

**Etudes:** an online theatre & performance  
studies journal for emerging scholars

## The Hundred Thousand

Conceived and Curated by Mary Anderson

### Abstract

Dr. Mary Anderson curates an epistolary response to the deaths of 100,000 Americans of the novel coronavirus. Including contributions by Hannah Anderson, Michael Barnes, RAS Mikey Courtney, Nancy Florkowski, Richard Haley, Lisa Kander, W. Thomas Karr, Jessica Rajko, Devon Redmond, Doug Risner, and Lisa LaMarre Wilmot.

# The Hundred Thousand

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World U.S. Politics N.Y. Business Opinion Tech Science Health Sports Arts Books Style Food Travel Magazine T Magazine Real Estate Video

## U.S. Deaths Near 100,000, an Incalculable Loss

oretta Mendoza Dionisio, 68, Los Angeles **Cancer survivor born in the Philippines.** • Black N Mild, 44, New Orleans • Alan Lund, 81, Washington • Ronald W. Lewis, 68, New Orleans • JoAnn Stokes-Smith, 87, Charleston, S.C. • Fred Walter Gray, n County, Wash. • Carl Redd, 62, Chicago • Alvin Elton, 56, Chicago • Mike Longo, 83, New York City **Jazz pianist, composer and educator.** • Donald J. Horsfall, 72, Rydal, Pa. • Larry Rathgeb, 90, West Bloomfield Hills, Mich. • George Freeman Wir silburne, Vt. • Carole Brooks, 76, Palm Beach, Fla. • Laneeka Barksdale, 47, Detroit • Floyd Cardoz, 59, Montclair, N.J. • Kious Kelly, 48, New York City • Romi Cohn, 91, New York City **Saved 56 Jewish families from the Gestapo.** • Peggy Rake Matteson, III. • Robert Earl Schaefer, 87, Seattle • Gerald Anthony Morales, 91, Louisiana • Landon Spradlin, 66, Concord, N.C. • Mary Virginia McKeon, 65, Chicago • Roger Lehne, 93, Fargo, N.D. • Louvenia Henderson, 44, Tonawanda, N.Y. • Lynn Sierra, e, III. **Grandmother who was always full of ideas.** • Susan McPherson Gottsegen, 74, Palm Beach, Fla. • Andreas Koutsoudakis, 59, New York City • Noel Sinkiat, 64, Oiney, Md. • Minette Goff Cooper, 79, Louisiana • Thomas A. Real, 61, Newtown ol Sue Rubin, 69, West Bloomfield, Mich. • Bassey Offiong, 25, Michigan • April Dunn, 33, Baton Rouge, La. **Advocate for disability rights.** • Harvey Bayard, 88, New York • Eastern Stewart Jr., 71, Annapolis, Md. • Peter Sakas, 67, Northbrook, Ill. • in, 84, Norwalk, Conn. • Janice Preschel, 60, Teaneck, N.J. • Daniel Spector, 68, Memphis • Alby Kass, 89, California • Clair Dunlap, 89, Washington **Pilot still teaching people to fly at 88.** • Ralph Plaisance, 87, Massapequa, N.Y. • Mary Minervini Oak Lawn, Ill. • Terrence George Driscoll, 87, Plymouth, Mich. • Ronnie Estes, 73, Stevensville, Md. • Ronald Burdette Culp, 84, Redding, Calif. • Barbara Yazbeck Vethacke, 74, St. Clair Shores, Mich. • Israel Sauz, 22, Broken Arrow, Okla. • Leo Sreebny, 98, tie **Preferred bolo ties to neckties, suspenders to belts.** • Robert Barghaan, 88, New York City • Marty Derer, 56, New Jersey • Janissa Delacruz, 31, Haverstraw, N.Y. • Joseph W. Hammond, 64, Chicago • Morris Loeb, 90, Northbrook, Ill. • M i, 46, Chicago • Torrin Jamal Howard, 26, Waterbury, Conn. • Gene Zahas, 78, Oakland, Calif. **Fierce advocate for educational opportunity.** • William D. Greeke, 55, Massachusetts • Jack Butler, 78, Indiana • Hailey Herrera, 25, New York City • J elly, 81, New York City • Perry Buchalter, 63, Florida • Monica Mailey, 74, Rehoboth Beach, Del. • Ruth Skapinok, 85, Roseville, Calif. • Faralyn Havir, 92, Minnesota **Her favorite thing was meeting new people.** • Clara Louise Bennett, 91, Albany, rad Duncker, 99, Chicago • Johnnie D. Veasley, 76, Country Club Hills, Ill. • Sean Christian Keville, 47, New Providence, N.J. • Stuart Cohen, 73, New York City • Mike Field, 59, Valley Stream, N.Y. • Marie Scanlan Walker, 99, Louisiana • Frances M. Pilot, 81, **Known as Big Momma to all who loved her.** • Claudia Obermiller, 73, Nebraska • Deyrold Arteaga, 66, Central Valley, N.Y. • Myles Coker, 69, New York City • Richard Alexander Ross Jr., 66, Boynton Beach, Fla. • Rosemarie Amerosi, 87, New York

## THE HUNDRED THOUSAND

In mid-May, I received an email with the *Etudes* CFP, seeking contributions on the theme of Theatre Persists. I was drawn to this sentence in particular: *As the theatre faces our latest challenge in the form of COVID-19, this issue seeks to celebrate the resilience of theatre and theatre artists, tracing paths through adversity, and looking with clear and hopeful eyes at what lies ahead.* The implicit suggestion in the editors' call is that if we are to reflect on both the recent and historical challenges associated with theatre practice, we might be better positioned to consider how we want to shape the field into the future.

