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The Rise of the Arm Chair and the Fall of the Discipline—Philosophy and Quarantine: An Introduction to the Quarantine Special Issue

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The quarantine issues that the globe experienced and continues to experience with COVID-19 are not new and have a history that goes back centuries. Even before we had any real idea about how viruses spread, when superstitions and magic held considerable sway and scientific thinking virtually none, people understood that quarantine helped prevent the spread of diseases. The quarantines of COVID-19 have been very revealing. The most obvious and bizarre initial toll of the COVID-19 pandemic was social – not financial or medical. Those would come later. Quarantine and social distancing, coupled both with the unsettling *visual* muffling of the face and the rise of virtual meetings, put us in an odd situation: on the one hand, we had less of each other to see and to touch; on the other, we had more of each other in our homes, in our pockets, and virtually anywhere we carried our ubiquitous screens. The novelty of this virtual zooming into each other's lives had its perks. It was perhaps fun to give presentations and attend meetings while wearing formal wear only where visible. As with everything else, however, videoconferencing while secretly half-dressed grew old hat fairly quickly. The zooming into our private spaces and bodily secrets, meanwhile, accelerated apace. Strangers at supermarkets, restaurants, banks, and theaters came to know – and to need to know – our temperature. We came to know and accept being monitored, having our movements tracked and controlled, and self-policing under threat of punishments of varying degrees. Virtual realities replaced social realities. We began to see ominous visions of the future. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek suggested that the new normal might well be here to stay and that "maybe only virtual reality will be considered safe from now on" (43–4). He went on to explain that

> many dystopias already imagine a similar future: we stay at home, work on our computers, communicate through videoconferences, exercise on a machine in the corner of our home office, occasionally masturbate in front of a screen displaying hardcore sex, and get food by delivery, never seeing other human beings in person. (56)

The world had suddenly become a misanthrope's paradise – almost as if this is how things should have always been. The misanthrope is, after all, appealing on screen and page – to wit, the charm of Sherlock Holmes, Ebenezer Scrooge, Dr. Gregory House (in *House*), Larry David (in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*), Dr. Martin Ellingham (in *Doc Martin*), and so on. If the fantasy of the would-be misanthrope had come to life, then it also rather quickly became old and died. What remained, flickering in the winds of variable rates (infection, not lending or inflation), was quarantine, and quarantine hurts us – body and mind – in ways that are difficult both to imagine and to measure, and philosophy, in some sectors, has taken a bad hit.

We should be doing better, given our collective global history with quarantine. As Mary J. Dobson explains in her monumental *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England*,

> Although the exact mode of plague transmission and the role of the rat flea was not understood in seventeenth-century England, and many different ideas surrounding contagion, corruption of the air and waters, providence and supernatural causes continued to be discussed, experience had shown that preventive measures

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

should be directed towards isolating 'pestilential' victims, avoiding 'pestilential' quarters of town, and cleansing 'pestilential' airs … public gatherings were often shut during epidemics … [and] fines were imposed on offenders. (486)

According to British historian Paul Slack, quarantine and the restriction of gatherings (among other things) represent a

remarkable achievement, [part] of the development of a strategy for an active war against the plague, [an achievement that] has yet to be given the historical attention it deserves. One of its extraordinary features is the fact that it owed more to practical experience than to medical theory. It rested on observation of the ways in which plague moved. (Slack 46, Dobson 487, n. 110)

Nor is it a uniquely European experience. Israelites in the 7th century BCE were quarantining for a skin disease known as "tzaraath" (צָרַעַת). Damascus was quarantining leprosy patients between 706 and 707 CE, as was China in the 16th century. The Ottomans built a leprosy quarantine hospital in 1431, typhoid patients in Sydney Harbor were under quarantine in 1814, and so on. Therefore, new though our understandings of transmission may be, quarantine itself is not new. Even so, most of the people alive on the planet today had never experienced such things until COVID-19 came along.

