning, but as a lawyer researching human rights and religion I felt privileged for having stumbled there that day because I was not prepared for what I heard. The vicar's sermon that Sunday was an exemplary piece of public service. He deliberated on the exacerbation

of illness in the community, on the increased cases of infection and the mounting numbers of dead from the coronavirus. He prayed for his community, but he also performed a vital role in community outreach for public health. The sermon included practical and medically

substantiated advice on

how to protect ourselves and our loved ones from COVID-19; Revd. Gillespie stressed the importance of hygiene in and for faith, and the readings chosen for that day were beautiful, recalling the Christian principle of protecting our brothers and sisters.



I felt privileged for having stumbled there that day because I was not prepared for what I heard.”

I left the service feeling uplifted, but also heartened by something I have long believed: beyond their acknowledged and crucial roles in community-building, faith leaders also play a huge part in influencing the direct action their followers take. I am certain that the congregation that day at St Ann's went home and washed their hands multiple times, taking heart in knowing they were doing the Lord's work.



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Unfortunately, this hasn't been the case in many parts of the world, and my research into religion and human rights has become depressingly relevant of late. My home country, Pakistan, had a strong start battling the virus. Lockdowns were put in place before most countries in the developed world, all flights in and out of the country were grounded, quarantines were put in place for people being repatriated,

and there was widespread testing. Prime Minister Imran Khan was praised internationally for this swift action. But the Pakistani government completely failed to place restrictions on religious gatherings inside mosques.

Pakistan has long struggled to exert control over its fourth organ of governance--religion. In late March, the President of Pakistan was holding meetings along with provincial governors to convince senior clerics to close their mosques. That the state could enforce this for schools,

universities, businesses, and industry, but had to plead with mosques, is telling.

Unsurprisingly, the clerics rejected this plea. All congregational prayers went ahead for weeks, lockdown notwithstanding, as thousands worshipped in tight and cramped mosques with no social distancing measures, until Pakistan's COVID death toll became staggering. By the end of May, Prime Minister Khan had capitulated, lifting the lockdown before the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. New coronavirus cases skyrocketed as a result, with daily infections rising from about 1,700 per day before the relaxation to 5,385 new cases on June 9th, a single-day record.