But, how do we effectively trace the paths of our adversity while we are still in the midst of our adversity? How do we hold onto the important lessons of any given moment while we are living it? In response to the questions in the editors' call, I invited one of my colleagues to engage in an epistolary essay with me, in which we would attempt to simultaneously remember and record what we were living through, in hopes that these

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lessons would stick with us and power us into the next chapter of art and education at our institution. Fascinatingly, I never heard back from him. But in that silence, as the May days passed, and the U.S. got closer and closer to the 100,000 mark of COVID-19 fatalities, I felt an increased sense of urgency. I needed to hear from someone – anyone. I was consumed by the tragedy of this landmark and panicked that if we didn't write something down at this moment, it would all just get swept along like so many anonymous tumbleweeds. So, I took the letter that I had composed for the one colleague, rewrote it and sent it to every colleague at my institution with whom I had had a conversation about life/theatre/shutdown/art since March and asked them to help me remember what they thought was most important about the times in which we were living, and how it translates to the teaching and making of art now and into the future. The subject heading on the email read: The Hundred Thousand.

My initial letter was sent out in the afternoon on Memorial Day: Monday, May 25, 2020. I look at the time stamp and think: I didn't know it at the time, and the world did not know of him at the time, but George Floyd was alive when I sent the email. Hours later, George Floyd was arrested and murdered, ushering in what Jelani Cobb has described as the American Spring of Reckoning. What becomes apparent in the responses I received, presented here chronologically, is the manner in which the narratives oscillate between personal experiences in relation to the virus, observations about systemic oppression, and our responsibility to employ art as a means of change. The three domains are intimately intertwined: personal loss and grief, systemic oppression, and the urgency to use art as a means to promote change. The principal lesson of the spring and early summer, then, it would seem, was that in the relative silence and stillness

of the shutdown, we were invited – and I would go so far as to say, we were mandated – to turn our attention, our priorities and our actions towards the creation of a more equitable society. Cobb explains, “The American Spring has not toppled a power, but it has led to a reassessment of the relationship between that power and the citizens from whom it is derived.” The confluence of local and global crises in the past several months have presented us with a set of immediate and unavoidable questions about where our practices are located with regard to power and citizenship.

In what follows, you will find my initial letter and all of the responses I received from May 25<sup>th</sup>, when I initiated the project, to June 16<sup>th</sup>, when I sent the piece in for peer review. In reflecting on this tiny time capsule – just over three weeks – I am reminded of Walter Benjamin’s thought that “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (155). I’m looking at these diaristic accounts that we all created in that spirit of attempting to seize hold of the fragments of our memories, of our experiences. They are flashpoints captured *in medias res*. Like Sally Ann Ness explains about fieldnotes: “*They are not my memories intact*. They are keeping my memories from dying” (67). In this sense, I think that this exercise of call and response serves as a heuristic technique. Tracing paths through this particular epoch of adversity as we have experienced it, the written outcome was not so much clear and hopeful as it was earnest and cautious.

## MAY 25, 2020: MY CALL

It's the eve of Memorial Day and the *New York Times* has published the names of some of the nearly hundred thousand people who have perished from COVID-19. The digital headline cascades in a pattern I can't decipher. It's not a vertical scroll. Or a horizontal sweep. It's this: every four seconds (I've been counting), the palimpsest of one set of names and places and ages are simply succeeded by another palimpsest of names and places and ages. And so on and so on and so on. 1-2-3-4. 1-2-3-4. 1-2-3-4. The design produces the effect in me of a kind of interior avalanche. As if my heart, a mountain range covered in soft, beautiful snow, is caving in to a void that is not me, not my body, just pure absence. Darkness. Leaving only the imprint of the trace of the bold font that the *Times* leaves behind for us to attend to: **Loved to dance. Kept a scrapbook of the places he saw. Put himself through college. Her favorite thing was meeting new people.**

Oh dear.

I'm writing to you because I said I would write to you because I started feeling last week that I was afraid of forgetting. Maybe the week before. Maybe even before that. I can't remember when I started feeling this fear of forgetting. Afraid of forgetting all of our important conversations about how to save the world, how to save art, how to save ourselves from the pasts and habits that haunt and trouble our practices. I was afraid of forgetting all of the good work we had done.

But now. I am ashamed.

Do I need to say it? How embarrassing. How mortifying. To think that my singular obsession has been in trying to record, trying to capture, trying to hold onto the work we've done in recent weeks – in hopes it will fortify us for the future so our art might survive and so – even more importantly – our fundamental calling might become more readily apparent to us ... This has been my occupation?

Because, until this moment, to spend time with the loss of lives. Well. Has been impossible.

What is possible for us? I think inescapably in terms of plays. So the counting above: that's Beckett. And the naming of the names: that's Shakespeare. And the moment, early on in the outbreak, when I didn't know if we had enough food in the house and I was watching the neighbors frantic like squirrels traveling out to gather everything they could find at the stores – everything they needed and more and more and more – and I wondered if we would be able to feed the children and I thought: well, there's the dog food. And when we run out of the dog food. There's the dog.

That couldn't be a real thought, right? I couldn't have actually had that thought on my own, could I? I had to have inherited it from somewhere. Some character invented by some playwright. Some Mother Courage meets Medea meets ...

Ordinary people don't think that way.

Here is something: I've been thinking about the precarity of theatres and zoos. Last Monday, Tommy sent me a link to an [article](#) explaining that

Broadway will be dark this summer and theatres might remain closed for quite a long time after that. On the same day, the *New Yorker* [reported](#) that some zoos and some animals may not survive the pandemic. This gesturing as to what and who will survive: we've gotten used to this. Caridad Svich [called it all out](#) ten days ago. And this was part of it: "Photos of empty theatres grace the ruin porn of our Twitter feeds and Instagram posts. Mourning the many beautiful buildings—and not so beautiful ones too—has become a daily practice. *Look. That used to be a theatre once.*" *This makes her wonder who theatre is for and how we can do better. And I hear her wonderings echoed in President Obama's [H.B.C.U. commencement speech](#) exhorting us to expand our moral imagination.*

We are in a moment of invocation. Maybe my desperation to remember what's transpired is not as humiliatingly narcissistic as I perceive. Maybe my desperation to remember is a kind of conjuring – to participate in this collective incantation as we all call out: our systems have failed us, our systems must change.

Will you help me remember? What are the important moments of the last ten weeks? What have we learned? What have we done? What have we already begun to change? Where are our guiding stars?