Quarantine means something different for twenty-first century pandemics, however, than it did for pandemics of other historical periods. COVID-19 has proved to be what Fareed Zakaria has called an "asymmetric shock … [something] that start[s] out small but end[s] up sending seismic waves around the world" (9). Indeed, while diseases and pandemics are hardly new in history, hardly the "unprecedented" events that so much of the stunned world claimed COVID-19 and its effects to be, hardly the kinds of things that one would have expected to bring the world to a grinding halt beginning in 2020, the face of quarantine today is simply not the same as it was a hundred years ago. It is a face with a more sinister aspect, more wrinkles, more implications. What we are, as I write in the summer of 2022, continuing to live through, are the convulsions of a specifically global pandemic in a specifically globalized world. Never have we had the two together. Never have we shut down the global economy virtually overnight. Never have we had fear, isolation, and a growing sense of despair on as vast as scale as COVID-19 has engendered, and never has quarantine been so geographically and socially extensive. And never before has everybody's business become everybody's business, so to speak: what happens in Shanghai in the spring and summer of 2022 becomes a matter of global attention and criticism, for instance. Yet, it is good to remember that China took flack from the global media for its lockdown of Wuhan, flack that evaporated when Boris Johnson ordered the lockdowns in Britain on March 23, 2020. Who are the morons in this picture: the country that has one death for every 323 people, or the country that has one death for every 275,415 people?[1] Quarantines save lives, and that's a fact.

Among the things that made quarantine so "unprecedented"[2] during the COVID-19 pandemic is the sheer speed at which things travel around the global – things such as the virus itself and information (and misinformation) about it. Zoom, WebEx, Skype, and other telephony technologies, meanwhile, paradoxically distanced while connecting people, reminding them of what they didn't have by offering a virtual substitute – like telling a child she can't have an ice-cream but offering a full glossy colored picture of one. Who would blame the child for crying? Who can blame us for our quarantine fatigue? Who can blame us for wanting back control of our lives?

Roberto Marchesini has spoken about matters of control and about how our description of the time in which we live has both clouded and illuminated our understandings. He describes how he has

always been perplexed by the term "Anthropocene" because it lends itself to the most serious misunderstanding: that is, seeing ourselves as a world apart, freed from those ecological chains that sustain all species through interdependence. Our success, instead, has made us more dependent than ever! (1)

Nothing has shown this more clearly in recent years than COVID-19. N. Kathryn Hales has explained powerfully that

> It screams at jet engine volume that we are interdependent not only with each other but also with the entire ecology of the earth. And finally, it makes devastatingly clear how unprepared we are: unprepared to cope with the virus's effects, of course, but equally important, unprepared to meet the philosophical challenges of reconceptualizing our situation in terms that do justice both to the unique abilities of humans and to the limitations and interdependencies upon which those abilities depend. (S70)

Hayles could hardly be more accurate in noting that COVID-19 has revealed how we are "unprepared to meet the philosophical challenges" the pandemic has presented, as will become clear below through some fairly pointed comments about Slavoj Žižek's COVID-19 writings. Before we get ahead of ourselves, however, the other points Hayles makes warrant more discussion. Quarantine, she is undoubtedly right to note, disfigures our sense of our relationship with ourselves and with the world, warps our vision of our connectedness by at once bolstering illusions about independence whilst blasting to smithereens any notion that we *can* be alone, all the while measuring out in seconds and hours and days and weeks a microbial victory over human agency.

Quarantine wreaks havoc on social order, and history shows that it is more quarantine *per se* than government intervention that is at issue. While so-called Western democracies reeled financially and socially under COVID restrictions, with protests claiming that quarantines and lockdowns thwarted individual rights and freedoms, the less individualistic nations of Asia enacted government-led mandates for lockdowns and quarantines largely without incident. The ironies here drip. The very object of scorn and discontent for some fringe groups in Western nations during COVID-19, quarantine was historically the thing most desired. As historian William H. McNeill explains in his enormously influential *Plagues and Peoples*,

> In northern Europe, the absence of well-defined public quarantine regulations and administrative routines— religious as well as medical—with which to deal with plagues and rumors of plagues, gave scope for violent expression of popular hates and fears provoked by the disease. In particular, long-standing grievances of poor against rich often boiled to the surface. Local riots and plundering of private houses sometimes put the social fabric to a severe test. (182)

Writing about the bubonic plague outbreaks of the 17th century, McNeill's discussion here offers an uncanny reminder of the centrality of class to quarantine issues. In both the American anti-quarantine protests beginning in 2020 and the northern European pro-quarantine protests of the 17th century, it was the poor, the disadvantaged, and the disenfranchised (the same groups, incidentally, that support populist leaders and right-wing ideologies) who led the charge.