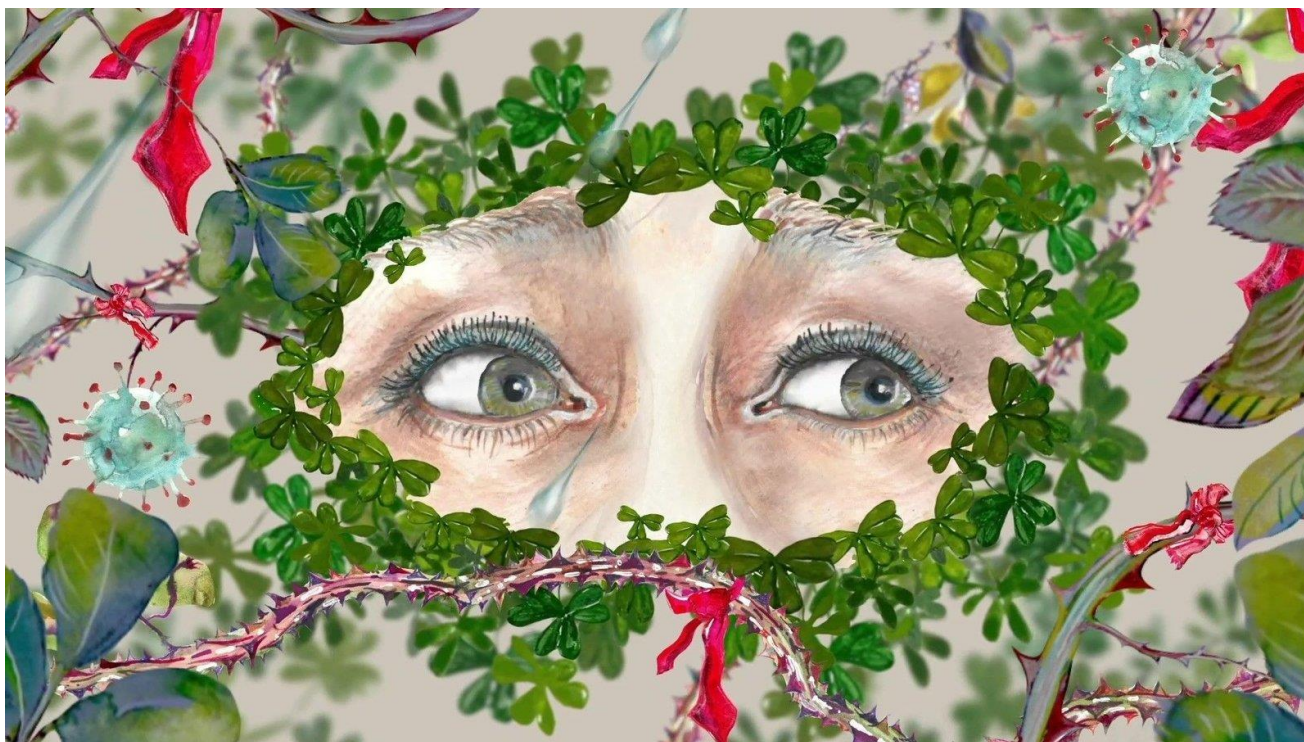
This is not to say that the mosques' refusal to close their doors directly caused this outrageous spike in numbers for the country - other lockdown measures were poorly enforced. But it sets a dangerous precedent when we see people of faith's right to practice their religion freely start impinging on public health and safety.

A similar situation arose in Brazil where a major evangelical church won a legal battle in court over the right to remain open as public gatherings were being cancelled. While most state governors and many city mayors tried to ban religious assemblies, they were overruled by President Jair Bolsonaro, who exempted churches from coronavirus lockdowns as an "essential service". With similar scenes playing out across Africa – in Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania, to name a few – one can't but help wonder, should the right to freedom of religion be invoked when being faced with a global pandemic that doesn't care whether its victims are believers or not? And should a church champion its legal rights over its moral duties to its community?

And as the world continues to grapple with this 'new normal', as major religious epicentres such as Mecca and the Vatican start cautiously

reopening, governments must take stock of how they will reconcile religious institutions and citizens' constitutional and human right to freedom of religion, with the expediencies of a public health emergency. There is a high human cost at stake, and governments will have to rise to the challenge.

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A Heroine of Irish Public Health

Daryl Hendley Rooney, PhD Candidate, School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College, which is considered to be the centre of immunology research in Ireland, has produced a long and illustrious list of standout immunologists and virologists. Some are well known, while others are less so. Trinity's School of Medicine was the direct route through which many of these skilled practitioners passed. In 1904, the Board of College agreed to the admission of women to study medicine. Just over ten years later, amidst the cohort of incoming medical students was 25-year-old Dorothy Stopford Price (b. 09 September 1890–d. 30 January 1954), a middle-class Protestant and so much more besides.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in medicine in 1921, Stopford Price went on to work in a number of roles focusing on public health. However, her greatest professional achievement was her pioneering work in the use of the Bacillus Calmette–Guérin (BCG) vaccine to treat the lung disease tuberculosis (TB) also known as consumption due to its victims being 'consumed' by weight loss and breathlessness. TB was a leading cause of death in Irish children in the 1930s and in the 1950s about 7,000 cases per annum were recorded. She intensely studied the BCG vaccination on the continent and brought back her newly acquired knowledge to Ireland, pioneering the vaccine's usage in Saint Ultan's Children's Hospital – the first hospital in Ireland or Britain to administer the BCG.