With love,  
Mary

And just to confirm how quickly the presence of absence becomes just absence, now I'm finishing this thought and it's a day later and the names in the *Times*: they're gone. Disappeared. I thought maybe they would last. Would stay, at least, through the long

weekend. At least through Memorial Day, itself. This Memorial Day, as we count: 98,044. 98,045. 98,046. 98,047. But they don't even accumulate like that, do they? They arrive in batches. Bundles. Statistics from two weeks ago are finally processed. We're already over a hundred thousand, aren't we? We likely were a long time ago.

**MAY 26, 2020: Nancy Florkowski**

Happy to be back in Detroit.  
Here, within the walls of our home  
safe in our own backyard or on the porch  
Hearing about death, tragedy and suffering  
It all seemed miles away.  
Recently returning to  
The city that never sleeps  
For business  
Not fun  
Feeling the absence of excitement  
And the new presence of quietness  
Hearing the sirens that are so typical of the city  
But knowing they now represent something very different.  
Looking at people on the street  
noticing them for the first time  
suddenly wondering about their lives, their losses  
Times are very different  
We don't know these people  
Any more than we did in the past



but we feel a sadness  
or maybe a new kinship  
with them.

As for my theatre kids who had to suddenly walk away from their  
production of *Sister Act*: Reminiscing about rehearsals with fifteen-year-  
old Bella, as Mother Superior, singing  
“Here Within These Walls”  
Pondering what the kids love about their theatre and what they are  
missing.

(Apology for lifting a few lyrics)  
Motor City Youth Theatre is our sanctuary.  
Outside, life's a mess...  
Full of bullies and misunderstanding

Outside, life is grim...

But here within these walls, days are filled with grace Here within these  
walls,  
life has a different pace  
We're safe within this place  
from life beyond our doors

Here within these walls, life is sweet and good  
Love is understood, and selfishness rejected

here within these walls,  
Life is truly blessed

Here, you are our guest  
We are all one together.

**MAY 26, 2020: Doug Risner**

DANCING AND EXPIRING

Community organizer, author, and person living with cancer, Marcy Westerling (2014) asks, “What makes for a good death in a just and sustainable world?” (np). Westerling believes the ultimate challenge of life, isn’t the cancer battle itself (though formidable), but rather the ultimate trial for persons living with a terminal disease is facing one’s own death on a daily basis. I have no doubt the toll of facing head-on one’s impending departure day after day, week after week is a certain death in and of itself. However, I take great stock in the fact that a life in dance has equipped me not only for living with a terminal disease, but also for finding significant strength for, in Westerling’s words, dying a “good death.” Taking a daily technique class for over 20 years, taught me the necessity and importance of commitment and possibility.

Death of the Performer-Self

In 1967 when I was eight-years old, my mom enrolled me in tap dance class. I didn’t play little league or any kind of sports, and she thought dancing would make me lose weight (I was a “fat” chubby boy). I remember,

I found the dance studio a seemingly safe place for my retreat—a magical,

transformative locale for me and my teacher, Miss Janice. Saturday dance classes held at the old junior high school allowed me to evade the bullying that I endured daily in school and at home. In my jazz and tap classes I did not worry about being cornered in the boys' room, beaten on the playground, or harassed by my older brothers. Bigger than life, Miss Janice provided a weekly escape for me, a retreat from a beleaguered family environment, a brief interruption from the chiding and teasing at school, a respite where my confused sexual identity did not seem important... the dance studio environment was a very comfortable one.

In my small town high school, I always got cast in the big dance roles in the annual musical, and I recall, "Although I was excited to be dancing, being pegged as a male dancer (when you already think that you might be gay) means constantly reasserting a straight image with heterosexual evidence... My desire to study dance grew; however, the secrecy and shame I harbored also increased." While performing onstage fulfilled me in many physical and emotional ways, performing heterosexuality in order to dispel constant suspicion I was gay and the harassment that followed took their toll. The easiest decision I ever made was leaving a small town in Ohio to study dance professionally at Point Park College in Pittsburgh. The year was 1980.

As a professional dancer and musical theatre performer, I thrived on the entire process—from learning choreography, rehearsing in the studio, taking final corrections pre-premiere—all leading to performance. What I found most satisfying about performance emerged from performing seasoned repertory, dances I knew inside out, comfortable like a favorite pair of jeans. Works that only received a few performances, for whatever reason, confounded me; no time to refine, internalize, or embody. I often

referred to these as “paper towel” dances—dash one off and then throw it away. When performing repertory work, I never felt I truly “knew” a particular dance until I had performed it at least 50 times in front of a paying audience. Something is completely unique about live dance performance that defies any sort of duplication or replication. When I left the stage permanently in 1999, that unique “something” died—a loss that I contemplated for a few years prior to ending my performance career. I wondered, “When would I know my performance career was finished, over?”

Abby Aquirreoct (2007) asked seasoned, healthy dancers and former dancers to describe their feelings about leaving the stage. The answers she heard were quite personal, “It’s a death,” “You’re losing your first love,” and “The loss is pretty devastating” (224). Aquirreoct, in summarizing her findings, writes, “Love, death, loss, devastation: these are the terms dancers tend to apply to ‘transition,’ dancer-speak for retirement since Career Transition for Dancers, a nonprofit service organization, was established in 1985,” and during that time, over 3,500 dancers (average age: 29), have sought counsel and advice from the service organization. Data from a Teachers College study reported the average age for dancer retirement between age 33-34 (Aquirreoct 224). My retirement from performing at the age of 40 coincided with returning to graduate school to pursue my doctorate in educational foundations, curriculum, and gender studies.

Ending a performance career, when framed as one of the demi-deaths a dance professional lives (through) as I do here, requires a good deal of reflection and critical questioning. Obviously, an unexpected death or catastrophic accident does not permit the actions I elaborate. However,

for those contemplating retirement or for those living with a terminal disease, preparing to end a performance career as a “good death” in a meaningful and expressive manner may occur in a series of self-dialogues. The work of social psychologist Victor Shaw (2001) provides a helpful framework for guidance, he asserts, “Self dialogue is a fundamental process of expression; it mediates between self-image and social experience” (272). As both self-conscious and self-monitoring, human beings, “collect information on themselves and incorporate feedback from the past into their future thoughts and acts. Self-dialogue makes sense out of the consciousness. It is an organizing theme or force of the human mental process” (Shaw 2001, 271).