Although so much about our responses seem new with each new disease event, senior fellow at the Center for Global Development Charles Kenny reminds us about what we seem to forget: quarantine is not new. Referencing *Leviticus*, Kenny observes that "the earliest written sources suggest that people have long appreciated the risk of contagion and understood the benefits of exclusion" (83). The history of the word "quarantine" is considerably shorter. Public health historian Dorothy Porter explains as follows:

> When plague first appeared in southern Italy in 1347, Italian port authorities began turning away vessels travelling from suspect areas. In 1348 this ad hoc measure was formally codified in Venice on 20 March, when it closed its port to all suspect ships and instituted systematic isolation of travellers and ships in the harbor, initially for a period of thirty days. In 1377, Venice's Adriatic colony at the port of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) set up stations where travellers and merchandise from infected areas were isolated likewise. At Marseilles (1383), Venice (1403) and Majorca (1471), the period was extended to forty days, hence the term "quarantine" ["quaranta" is the Italian word for "forty"]. The period of forty days was believed to separate acute and chronic forms of disease. (33)

Again, while quarantine has long been a part of the human response to epidemics and pandemics, COVID-19 has presented and continues to present challenges that are in some ways unique to our moment in history. Indeed, the very notion of isolation that quarantine has traditionally implied seems to have vanished. Citing Canadian sociological theorist Duane Rousselle, Slavoj Žižek observes that "most of us feel more intensely connected to one another during the pandemic than ever before" (Žižek 54). This leads Žižek to wonder that "the true problem of the pandemic is not social isolation

but our excessive reliance on others, on social links – can we be any more dependent on others than we are during quarantine?" (Žižek 54). This is a clear misunderstanding of the relationship between the two topics – social isolation, on the one hand, and what Žižek deems an "excessive reliance on others" on the other. Claiming that social isolation is somehow magically not "the true problem" of the pandemic because the pandemic has exposed our dependence on each other does not make sense on any level. Žižek seems to misunderstand what quarantine is. Quarantine does *not* mean no contact with people; it means no physical contact. Obviously we continue to have contact with people virtually, and obviously our physical and emotional dependencies are strained, but this strain is *because* of our quarantine, *because* of our social and physical isolation (and to separate the social and physical in the way that Žižek does creates a "false dilemma fallacy").

Žižek goes on to argue that "physical distancing as a defense against the threat of contagion has led to *intensified* social connectivity" (Žižek 61). While this is true, we need to be clear that this now-intensified social connectivity is virtual – and virtual is a far cry from in-person socializing. A virtual hug is not the same as a real one. A digital slap doesn't hurt. And sex without another physical presence just isn't the same. Žižek seems not to fully understand the realities of our digital existence. What he disparagingly calls "the Chinese way (total digitalized state control of individuals)" (2021, 65) is an intellectually dishonest, misleading, and, at core, racist rant. First of all, there is nothing *total* about China's "state control of individuals." People can go to their toilets or bedrooms and masturbate (perhaps not "in front of a screen displaying hardcore sex" as Žižek may be accustomed to having the opportunity to do), people can sing and dance, eat pizza or rice, and can criticize the government. There are restrictions, to be sure, that we don't find in, say, Philadelphia, but to suggest that there is "total digitalized state control of individuals" is just dishonest. And invasive though the tracking seems to Žižek, "the Chinese way" is hardly restricted to China. South Korea, too, established extraordinary surveillance of the disease. As I explained in the "Introduction to the special cluster 'Never really far from us – epidemics and plagues in literature'" (see Works Cited),