Irish history has never been black and white; green and orange. And neither were the people enmeshed in the contexts of the past. Dorothy Stopford Price was a complex character – a middle-class Protestant, an accomplished medical practitioner and an Irish nationalist. Her political views were heavily influenced by her aunt Alice Stopford-Green, an historian of Ireland and Britain, and an ardent critic of British colonial policy in Africa. After graduating, Stopford Price’s first post was at the dispensary in Kilbriain, Co. Cork, where she would assist the local IRA brigade as their medical officer. She also taught first-aid to members of the women’s republican society, Cumann na mBan. No doubt, Stopford Price realised the often-forgotten relationship between medicine and politics. Indeed, the politicisation of medicine is ever-present, from recent debates about the legalisation of marijuana in the Republic of Ireland to states buying up vaccination stock before it even leaves the test tube. Access to coronavirus vaccinations will be one of the most testing areas



Dorothy Stopford Price was a complex character – a middle-class Protestant, an accomplished medical practitioner and an Irish nationalist.”

for diplomacy and industry over the coming years.

These issues aside, it is worth noting that Stopford Price’s influence on public health did not end with her long journey examining the pathology of TB: the BCG vaccine, which was rolled out across many countries during the latter quarter of the twentieth century,

has recently come to the fore as a possible means of limiting the spread and severity of coronavirus.

In her biography of Stopford Price, *Dorothy Stopford Price: Rebel Doctor*, Anne MacLellan paints a fascinating picture of a rebellious doctor who challenged the patriarchal pillars upon which the study and practice of medicine had for too long been upheld. This biography, which utilises Stopford Price's extant letters, diaries, and research papers housed in Trinity College Library (some of which have been digitised and are easily accessible online), relays an incredibly personal insight into her experiences of such tumultuous events as the Easter Rising and the spread of the Spanish Flu.



Stopford Price realised the often-forgotten relationship between medicine and politics.”

It is often the case that the names of the great inventors and technologists who have made human beings' existence all the easier and indeed lengthier have been too easily forgotten.

Once a vaccination becomes ubiquitous, our indebtedness to its creator wanes over time as it becomes so familiar in everyday life that one fails to realise that it did not always exist. One can guess that in the advent of a vaccine for COVID-19, it will not take long for the name(s) of its maker to be forgotten. What is more, the sheer number of laboratories, of both private and public domains, means that we rarely read or hear the names

of the individuals and/or teams involved in creating a vaccination. However, when one considers the suffering – physical, mental and/or emotional – that often accompanies an illness, the importance of innovative medicines, treatments and protocols that emerge to treat patients or indeed make their plight that bit more bearable is truly immeasurable.

While we are often reminded to acknowledge our frontline workers, let us not forget the toil of those behind the scenes who are attempting to alleviate the pressure felt by patients and, subsequently, the frontline workers themselves. As her obituary published in *The Lancet* made plain, Dorothy Stopford Price ‘combined charm with vision, and zeal with an insistence that clinical work must be based on firm scientific foundations’. As we take a moment to appreciate the arduous journey of one selfless Irish medical practitioner, let us spare a moment in thanks to her contemporaries, as well as those who have been passed the torch.

Originally published on 16 September 2020

Deaf in a Global Health Crisis

Professor Lorraine Leeson, Centre for Deaf Studies, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin



We know that deaf people may experience mental health problems to a significantly higher degree than hearing people.”

Mid-March 2020 brought significant changes to life for everyone. We adjusted to reduced face to face engagement and increased use of online technologies. Those of us who are sign language users were no exception. In some ways, we had an advantage – here in Ireland we use Irish Sign Language (ISL), a

language expressed in the visual gestural modality, where articulation occurs using the hands, face, torso and body of the signer. ISL is not in any way a manual expression of English or Irish. It is an entirely separate language with its own grammar. Sign language users need to be seen to be ‘heard’ – both in face to face settings and online. In recent years, applications like Facebook and YouTube have opened up ways for this unwritten language to be

documented and shared asynchronously, and fluent signers are mostly comfortable with seeing themselves on screen.