One form of self-dialogue I employ when faced with ensuing professional demi-deaths comes from a “Witness, Confess, and Grieve” model, an especially helpful process for accepting when it’s time to move on, and to do so without regret or remorse.

- Witness the life change clearly and genuinely, searching below the surface in order to see unambiguously what I must resolve.
- Confess the loss openly and honestly, sharing with others who may empathize and support the changes that I must recognize.
- Grieve the emptiness reflexively and truthfully, reverencing the fulfillment and gratification that I must acknowledge in order to move on.

**MAY 27, 2020: Jessica Rajko**

As we edge into June, I've been feeling an itchy transition from 'this isn't so bad' to the unrelenting weight of it all. My skin turned to wet wool sagging a with little extra gravity for the day. I'm also in the first phases of taking a class hosted by the School for Poetic Computation. We're collectively rewriting definitions from the texts we read as short ideas, stories, real/imagined memories. I am enjoying this exercise and might follow its structure in response to your provocation. It might take me a little time to work out. Do you have an imagined time in which you'd like responses?

Thank you for carving space for our reflection. Sometimes we need others to hold space for us. Much appreciated.

Last week I learned that we lost my friend and colleague, Marcus White. Our worlds were strangely intertwined – he transitioned from Detroit to Phoenix, and I the opposite. We laughed about this a lot. I feel the echo of his presence everywhere here. He was an unstoppable force and a co-conspirator during my time at ASU. The rawness of this loss means I can't bring myself to read your words yet Doug, but I deeply look forward to reading them in the future. Karen Schupp reminded me how Marcus used to close his emails, so with him in mind I close with –

In groove and gratitude,

Jessica

**MAY 28, 2020: Lisa LaMarre Wilmot**

Patience is not something you can practice for.

I have fading memories of a naive woman standing in line waiting at the grocery store check-out, agitated about her ice cream melting. Her blood boiled at the need be in the presence of the screen all day. The dance studio was her “safe-space” and even on the worst of days, she’d exit with clarity and new purpose.

I used to think I knew what patience was. Now, I think, I didn’t have a clue. I’m still waiting.

... and yesterday, I taught dance in a garage. The whole neighborhood heard our music and laughter. Being face to face with these two young dance students was an injection of hope. The challenge of virtual dance lessons seemed all worth it in that moment. It was humid and hot, and I had to encourage the dancers to stop for a moment to take a water break. The energy steaming out of this cluttered space directed so much power it would be dangerous to get too close. Not because of the danger of disobeying governmental social distancing recommendations, but because you would have stopped to watch.

I used to think, I was a performer. Now, I think, I’m a LiveArts artist.

It’s been a natural transition to virtual, interactive-design instructional classes and advising screen-dance approaches. In fact, I’ve considered myself a screen-dance artist at times. ... but there is a something very different that my artistic self cannot overcome. Live Collaboration. I’ve

decided to take a stand and go against what every major dance company seems to be opposing. Waiting. I know now, my mission must include live interactions. My body is not ready to give up on contact improvisation and partnering. So, I wait and wait. I learn patience. I don't know what patience is yet, but until then, I practice.

**JUNE 1, 2020: Lisa Kander**

FULL STEAM AHEAD

The calls are out there: We must push ahead with science. We need all the tools of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics to STEM the tide of this Pandemic.

This is truth. We need all these tools to learn to control, to stop the spread, to cure this disease of the body.

But this is not enough. We also need to understand the lessons that the virus is teaching us. We need to understand what we have been, how we have come to this present moment. We need to understand the intersecting human stories of family, society, law, politics, policies, and personalities that have brought us to this moment, so that we don't go back to what was before.

Facts and statistics, numbers and sound bites: the United States is leading the statistics – greatest number of cases of the virus; greatest number of deaths from the virus. Statistics: Black Americans are four times more likely to die from the virus than white Americans. Facts: the greatest economic devastation from the virus is to the poor. The divide between



have and have not is stark.

Facts and statistics, numbers and sound bites—these may be truths that shock us or alarm us - for a moment. But facts don't change minds. Facts don't change the narrative. Facts are facts: it is how they are presented that shapes the narrative.

We need to change the narrative, the story.

We need to tell the human story. That's what we do, as artists – we take the facts and figures and the fragments and the pieces of our broken world and our broken lives, and we fit these together to help us make meaning and purpose.

We need the arts entwined with the facts as they have been revealed to us. We need to add Art to the Science and Technology and Engineering and Math. We need to bring the facts and statistics and data to life in the human story.

We need STEAM.

This is Truth. We need all these tools to learn to control, to stop the spread, to cure this disease of the body and the soul of ourselves and our country.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

**JUNE 3, 2020: RAS Mikey Courtney**

h'OUR' Glass

A wise man once said “It’s so hard to do and so easy to say, but sometimes you just have to walk away” (Ben Harper). These words speak a truth about love and how to place it in one’s life. It has also been said to “expect nothing and therefore you will never be let down by anything or anyone.” The former quote alludes, it can be quite challenging to live by the mantras that we preach. But do we realize that our prior expectations have left us in this present state of inarticulation. Emotions, mixed with frustration, sadness, tension, doubt, confusion, and disappointment. The light of joy that usually shines so bright from inside our essence, seems dim. The constant feeling of the heart descended into the stomach, unable to find a solution because we haven’t pin-pointed the root of the problem. Ultimately, in the end all the issues start with us. Our action—or lack of—coupled with our response to actions around us has put me in our present state. What new revelations have we made of these old thoughts? We have created boxes for those around us, when we don’t even fit into one. Although my perception of the good I see may not be another’s reality, unless that person too believes, sees, and feels the same is truth as me. There is a fire that blazes inside, it moves body with intensity, while burning out the sorrows of self. But this flame is not found in everyone. We only know what people show and though we interpret to perceive, motivation is a challenge for the uninspired. Theoretically, reality is perceptual, but does this mean that we are attempting to actualize a fantasy? No matter how hard we look or listen, we still only see and hear what is interpreted by our understanding. I have dug deep inside to discover self-less-ness and what I know to be unconditional love. When this type of love is felt or seen, the sentiment is not always reciprocated.

