

BECOMING (UN)PRODUCTIVE: GRIEVING DEATH, RECLAIMING LIFE (VOL. 1)

York University, Tkaronto, Canada
newsoc@yorku.ca

Being online during a pandemic in the climate of black death is absolutely triggering. To let the pain out, I've had to tap out—had to let those who love me pull me out of this trigger. We, as Black women, carry the heaviness of anti-black/misogynoir policing and anti-black violence with COVID. As Brand contends, 'we've been living in a pandemic all of our [black] life; it is structural rather than viral; it is the global state of emergency of antiblackness'. #SayHerName, #ICantBreathe, #Blacklivesmatter, sigh, I'm so tired. I don't want to live this pattern time and time again. I want to harness this anger/energy to build alternative possibilities for Black life, but I'm just so drained. So now, with this weight on my spirit, I am required to uphold my scholarly duties in addition to tutoring and mentoring the future of tomorrow, guest lecturing, hosting anti-black workshops, all whilst navigating an anti-black world that is determined to script my ancestors, descendants and I out of this narrative of life. It's a lot. But I'm managing.

- Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, Chief-Deputy-Editor

This year, I have felt simultaneously stuck in stillness but also surrounded by chaos. I feel frozen in time, trapped by the same mundane four walls that I call home, unable to think beyond their ontological restrictions. I feel time speeding past me as I stumble, fumble, and watch helplessly as it slips through my outreached fingers. My stuckness has forced me to rely on technology to marginally satiate my visual and auditory senses. So, I, the cyborg, use my new digital eyes and ears to escape these walls and find myself in chaos. I watch stewing in my impotent anger, but not shock, as the structures that make up our society continue to function as intended and wreak coordinated havoc on the world, committing gratuitous violence on people of colour, but especially Black people, around the world. I'm tired, and my weariness builds as I attempt to support my community, family, and friends in any way I can. My mind becomes more chaotic by the day as the 'need' for productivity builds and sits immiscibly with my awareness that productivity makes me implicated and complicit in reproducing this shitty system. But I the half-person, half-machine, must keep on keepin on, so I suppress and compartmentalize my emotions to continue producing during my 'free' time and stand idly by and watch as the academy squeezes every last drop of value from my body, too tired to think of an otherwise.

- Giovanni Carranza- Hernandez, Chief-Deputy-Editor

My head feels like a bottomless container of all the things I have to get done. Grade midterms, conduct interviews, read, email, coordinate mutual aid project, do mutual aid – cook, deliver, repeat, speak on panels, email, coordinate this journal, manage our social media, manage social media for mutual aid project, email, edit articles, submit articles, revise articles, find articles, try to have a life... I'm always doing something, and yet, the list never gets smaller. I'm productive. Always productive. Friends say: "I don't know how you do it." It bothers me. People mean well when they say it, but it's intended to celebrate my seemingly endless ability to output, to keep up, and the thing is, I'm not keeping up with anything. I feel like my body is disintegrating on a cellular level. I'm not even tired, I'm just exhausted. I don't want to sleep, I want to rest, to sit, to breath, to stop. That's what endless, uncompromised productivity really looks like. You don't actually keep up; something has to give. Nobody keeps up with academia and feels OK about it, especially not us. Something always gives, or breaks. I think I'm breaking, or something.

- Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, Founder/Editor-in-Chief

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Inline with the spirit of this issue, we begin with three epigraphs from the senior editors of *New Sociology*: Beatrice and Giovanni, our Chief-Deputy-Editors, and me, Jade, the founder and Editor-in-Chief. All of us are upper-level graduate students; all of us are tired, all of us are negatively racialized (albeit unevenly); all of us are sources of knowledge, insight, and strength.

These epigraphs mirror the exhaustion and resiliency that you will find pulsating throughout the pages of this issue: *Becoming (Un)Productive: Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life* (Volume 1). The theme of the issue was inspired by the realities of graduate students like us; those of femme, queer, trans* and or Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour academics, organizers, and creatives trying to live through academia and society's obsession with productivity during a time of widespread murder, grief, and unrest; during COVID-19 and, in the wake of George Floyd's, and more locally, Regis Korchinski-Paquet's, murder, the public's heightened (and now discarded) interest in Black Lives Matter and the state sanctioned killing and letting die of Black and Indigenous people especially and people of colour more generally; during protests and job searches, emails and naps, webinars and evictions; bursts of performative activism and endless calls for publications; social isolation and constant zooming.