> When I arrived back in Seoul from my sabbatical in late June of 2021, I was tracked through my phone for every moment of my two week quarantine. I dared not leave my apartment: there are cameras in the elevator and hallways. If my phone moved outside of the apartment, the government would know. If my phone didn't move for more than an hour (to guard against me leaving without my phone), the government would know—there were several times when I forgot to move my phone, and I got a phone call confirming my location. If I didn't respond to the alert, people would have come to my apartment and presumably punished me. (4-5)

Intrusive, perhaps. A breach of my liberties, certainly, but red lights at intersections are also a restriction of my freedom. I stop not because I have nothing better to do or because I'm capitulating to an evil empire that wants me to stop at intersections for some devious reason; I stop as a civic duty. I stop because I'm not the only person on the road. I curb my liberties so that others may enjoy theirs. What Žižek perceives as "total digitalized state control of individuals" (and to what devious end he doesn't say) is like a red light: it is clearly for the good of the many. Duh. So too with quarantines.

But it is not just cultural difference that we witness here in China's or South Korea's responses. Indeed, to see these responses as such is to misrepresent and misunderstand reality. The South Korean example is a good one to bear in mind:

> In mid-March [2020], the U.S. and South Korea had the same number of coronavirus-caused fatalities— approximately 90. In April, South Korea lost a total of 85 souls to COVID-19, while the U.S. lost 62,000—an average of 85 deaths every hour. Juxtaposing the South Korean response with the American tragedy, some commentators have chalked up the difference to an ancient culture of docile collectivism and Confucianism across the Pacific. This observation isn't just racist. It also exoticizes South Korea's success and makes it seem like the inevitable result of millennia of cultural accretion, rather than something the U.S., or any other country, can learn from *right now*. The truth is that the Korean government and its citizens did something simple, admirable, and all too rare: They suffered from history, and they learned from it. (Thompson)

The realities of South Korea's or China's surveillance of the pathogen are a far cry from the nonsensical, stream-of-consciousness ramblings of Žižek. South Korea's initial successes with COVID-19 are not for the reasons Žižek proposes: "we are told," he explains, that "people in the

Far East are much better able to come to terms with the pandemic – for them, death is just a part of life, of the way things are" (Žižek 11). Exactly where in the Far East is Žižek talking about? He says "We are told," but by whom are we told? It is a new level of absurdity for this man repeatedly called the "Elvis Presley of Philosophy." Žižek's heavily Wikipedia-referenced pandemic diptych in 2020 and 2021 – *Pandemic: COVID-19 Shakes the World* and *Pandemic 2: Chronicles of a Lost Time* suggest that our Elvis may have lost his key – or worse, become tone deaf. In the first of his ramblings, he argues that

> the ongoing spread of the coronavirus epidemic has also triggered a vast epidemic of ideological viruses which were lying dormant in our societies: fake news, paranoiac conspiracy theories, explosions of racism. The well-grounded medical need for quarantines found an echo in the ideological pressure to establish clear boundaries and to quarantine enemies who pose a threat to our identity. (Žižek 39)

Žižek is clearly trying to expose how xenophobes can put the pandemic to use, but it is impossible to take such a gesture seriously from the mouth that has just slavered out an anti-Asian racist rant. It is all very well to talk about ideological pressure, and Žižek is not wrong to do so, but it all starts to look a little disingenuous and a lot like the pot calling the kettle black.

There is, moreover, a more rooted problem in Žižek's use of what Marchesini calls "the virus paradigm" in his book of the same title. This problem has to do with how Žižek migrates the term "virus" very far – and damagingly – from what it actually denotes. To me it seems important not to fall into anthropomorphic notions about viruses, a point Žižek seem also to hold when he explains that "the virus is not an enemy with plans and strategies to destroy us" (Žižek 104–5); yet, in what remains of that sentence, he claims that "it is just a stupid self-replicating mechanism" (Žižek 105). Clearly Žižek either hasn't thought this through or is just being sloppy – likely that latter, given the clear lack of scholarly rigor in these two volumes. Viruses are neither intelligent nor stupid, of course, but to call them stupid in the same sentence that claims they are "not an enemy with plans and strategies to destroy us" – that *is* stupid. Nevertheless, let us not lose the point that a virus "is not an enemy trying to destroy us – it just reproduces with a blind automatism" (Žižek 110). Moreover, it is simply not true to say that "a virus is a part of reality than can dealt with only through science" (Žižek 110). Long before there was science, there were quarantines. It is anachronistic to suggest that 7th century (BCE) Israelites were dealing with צָרַעַת through science.