Have we expected too much of others, of love? What are the expectations of myself. What do I know about me, honestly? Does the love we give ever equate to the love we received? Though karma compels me to be mindful of giving more, I aim to motivate those in need. If we are capable, we need to do better. The things we acquire or aspire for, how do we determine whether it's a want or a need? One who has been ruled by dictation may not make the differentiation. What scale of morality designates an environment of better opportunity as persons can't depend on words alone? Action is what actualizes dreams, and step by step, we forward even in reverse. We never move backward with our knowledge of where we have come from and we retrace our steps of before with the experiences of now. We seek stillness but life is motion. Do we see our progress or imagine memories in our present? As these words touch this page, the heaviness in my chest feels a little lighter. My joy is in finding the way forward while coming back into this 'heartical' space, with unshakable faith. This beautiful thing we call life, is never practiced the same, and manifests our truths and realities of unpredictability. Have we been lying to ourselves? Can we be the spark for someone else's flame? Or even for our own? No matter others' perceptions of my reality, I have to find the way to keep the fire blazing in We. Step into the times of now, as we all rise and fall with the sands of the h'OUR' glass. If we truly believe in a destiny, is it always sensed as reality? What is the probability of one's inability to achieve perceived success? In a moment of clarity, when you reach a goal or when a visual becomes physical, what about the journey? If a part of We is 'destined' for eternity, then this enlightenment must be ongoing. Do you perceive the duality? My for-sure-ity comes through knowing that all works in accordance as we align with atonement. I live as an example of the change as I know it all starts with me. What do you see?

Question:

Do people really want to hear truth when they ask your opinion? Or do they just want you to make them feel good?

Sometimes the truth hurts. It's called 'growing pains,' and who feels it knows it. But it's a waste of time and energy to dwell on negativity. Live up! We as a people can build constructively if we embrace empathy and project the positivity we so ideally speak of. It's been said that although we are created in the likeness of perfection, we are also flawed by flesh. But we are also Spirit within and without of the flesh. One is eternal, the other bound to perish. We 'live' on borrowed time. There are no real guaranties, nothing is for certain. Man can only rule life for a time, but the Architect of existence maintains our spirit, our essence, our eternal energy.

So many with in 'hue'-mankind are living for fleshly passions and selfish desires. Neglecting their Spiritual connection. Our purpose for borrowing the flesh should be in alignment with our eternal spiritual practice, our connection to the Creator of all things. So, there is no duality in nor should there be amongst 'hue'mankind, no separation, only oneness, an outer/integration.

To nurture and cultivate the spirit will fortify your now existence within the flesh.

Is this what you expect to hear when ask for an opinion?

**JUNE 4, 2020: Michael Barnes**

Virus. Avoid. Transmission. Infection. Sickness. Fight. Cough. Cope. Gasp. Heal. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

As I traveled with a group of young people eager to take on the world and tried to steer them in a way that they could start moving into the next phase of their lives, I ran headfirst into watching the greatest city in the world shut down. I watched as my friends—the artists who invigorate me, who inspire me, who help me feel alive in the arts—were being forced away from stages and rehearsal halls. They gave in to the fact that the virus was enveloping their artistic spaces and—in order to keep it from settling into the bodies of their audiences—they needed to take refuge in their individual places of comfort. I mourned with them as theatre and film and television shut down across this country and it became apparent that the show that I was working on was coming to an end. It wasn't a finish; it was an end.

I returned home, trying to find solace in my home but soon finding that the illness, which everyone was trying to escape, had not been inescapable. It caught me. Though I wanted nothing more than comfort and compassion and assistance and caring from my loved ones, I knew that their being with me could possibly hurt them. While I wanted nothing more than to ask my husband who had been away to come home, to take care of me; I spoke the words that, logically, I knew must come from my lips: "Don't come home. I don't want to get you sick." Logic. That thing that I fall back on frequently to navigate me through life. It ran me into a rock. My mind knew that those words were for the best; my heart wanted the most important person in my life to be with me to encourage me as I

faced an illness that the television and the papers were telling me was killing thousands.

Thankfully, I was spared the worst of it. “Symptoms roulette.” That’s what I called it for the first two weeks. Every day, a different symptom decided it wanted to steer the truck that was running over my body. Finally, it felt like the truck was driving away only to have a train come behind it to run me over—dragging me along to suck the breath out of my lungs. For another week and a half, that train dragged me along—bumping my body along the tracks until finally I was able to break free of its pull.

As I began to breathe the life back into my body, my physical being began to feel whole again, only to have my mind begin to feel like it was emptying out. The anxieties of being confined in a space, that normally provided me with comfort but now began to feel like a vice closed around me, consumed me. I wanted to be interacting with people—not this virtual interaction that I had been telling myself was an acceptable way of interacting with other people. Virtual. It’s NEARLY interacting, no COMPLETELY being with someone, FAKING a sense of relating to people. I had always loved technology—been pulled to the diodes of a screen—and now I just wanted to stop looking at the pixels that make up words, that make up images, that make up people. Pixels are...not...people. I had to shut off the screens. I had to hear voices.

Then, the need hit. I needed to know, “Was I really sick with this stupid virus?” “Was it in my mind?” “Did I still have it?” I was finally going to see my husband after so much time apart. “Could I still have it? Could I still get him sick? After not being able to get any when I was sick, weeks later, I’m able to get a test. NEGATIVE? POSITIVE? What would it be? I find out; I

don't have the virus. Great. Several days later, we're able to get the antibody test. As the nurse drew my blood to send to the labs and ultimately tell me if I have this virus, I harkened back to earlier days—to the last big pandemic that weighed on my life. Now, there is a hope that I do have the antibodies; maybe it will mean I can fight off the disease in the future and not get it again. I WANT to be positive. This is nothing like the 1990s, when that word POSITIVE was the scariest thing I could imagine. Finally, eight days later...POSITIVE. Like the 90s, I breathed a sigh of relief, but for a different word. Unlike the years of avoiding the word positive during that three-letter word pandemic, this time it might protect me.