These epigraphs are intended to speak for us, and, more specifically, me, as I fumble to write this introduction. I don't have the time or energy to write a proper one, so I'm not going to. Indeed, doing so would be disingenuous to what we have set out to do here: give people like us the space we need to produce and create on our own terms, and not according to the imperializing rhetoric of academia and racial capitalism. Also, we do not want to ask you to read more than you need to. We have too much shit to read and no time to read it in. So, this is all I'll say for now: *We're just so drained, too tired to think of an otherwise. And something has to give.*

What that something is, and what its absence gives way to, we don't know, but we continue to imagine, dream, and hope for an otherwise, for a world beyond productivity and death.

I will, however, introduce our pieces in traditional editorial fashion, as we want to show our

authors not only the respect they deserve, but the gratitude we have for their art, poetry, and prose. The issue is broken into five parts, each organized by a prominent theme, all containing three pieces each: *Sleep*, *Contagion*, *Movement*, *Productivity*, and *Storytelling*. These are the themes our authors naturally oriented towards and revealed to us through their art. The first theme, *Sleep*, begins with the featured piece of the volume: "Sleeping into Wakefulness: Traversing the Three Stages of Sleep Towards Liberation", written by activist-artist Anjali Appadurai, and activist-scholar Sasha Askarian. Feeling the power, beauty, and raw energy of Appadurai and Askarian's words within our bones, our editorial team unanimously agreed to make this our featured piece. A combination of poetry, social commentary, and collage artwork, *Sleeping into Wakefulness* uses sleep as a reality and a metaphor for the trauma and resistance of racial-gendered-classed being under white-supremacist-capitalist patriarchy, moving through the sleep cycle – light sleep, REM sleep, and slow wave sleep – to speak to the liberatory energies contained within our unconscious minds, creative energies, and (un)known imaginaries. In essence, this piece literally details the power to dream of an otherwise. The authors' words spoke to us and our team on a cellular, spiritual level, and, in doing so, perfectly embodied the critical praxis ethic of our journal: art and politics as lived practice.

The second piece under *Sleep* is a creative nonfiction essay written by Andie (Amy) Keating, entitled "I Need a Nap: Living with Idiopathic Hypersomnia in Sleepless Capitalism". Keating combines the best of academic critique with the power of personal prose in a seemingly effortless way that is nothing short of profound. The sleep to which they speak is exhausting and unquenchable, conditioned by the body and by the social, by their idiopathic hypersomnia and the hyper-productivity of our violent capitalist state. In approaching the question – the trauma, the desire, the idea – of sleep in this way, Keating blends the public and private realms of living (and dying) in our devastated world to intensely explore the ills of our current milieu from the rhythms of the somatic self. This piece points to the potential of academic work to bridge the intellect with the beautiful and the ordinary, the ability to push so-called academic writing from the confines of citations, literature reviews, and themes, to the power of the everyday. In doing so, Keating's

words are a harbinger for how art can improve and enrich academic analysis.

The last piece of the section is a devastatingly beautiful poem entitled “To sleep overseas”, which is written by scholar and international organizer Roxana Escobar Ñañez. The poem speaks to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her home country, Peru. There is a pain and a truth contained within the poem that is as undeniable for the reader to feel as it is as hard for me to capture. Escobar Ñañez’s powerful and intense writing uses the images of sleeplessness and nightmares to reckon with the fear and anxiety that she feels as an international Peruvian student living in so-called Canada. As a result, she brings the “far away” impacts of COVID-19 on the Global South to bear on those of us living in Tkaronto/Three Fires Territories and beyond. Her poem reminds us that the nationalist thinking through which Westerners often interpret collective trauma, such as COVID-19, tend not to speak to the transnationally complex realities of many refugees, im/migrants, and international students/workers living in Tkaronto especially or so-called Canada more generally. Left with the haunting image of loss that so many of us deny or turn away from, Ñañez’s poem foregrounds her personal grief in politically impactful, socially compelling, and poetically striking ways that we all must sit with and hold onto.