Ultimately, Žižek shows the collateral damage that COVID-19 has had on the discipline of philosophy. As its Elvis, Žižek shows the fall of the discipline as he himself sinks to the level of every other sudden expert COVID-19 has spawned. He becomes just another arm chair philosopher. Perhaps this is the most horrifying academic casualty of quarantine. Not only has Elvis left the building; he has taken the band and crew with him – or at least he has signaled their exit.

The voices in this Special Issue actively resist the mediocrity and stream-of-consciousness rambling whose only footings are in Wikipedia and in Žižek's rapidly fading flower. The voices in this Special Issue sing more vibrantly than the fat Elvis does. The first two articles address Zijian Chi's *Snow Crow*, a 2010 Chinese novel that is set against the historical background of an outbreak of bubonic plague in the northeastern city of Harbin in China (then Manchuria) from the winter of 1910 through 1911. Ping Du's "Plague Writing and Quarantine in Zijian Chi's *Snow Crow*" explains how the novel outlines both the physical and emotional difficulties of survival ordinary citizens in the infected area experience. Plague is both a metaphorical and a real thing in the novel, and it engenders spiritual isolation and psychological trauma that lingers long after the plague and the quarantines. Ping Du argues that along with the progress and development of epidemiology in China, Chinese plague writing gradually turns from associating disease with gods and ghosts to reflecting on relations among people, between humans and divinities, between humans and nature, and between individuals and society. The paper also traces the historical development of quarantine in different ancient Chinese dynasties and how quarantine evolved from people's unconscious and instinctive will to escape on the one hand, to the more conscious moves to physically and psychologically self-isolate on the other. These in turn evolve into large-scale government-led quarantine measures, and Du makes comparisons and contrasts of

our contemporary situation with the quarantines in the novel. Du shows that Chi's plague and quarantine writing reveals how plague metaphors shape people's thinking about themselves and about the plague itself and how people can recover after quarantine. In so doing, Du offers timely and important reflections on our current pandemic struggles.

In "Reflections on Quarantine and Social Relations in Zijian Chi's *Snow Crow* in light of Shanghai's 2022 Quarantines," Yina Cao and Xudong Guo offer another set of insights on *Snow Crow*. Cao and Guo analyze the hardships and dilemmas confronting people during the Harbin plague in the novel and invoke both Susan Sontag's conceptualization of illness as metaphor and Priscilla Wald's understandings of outbreak narratives. Cao and Guo show that plague and consequent quarantines have profound influences (both positive and negative) on people's bodies and social relations. Quarantine also bears importantly on attitudes toward the plague itself. People begin to have a scientific understanding of plague instead of a metaphorical one in the plague's outbreak, development, and eradication. This results in a change from a sense of isolation to one of cohesion among people. Thus, approaches to fighting plague should be both scientific and social: in other words, fighting plague means both eliminating the epidemic virus physiologically and breaking down the sense of estrangement that epidemic quarantine produces . Furthermore, in order to take a more scientific approach to the prevention of plague, Cao and Guo claim, quarantine activities and the treatment of people who are quarantined should also be objectively and adequately considered to avoid excessive burdens. One thing is certain about quarantine, according to Cao and Guo: there is nothing normal about life during periods of quarantine.