I ruminated on the time in which we have been locked away in our own little spaces and then on the moments we can sneak out into the world. After five-and-a-half weeks I could finally venture out to a store, to buy food, but the anxieties of wondering what life would be like in these supposed cornucopias of sustenance overtook me. What would these places be like? Would there be lines? Would there be anything on the shelves? How would people interact? Now, I could go into the spaces, but they did not feel the same. They have become places of avoidance, of separation, of things that I just don't like.

What has happened to me? What has happened to all those around me? I bury myself in articles and broadcasts that talk about the way the US responded—the way that the orange man who is supposedly leading the country avoids anything that seems like it would benefit our people. I bristle against the understanding that so many people continue to flock like moths to his orange flame—believing that he has taken care of them and will take care of them “better than anyone could.” How can a mask—

a piece of fabric—become a political bullet? How did the orange one convince people to believe it is a symbol of opposition? Why can people not realize that times of crisis are the exact times that we should find a sense of community to support one another? These are the times that we need to bind together to lift one another up.

Exhaustion.

More orange deflections. More orange lies. More orange stirrings of hatred and anger, of crushing the people that just do not matter to him. Lately, I just feel so tired. Once upon a time, we could rely on the person in the White House to be above pettiness and bind us together, not make it worse. Now, I withdraw—in the moment when I need to be stepping up. Just....let...me....take...a...moment. I'll be back. I'll rally. I'll push forward again. I'll breathe. That breath will help me find my voice and lift it out again.

### **JUNE 8, 2020: Richard Haley**

The body, the camera, the screen (in no particular order) have been imbued with new meaning over the past several months. In March, as our country began to shut down, economically and socially, we avoided other bodies, became acutely aware of how we are portrayed on camera, and the screen became our tool to connect with others at a safe distance. In the midst of this new chapter, our country became divided on whose right it is to enforce how close we can be next to a stranger and whether or not we should cover the parts of our bodies that expel viral particulates. Even before the aftermath of this moment, another shift disrupted our



corporeal framing: our hand-held devices bore witness to seeing another body on screen having its breath forcefully removed.

The devices we use to view the world will continue to be used for their prior exploits: shopping, documenting a really good burrito or cocktail, and berating a stranger at a distance. Also, they will still stand tethered to the present. How long this present persists, remains to be seen.

In this turbulence, rippling between clarity and blurry-eyed, is where this exhibition finds itself. Artists have been asked to create a live work, broadcast online, asking questions about the nature of transmissions and receptions of selves. The work will be at a distance, but will happen within your personal or domestic space. It will appear on a screen that you clutch in your hands, hold on your lap, or sit within range of the light it emits. The screen itself has become a lifeline, but simultaneously has become a parasite; we have become the interlocutor for this crutch. The unease of the moment will have its time to mingle or be a temporary stain within your home.

We are left wondering: can an image still sear into memory? I am not sure if we will ever know. Our tools of observation are perpetually mutating past the point of being able to be held near.

**JUNE 16, 2020: Devon Redmond**

I just got finished reading [this article](#) in the Atlantic. I'm terrible at remembering authors (I really want to work on that) but I was really struck by Ekemini Uwan's earnestness and heartfelt prediction of a new normal

following coronavirus and the BLM protests, but I couldn't help but find myself becoming more and more amused as I read.

I loathe the term "realist," but it is what I consider myself. More truthfully, an optimist masquerading as a realist. I like to keep the ball and chain of reality strapped tightly to my ankle so I don't float away to some utopian fantasy devoid of the truth that every single person living in this country, I daresay the world, gets a say in what the future will look like. That's a pretty daunting thought considering that nearly half of America voted for Donald Trump. It gets even worse when you realize that although every person gets a say, they certainly do not get an **equal** say. Huge swaths of the public are dependent, truly at the mercy of a handful of companies and individuals with power, wealth, and resources and that leverage amplifies the voices of those few *exponentially*. It binds America together in a way that Christianity never will.

Capitalism does not bend to the will of protests or moral outrage, if it did, it would have collapsed long ago. It is the A-moral all-consuming American god, and while it's true that we will be different tomorrow than we are today the changes will by and large be: 1. Symbolic 2. Not permanent. The longer quarantine continues, the larger the legion will grow attempting to push back on this "new normal" which I assure you will inevitably begin to look more and more similar to the old one.

I live in the present with a singular perspective and I simultaneously acknowledge that I also exist as a statistic and a data point, a tiny part of a greater whole. I don't prescribe my feelings and the conclusions from my anecdotal experiences, the micro, to the populace at large and the workings of our capitalist society, the macro. I think that's what the author

is doing. I think the author will be surprised at how well the American god adapts, and how outmatched “sustainability & equity” truly are in a fight versus efficiency & profit.

I know... I said I was an optimistic realist but I’m practicing radical acceptance, I’m just on a different level with it. I think the only thing you can actually control is yourself and your own journey to self-actualization. Adhering to the values of truth, justice, honesty, and letting the world see all of you, I’ll call it... radical transparency (radical seems to be a buzzword these days LOL).

## **EPILOGUE**

When the peer reviews came back and it looked like this article would likely be published, I reached out to all of the contributors to invite them to share any updates that they might like me to include in the revised epilogue. I also reached back out to a few people who were on the original May distribution list to see if they had any thoughts on the circumstances of the present moment. I received two responses, which beautifully and poignantly capture the distance we’ve traveled in the months since we created the time capsule.

### **October 26, 2020: W. Thomas Karr**

I’m struggling with purpose. Are we really “pivoting,” as had been the favorite go-to phrase of theatre makers during this chaos, or are we actually building something brand new? To pivot would be a shift in direction; this is something entirely new — starting from scratch. And if we

are building something new, what is my role in it? Is the new thing important? Is my role important? Will this new thing change the trajectory of our country, our future, our lives? Does it have to? Is that what defines “important” now? I ask this because we’ve lost more than 200,000 people, and there’s nothing the arts can do to actually stop it. So my question is: Is art, is dance, is theatre — in whatever format its consumed — enough? Is escapism and entertainment enough or is there something more we should be doing? Should we use our skills for a larger purpose? But what is that? Isn’t the creation and sharing of art a great purpose in itself? I think so, but I question myself daily.

