



Slow. the. fuck. down.

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Do you remember what an ordinary day in your life looked like last autumn? Back when Corona was just a below average beer and social distancing described what happened to your attention when an academic at a party started talking about their favourite theorist?

Depending on where you lived, it was probably relatively smooth. Of course, there were many things which probably did not work as well as you would've liked them



to. Personally, I struggled between many uncertainties: my university leaving the country I live in, the program I direct being *de facto* suspended for a second time for political reasons, ongoing Brexit unknowns, and the cruel promise that Liverpool might finally win the league this year. All this in Hungary, a state in which services are crumbling and bureaucracy was invented to make people cry. And yet, certainly compared to those of you who have lived or are living through state collapse, things sort of worked.

Of course – as a reviewer emphasized – there are people in many parts of the world who lived amidst unpredictability, multiple constraints and the hovering prospect of death long before our global Corona crisis. Indeed, as the entries from the global south produced within our [Corona Diaries](#) series point out, groups such as migrant labourers have experienced the pandemic in brutalising and dehumanising ways, but from a position of pre-existing hardship.

And, as I know from my own anthropological work amongst door-to-door salespeople in urban India, the smooth running of everyday life is something some groups have to work hard at to create.

However, this post is not about such groups, but rather academics like me in the global North(ish) for whom things – in spite of our complaints – mostly ran according to plan until a few weeks ago.

By which I mean food arrived to the market each morning, my kid went to preschool five days a week, I could grab a beer almost any time of the day, people collected the rubbish a few days a week, the classrooms I taught in were clean with functioning technology, the students I taught were (mostly) equipped with functioning technology and my own personal, domestic, labour, social and cultural patterns moved in and out of synchrony with other patterns to various degrees in a way I could (mostly) manage.

However, I was also aware that whenever I experienced a seemingly smooth environment, somebody had to work to make this happen. Sarah Sharma (2014)



calls these 'temporal architectures' – arrangements of technologies, commodities, services, or labour in a certain locality. Very often, she argues, such arrangements are done to benefit one group of people to the detriment of another. An easy example: the university is clean because cleaning staff worked unsociable hours to keep it clean.

The response to Corona should make visible the hidden patterns which sustained our lives.

Slowly at first, and then suddenly very very quickly, pillars of this temporal architecture started to collapse as things shut down and people were advised, urged or ordered to stay at home (if possible). And yet many people, including many people in academia, believed – and still believe – things could carry on as if they did not need the labour of many other people, the access to certain technologies, the provision of services and the flow of commodities.

'Teach your classes from home', they say, assuming everyone has fast wifi, doesn't have a 5-year-old bouncing off the walls of their one-bedroom flat, and might not be at all concerned with making arrangements for sick or vulnerable family members. 'Do home schooling for kids', as if everyone can continue their conference calls, paper deadlines, cooking and cleaning whilst suddenly learning how to teach children (or in the case of some academics, teach at all). In short, let's all carry on with our lives as if they were uninterrupted.

The obsession with uninterrupted is one of immense stupidity. People are dying, things are collapsing, it's ok if the semester is extended a couple of weeks.

It is especially galling, because some people need to speed up and offer uninterrupted service despite immense difficulties. By which I mean those who work in healthcare, food provision, transport and other essential services. Our work does not have such an urgent immediacy.



But we should not blame ourselves (too much). There are temporal logics at play which we are beholden to – grant deadlines don't disappear, short term contracts don't get extended, student loans or scholarships cannot be stretched, and jobs are under threat or have been already lost. And, of course, those of us with contracts (even definite ones) are luckier than those who have either been sent home on unpaid leave or were working gig to gig.

Thus, we all clamour to find ways to keep on being productive, even though our temporal architectures have crumbled around us.

University management, grant agencies, students, teachers and everyone else needs to come to a realisation that an interruption is not a failure. It's a moment people need to rearrange the temporal patterns of their life amidst massive change. Your hyper-productivity is predicated upon complex systems that are now under massive strain (if they were not before).

And so I have message to everyone in a situation like me, not least myself:

slow. the. fuck. down.