Zou Li and Zhou Quan, in "Quarantine and the Transformation of Power Dynamics during China's War against Japanese Colonialism," continue the emphasis on Chinese reactions to disruptions quarantine causes in daily life. By analyzing the parallel relationship between quarantine measures for tuberculosis in Ba Jin's *Cold Nights* and the disintegration of China's socio-political structure during China's war againstJapanese colonialism, Zou and Zhou explore how wartime violence transforms power dynamics between individuals and the socio-political system. They argue that this parallel relationship is crucial in understanding the transformation of wartime socio-political power relations. Quarantine and military action makes visible the interplay between individual rights and collective socio-political power. Both impact the fundamental premise of China's state system. This premise is based on the Three Principles proposed by Sun Yat Sen and emphasizes the building of in-group feelings and social cohesion among the Chinese people. Individuals in such a schema are an organic part of the national system. War and quarantine, Zou and Zhou explain, as represented in *Cold Nights*, clearly damage the balance of society and disrupt social cohesion.

In their article "Plague and Anti-quarantine Writing in Traditional Chinese Biography," Wei Guo and Peina Zhuang offer the final set of comments in this Special Issue on Chinese reactions to quarantine. Guo and Zhuang analyze the features of anti-quarantine writings in traditional Chinese biography and base their discussions on representative anti-quarantine stories in the biographies of Yu Gun and Xin Gongyi. These writings share the same repetitive simple narrative structures without delving deeply into matters about the plague itself and instead focus on the details of the words and deeds of the characters and their psychological activities. The novels share similar settings, temporal and physical, and focus on moral dimensions of quarantine rather than on the role of medicine in fighting against plagues. Indeed, in much anti-quarantine writing in traditional Chinese biography, doctors and medicine are often nowhere to be seen and are only used as props to highlight the nobility of certain characters. Guo and Zhuang explain the popularity of these anti-quarantine writings in ancient Chinese history and show that traditionally Confucian ethics have come before everything else, even though this has sometimes resulted in the sacrifice of people's lives and property – sacrifices that have caused heavy casualties and that resulted in the passing of the anti-quarantine laws in ancient China.

In "Quarantine Then and Now: Reflections on *Year of Wonders* and COVID-19," my own articleinvolves discussions of a different time and space than the Chinese articles address in this Special Issue. "Quarantine Then and Now" uses *Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague* by Geraldine

Brooks to show that there is a lot we have to learn from history and that not learning these things has compromised our responses to COVID-19. Indeed, one of the key inspirations behind this Special Issue has been to unearth the lessons of quarantines of the past – lessons we have globally clearly not attended or benefitted from. Like the many of the other quarantine experiences this Special Issue examines, those Brooks describes in *Year of Wonders* are far from contemporary. Having occurred more than 350 years before COVID-19, these experiences have an eerie resemblance and relevance to contemporary events. What is so very odd about the responses to COVID-19 is the sense that the problems, threats, and challenges that quarantine poses are somehow new. They most certainly are not new, and "Quarantine Then and Now" explores in particular some of the dimensions of resistance to quarantine, using the setting *Year of Wonders* narrativizes as a centuries-old referent point. As Fareed Zakaria so poignantly explains, "we should have seen it coming. The corona virus may be novel but plagues are not" (4). *Year of Wonders* and what it says about quarantines is in many ways a novel that could have been written yesterday.

Questions about time, clearly, are important not only in the history of quarantines but also within quarantines themselves. Kerim Can Yazgünoğlu's "Quarantine Time is 'out of joint': Re-Stitching Time as Posthuman Temporalities in Emma Donoghue's *The Pull of the Stars*" examines the relationship between clock time, duration, and viral time in the 1918 influenza pandemic in Emma Donoghue's *The Pull of the Stars* (2020). Yazgünoğlu focuses on posthuman temporal experiences of quarantine and shows how the pandemic challenges the human experience of clock time at a Dublin hospital. Quarantine and the pandemic unravel the co-existence of clock time, duration, and viral time rather than work to establish a boundary between human time and viral time. Such co-existence, Yazgünoğlu argues, is relational, multilinear, and hybrid. He further claims that it is obvious that a linear order of human time is incapable of making sense of a relational ontology of various temporalities, and the nonhuman temporality of the influenza virus is incompatible with clock time in the novel, although it co-exists on the same plane. Indeed, viral time, Yazgünoğlu explains, reconfigures perceptions, experiences of time, and chrono-normative activities in quarantine. *The Pull of the Stars* illustrates such different temporal scales by focalizing on the protagonist Julia Power and her sense of time in the pandemic. Yazgünoğlu shows how Julia's perception of time becomes queer: it occurs when she feels intimate with her colleague. In this context, the posthuman perception of time is in accord with multiple vectors, modalities, and scales of temporality. Posthuman temporality signifies multiplicitous times that are intimately embedded as part of human and nonhuman perceptions, experiences, and relations. Posthuman temporal framing, Yazgünoğlu notes, where various temporal scales such as duration, human time, and viral time exist alongside each other, is a vibrant, agentic, and proactive network that produces new experiences, relations, and intimacies between humans and nonhumans. Temporal bodies and nonhuman life in such posthuman framing has the capacity to affect other bodies and lives, be they human or nonhuman. Temporal agency meets viral agency, creating ecological and viral kinship. Highlighting such temporal and relational assemblages, Yazgünoğlu reveals how *The Pull of the Stars* both epitomizes quarantine time as being "out of joint" and demonstrates that life is not what it used to be in pandemic times when people are in quarantine.