### **October 31, 2020: Hannah Andersen**

It’s October. Is it October? It’s Saturday. Is it Saturday? It seems like every day has been Blursday for the last seven months, and now it’s Halloween. I woke up today and realized I have spent the same amount of time living in Detroit while open and bustling as I have while closed due to Covid-19 restrictions. Seven months, fourteen total. That’s something.

### *Space and Time*

I am a dance person. Space and Time are how I make sense of the world. There are new structures emerging to help us keep track of Space and Time. The geographical and temporal boundaries created by ‘going’ to work or school or to meet a friend for dinner are different now. Space and Time often feel intangible (two-dimensional). They also sometimes feel increasingly tangible.

*This is New*

I can feel my breath as the moisture seeps onto my upper lip with every exhale in my mask.

This is new.

I wash my hands for twenty seconds and feel the lather of the soap and warm water.

This is new.

I walk downstairs to grab a can of spaghetti sauce out of the pantry. We have a food pantry?

This is new.

I walk into my yard barefoot most days and viscerally feel and see the change of seasons. It grounds me.

This is new.

I open my social media to see the environmental climate crisis burning and ravaging my childhood home. All of my people affected by wildfires, but somehow the only effect on me is emotional.

This is new.

I arrive at 'work' within two minutes of getting out of the warm shower, and nobody knows that two minutes ago I was completely naked.

This is new.

The gravity of balancing empathy, reality, and optimism with college dance students weighs heavy.

This is not new, but it feels different with students inside of a screen.

If this virtual workshop/meeting/conference/class/performance is not directly tied to my current teaching, community, or well-being, who cares?

This is new.

I sit muted and listen to colleagues and students share their experiences about being Black in America. I need to listen. My words sit in the back of my throat like something I can't quite swallow.

This is new.

Why did I care so much about attending every event? Why was my immediate community not first? Why was I not washing my hands? Should we always have food in the basement? Why was I not fully listening before?

### *Pause*

I tend to make decisions based on intuition. I always have. And when I don't, it feels uncomfortable in my bones. I am in my mid-thirties and many of these decisions have been towards forward motion in my career as an educator and artist. Due to the pandemic there has been a 'pause' of many things that defined forward motion. I have time to pay attention to what is going on around me. Nurture my relationship. Be here now. Feel the breath enter and exit. Pause. Listen. Observe. Respond.

### *Numbers*

Open the news. It is a slew of numbers: Covid-19 deaths (now over 231,000 in the US), daily number of cases, how many people allowed in a space, how many feet apart to stay, weekly unemployment claims, the stock market plunge, interest rates, mail-in ballots cast, minutes until the election, days of protests, number of Black Americans killed due to police brutality... the list goes on. The numbers are supposed to tell us something about how to act, how to think, and what to do. The question is: how do I respond today? There is a liminal space between quantification and intuition. The world has been floating in that space for 7 months. It's hard.

### *Spiderman*

Last Halloween we lived across the street from a large low-income housing community in Midtown Detroit. On Halloween, costumed children arrived in small cohorts. It was the first time in my life without a single white trick-or-treater. Late in the evening, a four-year old Spiderman ran into our house ecstatic to meet our goldendoodle he heard barking (he didn't care about the candy). He threw a screaming tantrum and I had to carry him out the door to his caregiver who seemed too afraid to step into our home. This moment was one I will never forget, as I was reminded of the importance of always understanding where I am in Space and Time. As the pandemic ravaged our (their) community, and the Black Lives Matter Movement revived, I felt the weight of living in an 80%+ black city for the first time in my life, as opposed to Eugene, OR in 2014 when #BLM began and we marched for Black Lives in a sea of white folx.

### *Structure*

It is incredible to be a part of a reckoning with institutional structures in a geographic space (Detroit) that has been at the center of both creating and feeling the complete denigration of structure. Since the pandemic, BLM, and now the election, Michigan (a battleground state), Detroit (no stranger to racial strife, economic and climate crises), and the Theatre and Dance Department (ready and waiting for a massive shift, but needed to be forced into it and will be wholly different on the other side) are reckoning with structure. I am here for it all.

### *Consent*

How do you feel about going for a walk outside six feet apart? Are you comfortable coming over for dinner? Do you mind wearing a mask? Is it ok

if we both wear masks? Are you comfortable if I give you a hug? Mom, I am sorry, but you can't fly here for the holidays.

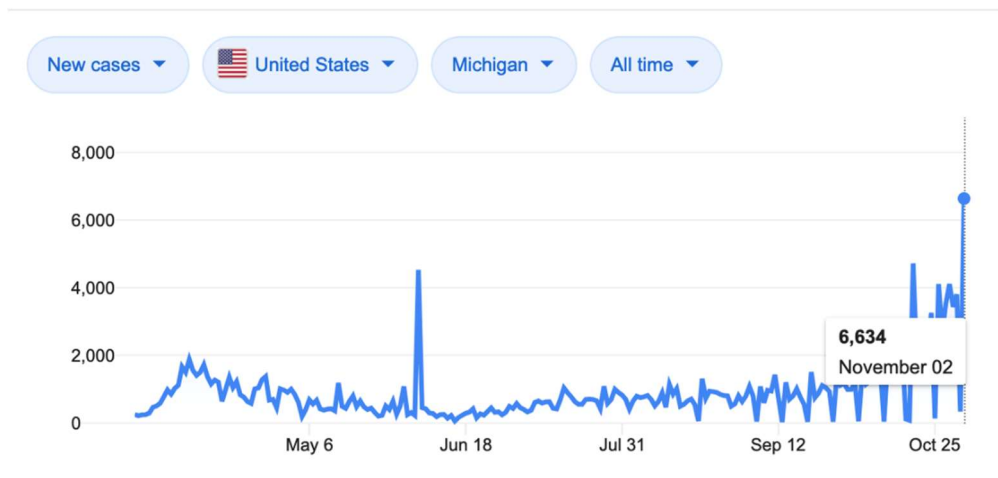
*Closing*

Sometimes I wonder if everyone operates via their intuition, but as I experience this moment (can we stop calling it a moment?) I am thinking...no. Donald Trump has said many times that he makes decisions based on his 'gut feeling.' If that is true, then I don't know if I want to be a part of this 'gut' thing anymore.