When COVID-19 hit our shores, the overriding concern was ensuring access to information about the virus and the government guidance issued in the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) briefings. Humanitarians agree that everyone has “a fundamental right to generate, access, acquire, transmit, and benefit from information during a crisis. . .” To do this, linguistic access is essential.

Many gaps have been bridged by community organisations working in partnership across this period. For example, the Irish Deaf Society has worked with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to ensure that there is information about COVID-19 in ISL on their website. The Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters, the Irish Deaf Society and the Centre for Deaf Studies (Teresa Lynch) worked collaboratively to develop new vocabulary and explanations of COVID-19 terminology like ‘lockdown’, ‘social distancing’, ‘herd immunity’ and ‘contact tracing’. This supported the Deaf community, the interpreters who have been working at live briefings, and the many deaf translators who have engaged in informal, voluntary and formal translation of COVID-19 informational resources to ISL. Yet other gaps remain. This oversight is critical to point out because English language literacy is an issue for many deaf people, particularly those who were educated in the second part of the twentieth century when sign language use in education was suppressed. Many adult Irish deaf people report struggling to complete a form or read a newspaper article, so imagine navigating the complexity of information on COVID-19 where only a relatively small proportion of information is available in a language you understand.

With the world moving online, there are possibilities opening up around online participation, but ensuring access requires the sharing of responsibility for organising linguistic access. Some of my research at the Centre for Deaf Studies has shown the asymmetrical effort that deaf sign language users have

to invest in order to secure similar – or lower – levels of access than their hearing peers across a range of environments in the pre-Covid era. Everyday we see social media postings from deaf friends and colleagues around the world pointing to the labour required to secure rudimentary access at all levels (e.g. in the UK, lack of provision of interpreters for Downing Street COVID-19 briefings has led to legal proceedings against the British government).

Beyond access to COVID-19 updates, there are the associated surges in demand for mental health services and noted spikes in domestic violence in the population at large. Both of these are domains where Irish deaf people are almost invisible and yet have a higher rate of need. We know from UK studies that deaf people may experience mental health problems to a significantly higher degree than hearing people. There are no studies of mental health in the Irish deaf community and no specialist

services serving this community. This is worrying at the best of times, but with the increased demand for mental health services arising from COVID-19, access to culturally and linguistically appropriate responses is a necessity that requires investment.

We know that reports of domestic violence have increased by 30% during lockdown. Here in Ireland we have no data around how deaf people



...there are the associated surges in demand for mental health services and noted spikes in domestic violence in the population at large...”

experience Gender Based Violence (GBV), and more particularly, domestic violence, but figures from other countries suggest that deaf women experience GBV at double the rates of their hearing peers.

There are also some potential “COVID-19 bounces”. The increased visibility of ISL on our screens will hopefully transmute to increased awareness of the Irish Deaf community. Many online events have been interpreted to Irish Sign Language and posted online. We have seen ISL and British Sign Language interpreters on screen for COVID-19 briefings in Northern Ireland where both of these sign languages are used.

This is a year like no other. And yet, life goes on. For Irish Deaf People, the year is particularly significant as December 2020 marks the commencement of the Irish Sign Language Act, passed into law in 2017. The ISL Act recognises Irish Sign Language as an official language of Ireland and sets out to improve access to public services for signers. If anything, COVID-19 has provided a test-bed for access. Our hope is that the increased visibility of sign languages in Irish society will not recede. If what is out of sight is out of mind, then we need to ensure that the sight of sign language use in our communities of engagement becomes a firm fixture of the ‘new normal’.

Originally published on 23 September 2020

Democracy is Fragile

Dr Elspeth Payne, Beate Schuler Research Fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub

Here we go again.