While the emphases up to this point in the Special Issue have been on the quarantine of people, obviously it is not only humans who are quarantined, and Iris Ralph's "Animals in Quarantine: Biosecurity vs. Biodiversity" offers a series of insights on the quarantine of animals in Australia. Ralph looks at causal relationships between nonhuman and human animals in quarantine in the context of nonhuman animals in Australia who are subject to a wide range of quarantine measures – policies as well as practices – for their entire lives. Ralph shows that these conditions might not seem to have anything to do with the incarceration of bats in cages in wet markets in China but in fact have everything to do with such practices. "Animals in quarantine" reveals the common moral and material grounds that animal quarantine sites in Australia share with both industrial and non-industrial animal quarantine sites elsewhere in the world. Ralph explains that the shared moral terrain involves ecophobia, speciesism, and

anthropocentrism, while the shared material terrain has to do with the biological connections between humans and other animals, connections that facilitate the transfer of diseases (zoonosis). Artists and scholars situated in the environmental humanities, Ralph notes, address those ties in an effort to reduce the risk of pandemics and so to eliminate the intensive commodification of animals in food and other commodity productions. "Animals in Quarantine" represents this matter as it appears in First Nations filmmaker Ivan Sen's *Mystery Road*. The film offers insights on the escalating imbalance between powerful biosecurity interests (which are in step with the interests of the meat industry) in Australia and its struggling biodiversity interests. "Animals in Quarantine" takes common definitions and assumptions about quarantine sites and shows that quarantine sites are not limited to the kinds that are most recognizable – for example, hotels that are adjacent to airports and function as quarantine sites for human cargo or the sprawling quarantine facilities associated with industrial animal production. Quarantine sites, as Ralph argues, also define and include vast areas of land devoted solely to animal agriculture.

Quarantine also matters to other forms of production than animal agriculture, and Loren Goodman's surprising and original "The Calm of the Wild: Memory, Inversion and Narrative Authority as a Function of Quarantine in Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*" explores how Jack London's 1912 pandemic fiction *The Scarlet Plague* yields insights into the relationship between quarantine, social immersion, and literary composition. Goodman works with a dual conception of quarantine as a solitary creative process involving both distancing from infectious disease and an embracing of literary artistic production. He offers close readings and analyses of London's novel in connection with Thucydides, its primary literary-historical antecedent, and argues that there is an interdependent, mutually beneficial nature of quarantine and literature. In its unique structure and framing, which have the effect of rhythmically and repeatedly attracting and repelling, and uniting and dividing its characters as well as its readers, London's text provides a model for narrative construction of value to all practitioners of the literary arts, including scholars, critics, storytellers, translators, and creative writers. The integral element of this method is constant movement between polarities. London's novel demonstrates this mainly through playful and dramatic juxtaposition of complementary opposites, such as memory and forgetfulness, civilization and savagery, and storyteller and audience. London distances of the reader, Goodman explains, through the literary conceit of translation. He also uses a narrator whose memory and linguistic ability to tell the novel's story are compromised through social interaction with his audience and restored through isolation. Both of these – the translation conceit and the narrative voice – shed light on the role of memory in storytelling and the necessity for intervals of quarantine between the construction of a story and the experience of the events it is based on. London's entanglements of vastly divergent characters through inversions of social class, race, perspective, and power dynamics, as well as his negotiation of narrative authority through collective storytelling, appear to advocate a holistic worldview of interconnectedness. This mirrors and informs an understanding of quarantine and social immersion as a continuum. It is a continuum that can be horrifying at points.