*Vote*

The election is next week. Can someone who understands Space and Time please become our President?

Daily change



Each day shows new cases reported since the previous day · Updated less than 21 hours ago · Source: [The New York Times](#) · [About this data](#)



**November 3, 2020: In Closing**

What was this project? In my original opening and closing statements for this essay – the ones I wrote before peer review – I was aggravated, I was aggrieved, I was accusatory ... All these months later, I notice that I am not so much aggravated as exhausted, not so much aggrieved as despairing, not so much accusatory as concerned. I don't know that it is possible to be as muscularly frustrated as we were in May and June. There's so little energy as one cycle of the virus closes down and another, far more terrifying, enters the scene. There's so little protection in an atmosphere where people have long since lost their short-lived "in it together" enthusiasm for common sense and common decency and a militia group plots to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer. The humility necessary just to keep going—just to persist—even after grand plans from the summer surrender to much more modest goals for the fall until only this miniature prayer for the winter remains: to survive. So when the draft came back to me, I erased those original endcaps. And replaced them with what you see here now: the story of what we did, in all of its smallness.

But what does this story, which traces the paths through a few moments of this particular epoch of adversity, tell us about how we ought to shape art and education into the future? When I originally sent out the letter in May, I was expecting to receive a series of manifestoes. Something more in the spirit of Svich's "This Is What We Do Now" essay that I referenced. Instead, as one of our peer reviewers noted, the responses were much more broadly philosophical, making the piece difficult to categorize. Still searching to understand the function of this work myself, I found clarity in a comment from the other reviewer: "This piece calls forth many of the hundreds of emotions and ideas my body has carried, along with the

repeated reckoning with weariness and resilience that these times require.” It’s a calling forth. An invocation. An incantation. In a kind of microscopic way, it might offer the kind of “intimate empathy and detached appraisal” characteristic of the work of Anna Deavere Smith (Cunningham 76).

I think it may be telling somehow that, when in distress, artist-educators invited to write about the future of art and education didn’t write so much about the future of art and education. Instead, they wrote about the emotional reality of living day to day. They shared their fears and their most confounding questions. They expressed their doubts about the future. Lisa Kander writes: “We need to change the narrative, the story.” But RAS Mikey Courtney asks: “Do people really want to hear the truth?” And Devon Redmond worries: “While it’s true that we will be different tomorrow than we are today, the changes will, by and large, be: 1. Symbolic 2. Not permanent. The longer quarantine continues, the larger the legion will grow attempting to push back on this ‘new normal,’ which I assure you will inevitably begin to look more and more similar to the old one.” When the rhythms of each contributor’s words start to play in syncopation like this, it suggests that this project could somehow be developed into a verbatim performance text. Perhaps, with hundreds of hours of interviews and a much wider temporal, social, cultural, and geographic net cast? Or, conversely, with hundreds of hours of interviews and much more narrow, focused, and conflict-driven criteria for participation? Either way, the kind of miraculous artistry of someone like Smith, who “makes distant world views sometimes painfully proximate” by channeling “a whole world of thought and emotion” in her singular body (Cunningham 76), is not within my grasp. Interestingly, many [COVID narrative projects](#) bubbled up during the height of the most acute period

of quarantine, but no longer seemed to serve a purpose past mid-May. People had an intense need to speak and to share in the spring that dissolved, evaporated, or otherwise was released as aspects of their social lives were restored in the summer.

It's the afternoon of election day. It's warm and every twenty or thirty minutes, families from my daughter's school walk or jog by. The PTA decided to do its annual fun run today and our house is on the route. Initially I thought it must have been some kind of mistake. But it's actually this weird genius of physically-distanced sociality during a very tense time. So we made a sign and have been playing music on my computer for them. I like to think that playing *Pride (In the Name of Love)* means something more today, broadcast across our tiny front yard through these tiny MacBook speakers, in between our signs endorsing Biden-Harris and the Fun Run. I will be sending this essay back to the editors before we have any confirmation about the outcome of voting. We are all bracing ourselves for weeks, maybe months of conflict and turmoil. I'm also obsessively refreshing the page on my "mi covid" google search. Not sure when they will post today's infection and death rates. I write it all out here and it sounds so mundane. But remember this, Mary: it's not mundane. It's a stress sandwich. We just keep stacking more and more slices of these irrepressibly foul ingredients between the two soggy pieces of bread that are our bodies. More deaths. More infections. More maskless people at the park. More mob mentality. More and more and more. At some point, I'll look back on the timestamp on the email I sent to the editors today and think: I didn't know it at the time, and the world did not know it at the time, but ... And there will be some information on the other side of that ellipsis. Some knowledge. Some reality.

For now, I am convinced that all of this – this recording about recording – is not a play or a performance for the future. It’s just the memory of the living we have done that will someday spark the plays and the performances of the future. I do not have clarity or hope about that future. I have wishes and dreams. I have curiosities. I have affinities and commitments. But I wonder if clarity and hope are simply not possible for me anymore. A few days ago, *The New York Times* published an abridged guide to what has been lost in the last four years, including entries on innocence, faith, generosity, naivete, illusions, pride, and apathy. Perhaps a few of these losses will serve us well in the sincerely unknown days to come. But one of the most worrisome entries on the list is “[A Reckoning](#).” Author Ross Douthat is concerned that the revelations of the last four years – not just about Trump, but about the country’s history of deep and paralyzing divisions, ideological conflicts, and policy failures – have not translated into a sustained and urgent call for radical change. Douthat uses the term “derangement” to characterize events of the past four years. That seems fair. But Amitav Ghosh suggests that the derangement is limited neither to the last four years nor to any individual leader from this period. Ghosh explains that we are all suffering from a derangement unique to human thinking: we fail to grasp the scale and violence of the very crises we bring upon ourselves. How do we do better with limitations so profound? I have wishes and dreams. I have curiosities. I have affinities and commitments. But these are dangerous times. I think clarity and hope are among the casualties.

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