Monday 21 September. The most senior British government advisors are about to make a televised appeal to ask the ordinary person to do more. The British government is considering additional 'lockdown' measures to curb the spread of the virus at a critical juncture. The British public are facing potential mega-fines and being called upon to 'snitch' on those failing to self-isolate.

And people are confronted with the news that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson may or may not, in the previous fortnight, have been on a secret jaunt to Italy.

The story was broken by the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, and mistakenly confirmed in a press release by the Italian airport in question, San Francesco d'Assisi.

This is not the first time the story of a holiday has caused a headache for the British PM. In August, an ill-timed Scottish break made the headlines.

These trips, alleged and confirmed, are certainly not the worst of the current British government's misdemeanours. They pale in comparison, for example, with its explicit willingness to break international law with its internal market bill. Having passed its third reading in the elected chamber, the House of Commons, the legislation is currently under review by the

appointed peers in the House of Lords. Yesterday, the EU launched legal action against the UK for this breach of the Brexit withdrawal agreement.

Nor are they the government's worst, or most dangerous, failings in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic. The late initial response. The UK's relatively high infection and death rates. The disproportionate impact on minority populations. Confusing messaging. Contact tracing app failures. Testing inadequacies. The list could sadly go on.

As we face into a difficult winter, it feels like there is an increasing drive on the part of the British government to absolve itself and blame the individual. It wasn't the testing system that was the problem, but that people with colds were getting unnecessary tests. It wasn't the 'Eat Out To Help Out' scheme or the push to get workers back to the office that contributed to the surge in cases, but that selfish people were socialising unnecessarily. Epitomised by the call to spy on your neighbours, it all feels increasingly nasty.

And there have been fears, even within Johnson's own party, about the continued and unjust use of emergency powers to circumvent parliament. Rebellion was only narrowly averted by the introduction of new powers allowing MPs to vote on Covid restrictions.

Number 10 were quick to deny the Italy allegations, clarifying that Johnson could not have been in Perugia because he was selling his Brexit vision to 256 Tory MPs on Zoom. A spokesperson for Westminster Cathedral later confirmed that the PM had baptised his son in a private service on one of the days in question. This was a case of mistaken identity. Perugia Airport quickly retracted its claim in a statement reprinted by *La Repubblica*.

So Johnson didn't go to Italy. But after endless months of underhand tactics – and years of public school bravado – few would perhaps have been surprised if it were true.

What if Italy had been just the latest in a long line of scandals? It feels like, right now, it wouldn't really matter. In Ireland, 'golfgate' had consequences. A spate of resignations – some willing, some less so – followed. Johnson, like Trump, seems untouchable. Nothing sticks. We never reach the tipping point.

This wasn't the only recent controversy involving Johnson and Italy. Last week, the PM brashly dismissed claims that test and trace system disparities were to blame for the relative Covid infection rates in the UK, Italy and Germany. Johnson professed there to be a fundamental difference at play: Britain's apparent status as 'a freedom-loving country'. Echoing whiggish narratives of Britain's past, he proudly claimed 'if you look at the history in this country in the last 300 years, virtually every advance, from freedom of speech to democracy, has come from this'.



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But whatever achievements and merits can be associated with its historic development, the British parliamentary system no longer seems to be working.

What do we do when a leader commands such a majority that a bill explicitly designed with a willingness to break international law is passed? What do we do when an unelected official holds too much power? How do people have a real say beyond the ballot box?

And you'd be forgiven for missing the Italy story. Not merely because it turned out to be untrue. Not just because of the fast turnover of news

culture. But because many of the right-leaning mainstream media outlets in Britain are keen to brush such scandals aside. This is not a privilege extended to their political and ideological opponents.

Although Johnson is coming under increasing scrutiny in this quarter, the situation could be about to get worse. Political and financial attacks on the BBC, the UK national broadcaster, have escalated since Johnson's election.