The next section of our issue is entitled *Contagion*. The pieces under this theme all use the power of visual imaginary to highlight the societal undertones – from the racial to the environmental - of infection, dirt, and disease, giving substantive focus to COVID-19, Orientalism, and their intersections. Piece one, entitled “Mutations in Yellow: Tumeric, cumin, cinnamon, and chili powder on rice paper”, is a photo essay by local artist and non-architect michelle liu. Featuring images of a serial arrangement of yellow pigments on rice paper, this photo essay gestures to the relationship between botany, viruses, and empire using turmeric, cumin, cinnamon, and chili powder, thereby exploring how the overlapping “yellows” of infection, foreignness, and invasion are often rendered into matters of racialized contagion within the white imaginary of Western nation states. The contagion of liu’s art is that of the Orientalized Other navigating a world that is medicalized, if not sterilized, in alignment with the racial purities and suffocating cleanliness of white supremacy.

The second piece in this section is a captioned photo essay written by photographer-scholar Brittany Schaefer, which is entitled “Lysol Lakes, and Other Photographs”. The photographs featured in this essay vibrantly bring to life the mundane horrors of COVID-19, highlighting the now normalized traumas we must endure to stop the spread of the deadly virus. Schaefer’s images are as haunting as they are beautiful, drawing focus to the oh-so-still nightmare of our new world order using intensely visceral yet tedious sites of un/contaminated public landscapes. This photo essay will leave you simultaneously validated and devastated. Following this, is a piece by scholar and creative Mengzhu Fu, who uses a clever comic strip to not only show us “how to wear a mask” but, in doing so, challenges the rise of Sinophobia in the wake of COVID-19. In this illustration, Fu disrupts the myths of why people might wear masks through a basic 101 tutorial that mimics the style of the safety instruction cards found on air flights as well as the colonial-esk posters featured in Anglo-colonial university washrooms that tell Chinese students not to stand on the toilet seats. Fu’s piece disperses the eroticism around masks to provide white people with the information that they apparently need to reframe from attacking masked East Asian folx. Rife with meaning, complexity, and colour, this brief comic illustration is a more than impressive balance between art, political satire, and academic critique.

The third section of the issue is called *Movement*, and it captures how we move, or do not move, the mind, body, and spirit to grapple with the simultaneous beauty and trauma of life. The first piece of the section, entitled “Thoughts of Sorts”, is a multi-media poem written and embodied by dancer, poet, and researcher Sebastian Oreamuno. A Toronto-based artist and PhD student born in Santiago, Chile, Oreamuno uses poetry and abstract imagery to visualize how he mobilizes dance and movement to articulate a sense of being and becoming that is as full, rich, and fluid as the worlds he inhabits, and which his art brings together. Equal parts poetry, dance, and methodology, *Thoughts of Sorts* is a testament to movement’s ability to resist and restore.

The second piece in *Movement* is a short but powerful poem written by Fiona Edwards, called “Sitting in the dark: COVID-19 and mental well-being”. An expression of how collective trauma

and non-movement go hand-in-hand, Edwards explores how the COVID-19 pandemic stagnates us, particularly young folk who are forced to come of age amongst a global health crisis defined by death, social isolation, and lack of mobility. Edwards' words speak to a reality of troubled mental health that plagues much of our postCOVID¹ society and will likely mark generations to come. From here, is the last piece of the section, which is a co-authored multi-media project entitled "What's Safe". Written and composed by local researchers, creatives, and educators Mēlika Hashemi, Maryanne Casasanta, Lauren Runions and Heddy V. Graterol, the piece uses dancing and creative problem-solving, captured in prose and videos stills, to explore social distance measures and the limits of productivity in our immediate postCOVID world. Staged at Trinity Bellwoods Park in Tkaronto, Ontario, the dance score registers with many Torontonians/GTAers struggling to adapt to our shifting notions of (un)productivity and our desire to reimagine productivity along the lines of play and imagination.