The next article in the issue looks at some of those points of horror. In "'That Noisome and Contagious Receptacle': Quarantine and Horror in Charles Brockden Brown's 'The Man at Home,'" Matthew Wynn Sivils examines how Charles Brockden Brown's 1798 series of fictionalized prose sketches, set against Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic, explores the horrors that emerge from the narrative mixture of contagion, quarantine, and xenophobia. Informed in part by Eugenie Brinkema's radical formalism, Sivils draws parallels between Brown's sketches – particularly those sections directly portraying the fears and distrust of quarantine efforts – and the xenophobia and irrationality that flared up during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sivils reasons that Brown's "The Man at Home" highlights how mitigation efforts associated with the yellow fever epidemic, especially quarantine, may be read through a formalist conception of horror, not necessarily the horror of disgust but the horror of distrust and dehumanization. The result, both in Brown's 1798 tale and in our current coronavirus reality, is a community infected with a fear intimately linked with isolation and fragmentation and

fueled by a toxic blend of anxiety and ignorance. For Sivils, Brown's series demonstrates how quarantined spaces impose a form of order within the atmosphere of disease that not only work to foil the spread of a contagion but that also disrupt and degrade the movement of information, ultimately fostering another type of social malady in the form of xenophobia and racism. "The Man at Home," Sivils argues, embodies the concept of quarantine as a formalism of fear, a mechanism of isolation that compartmentalizes people while also disrupting the flow of information and interaction that binds a community together, resulting in a culture of misinformation, dread, and hatred. It all sounds uncannily similar to our current situation.

The final article in this Special Issue takes us directly into our current situation and offers analyses of literature written about COVID-19 itself. In her "Social and Ecological Relationships in South Korean Quarantine and COVID-19 Literature," Narie Jung analyzes features of quarantine narratives in Jiin Choi's *Pandemic* [팬데믹] and Hyewon Lee's *Ecological Narratives* [생태 소설], both edited collections written in Korean. These narratives show that COVID-19 quarantines have posed important questions about social and ecological relationships. The stories in *Pandemic* recognize the importance of social relationships and envision what new forms they might take after the pandemic and quarantines. The stories explore new types of social relationships and show how the matter of human and nonhuman agency may be a part of this change. Jung explains also that the focus of the stories in *Ecological Narratives* on relationships between humans and nonhumans stresses the significance of nonhuman agency, human dependence on nonhuman agency, and the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans. This stress reveals that anthropocentric ideas about agency are destructive in the long run. The stories in *Ecological Narratives* recognize that the absence of awareness of interconnectedness has brought about environmental degradation, and they simultaneously assert that the kinds of contact currently in play are often exploitative and destructive. In their strong focus on social and ecological relationships, Jung argues, *Pandemic* and *Ecological Narratives* forecast that after the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantines, Korean society will move toward building a stronger and more inclusive community, both social and ecological.

It is hard to disagree with the assessment of N. Katharine Hayles that COVID-19 has caught us with our philosophical pants down and has revealed how we are utterly "unprepared to meet the philosophical challenges" we currently face; yet even as fat Elvis staggers and reels upon the stage, new voices are belting out fresh materials. Those materials are what this Special Issue is all about.

Notes

1. I have calculated these numbers (as anyone can) from that data on the https://www.worldometers.info/corona virus/website.
2. The very word "unprecedented" is one that ironically is included in the title of a BBC Report by Amol Rajan on *OED*'s extension of its "Word of the Year" to "Words of the Year" for 2020, but "unprecedented" is not actually included as one of those words. Anyone who lived through 2020 will remember the unprecedented use of the word "unprecedented" (see Rajan).

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