When the once-shocking is increasingly mundane. When 'fake news' seems as plausible as a falsehood. When the freedom of the press is less certain. When trying times only further expose the fragility of our democracies. What then?

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A Tale of 'Afterwards'

Professor Eve Patten, Director of the Trinity Long Room Hub

It was the novelist E.M.Forster who first used “the long weekend” to refer to the tense interim between the two world wars. The expression may unfortunately become relevant again as we contemplate a brief summer release from lockdown without fully liberating ourselves from the fear of returning to it in the autumn. In this context,

“afterwards” has become a heavily burdened word. As we begin to talk – tentatively – about resuming something like normal life, the phrase “after it’s over” has become a kind of mantra, a promise of a magical reversion to a world we recognise. But we have to confront the fact that the virus also has an “afterlife” – perhaps retreating, perhaps mutating, perhaps returning with the havoc of a second wave – and in this context the idea of “afterwards” is filled with apprehension rather than enchantment.

Trying to imagine what a Covid-19 “afterwards” might be like has sent me back to thinking about some of the novels I have taught for many years to my students, and most of all to the fiction that emerged after the end of the First World War. The literature of this time is characterised by a very distinctive anxiety, generated by the terrible experiences of global conflict but also sustained by a crippling sense of foreboding, a dread that the War, with its unfinished business, will inevitably return. The novelists of the 1920s reported on the everyday consequences of the peace – to adapt Keynes’s



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premonitory title – by depicting a society pinioned between grief for what had happened and disquiet at the prospect of it happening again.

Responding to this landscape, literary critics often engage the language of psychoanalysis and talk about “anticipatory trauma” to describe the effects of post-war novels that seem to have no straightforward direction. Caught in what Virginia Woolf called the “perpetual suspension” of a fragile present, these works are jumpy, jittery, breaking up the conventional lines of plot into episodes that start and then tail off, thoughts that drift at random, stories that seem to have no resolution. Of course this was “modernist style”, but such narrative disturbance was also rooted in the very real anxieties of the post-war era, as authors juggled with portents and predictions of a second conflict. In Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*, set almost five years after the Armistice, a shellshocked soldier struggles to move forward in a state of acute mental disturbance, fuelled by the fear that disaster will befall him again. His anguish is extreme but he embodies a collective trepidation: “The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?” Woolf’s question mark is familiar to us all at present – where and when will the virus strike next?



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Media-driven comparisons between the calamity of world war and the impact of coronavirus are over-stretched and obviously reductive of their different scales, but perhaps there is a useful analogy to be found in the prospect of an ‘afterwards’ common to both. Troops on the Western Front sang “After the War is Over”, written in 1917, with little comprehension of how their “afterwards” would extend across at least a decade of

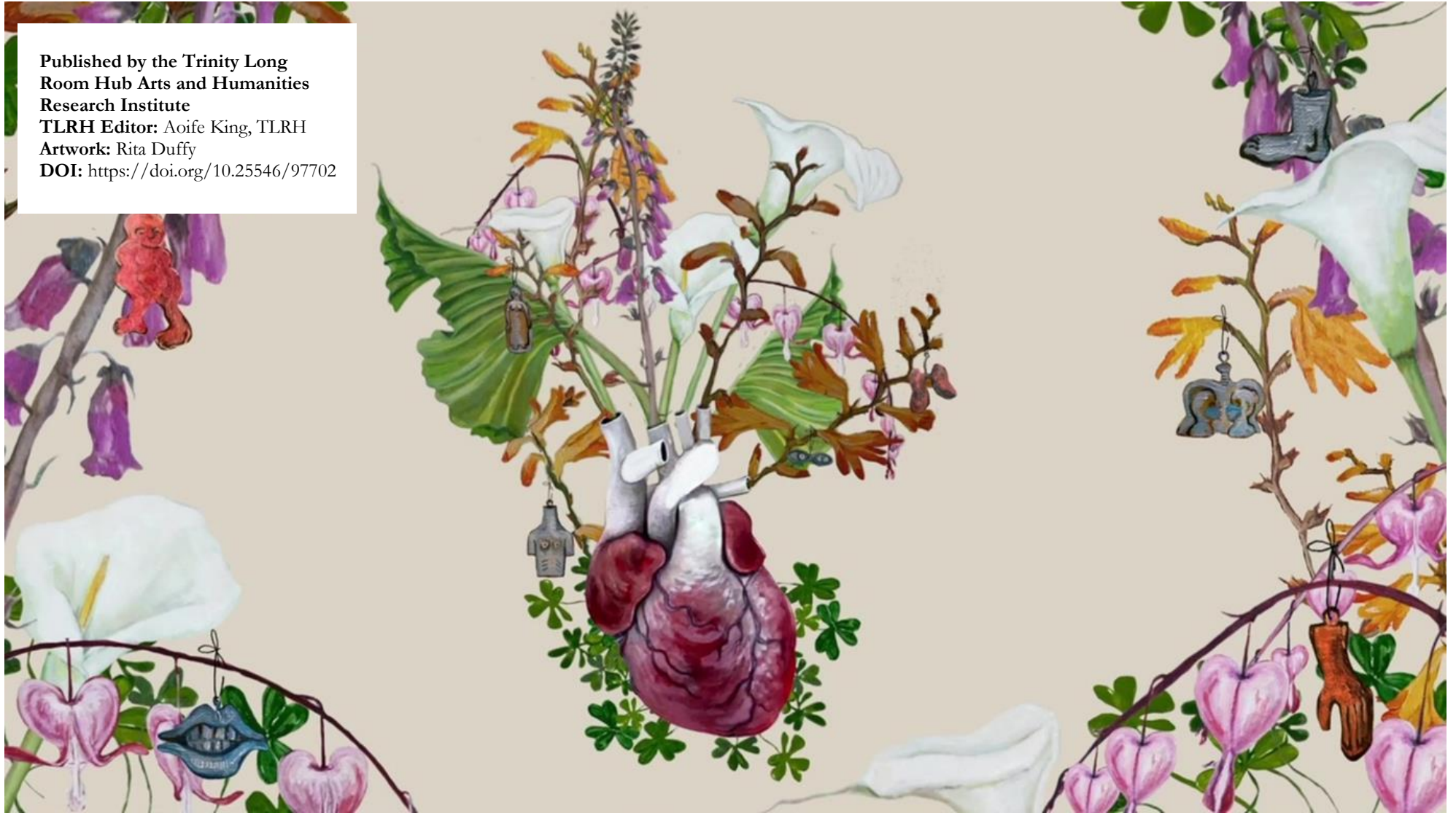
disorientation and bad dreams. It was in literature that this communal instability found expression. Though he didn't serve in the War, D.H. Lawrence absorbed its shocking effects and was haunted throughout the 1920s by the thought of the world descending into renewed violence. He suffered recurrent hallucinatory night terrors, imagining his body being devoured by giant insects and visualising waves of destroying armies rising up in front of him, anxieties he translated into the "Nightmare" episode of his strange and dislocated 1923 novel *Kangaroo*.

My students are reading the fiction of almost a century ago, conceived and written in a deeply traumatised era. Is there anything constructive to be learned from it now about the concept of "afterwards"? As the pandemic has run its course, we have listened, rightly, to the science. But it may well be that art and literature provide a better diagnostic tool than science for understanding the hesitant and disorientated nature of a post-virus sensibility. Writers of the interwar years showed that trauma works forwards as well as backwards, and that the fear of a painful recurrence can be almost as debilitating as suffering in the present.

At the same time, the novelists of the 1920s herald a human resilience in the slow and piecemeal reconstruction of interrupted lives. "The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins", Lawrence wrote in the famous opening to his post-war saga, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); "there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen."

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