Next, we have the section *Productivity*, which features pieces that explicitly challenge notions of productivity following the onset of COVID-19. First, we have an email exchange entitled "Imagining an (Un)productive Anthropology Through the Night" by Vishwaveda Joshi and Ira Famarin. Mobilizing the unique yet now overly familiar medium of email, scholar-artists Joshi and Famarin engage their minds, bodies, and souls as sites of trauma from which they can explore the thematic potential and insight of nighttime and nightness. In their exploration, they challenge static notions of productivity and reclaim the everyday as a site of artistic vision. Most profound, is their use of email, a platform that we have come to associate with the rigid hyper-productivity of our digital, postCOVID life, to diametrically detail the beauty, care, and power of everyday intimacy. As such, this piece is as novel in vision as it is in form and content.

The second piece under *Productivity* is a digital image curated by scholar-creative M-A Murphy, entitled "You Are More Than Your Productivity". While seemingly a simple message, the words

encapsulated in the title, the design, and the text, have become a mantra in the wake of COVID-19, in the wake of blurred boundaries, endless workdays, a million Zoom meetings, and even more emails: *we are more than our productivity*. We are art, beauty, and pain; we are alive. Murphy's words stand as a reminder to all of us attempting to write and work through collective trauma; through pandemics and broken social systems and all-around injustice and inhumanity, that our value, our worthiness, our lives are not contingent on our productivity, but the connections and relationships to the energies that make up our world and the loves in our life. Lastly, we have "Quarantine Diaries: A Look into Isolation, Self-Hatred, and Acceptance" – a series of diary entries written by poet and emergent scholar Gloria Park. An intimate exploration into the exhaustion, anxiety, and depression of self isolation, widespread grief, and deep uncertainty, Park shares pages from her personal diary to highlight the all-too-common mental health struggles of COVID living. At once personal and social, spectacular and mundane, intimate and general, this piece is not only a metaphor for the blurred public-private boundaries of our new world, but a radical reimagining of its potential, resonate of the feminist adage "the personal is political" and the underlining belief in the power of everyday social critique.

The last section of our issue is entitled *Storytelling*. These pieces highlight the pedagogical, critical, and radical power of personal and creative narratives, blending emotions, lived experiences, and artistic prose with political critique and praxis. The first story is a visual essay called "Writing through Story: The Death of my Mother", written by creative writer Deanna MacNeil. Curated in the form of a blog post, *Writing through Story* is a heart wrenching, heart warming, and soul nourishing narrative about MacNeil's loss of her mother and the radical re-imaginings of family and kinship folded around, between, and across her grief. Rich in both affect and possibility, MacNeil's essay rests in your bones and radiates throughout your body, joining

¹ We mean postCOVID in the same way Ryan Kanté Jobson means the term postpandemic, as implied by their tweet: "So the "post" in postpandemic is the same as the "post" in postcolonial, no?"

Accessed June 14, 2021. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RyanCecilJobson/status/1401909046391853061?s=20>

sensations of loss and hope together in ways mirroring the complexities of family itself.

Following this, is another story rooted in lived experience: “A Cultural Reset” by emergent scholar Sarah Gaddam. Moving through the complexities of racial-ethnic-national belonging in our transglobal and diasporic world, Gaddam moves through the ebbs and flows of being and belonging by sharing her experiences as a first-generation South Indian of mixed Canadian-American nationality who is now living in Brampton, Ontario. Drawing specifically on her simultaneous loss of and yearning for her family’s native language, Telugu, Gaddam reminds us of the boundaries and contradictions inherent to ethnic-racial identifiers such as Brown, South Asian, and even Indian. Lastly, we have our first, only, and much appreciated piece of fiction, “The Factory Women”. Beautifully written by writer-researcher Natalie Welsh, this story brings the historical past into the historical present by sharing the stories of Italian immigrant women in Toronto in the 1960s prior to their acceptance into the whitestream. Reminding us that not too long ago, many ethnic groups who now benefit from whiteness were Othered and cast aside, *The Factory Women* is a call for solidarity among once “off-white” migrant settlers to reach into their past and to find themselves, their stories, in the faces of those who still reside at the margins.

As an issue born out of the trauma, heartbreak, exhaustion, violence, and resilience of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope you find parts of yourself in the poetics, artistry, stories, thoughts, critiques, and visions of the words and images that radiate throughout the following pages. This issue was a labour of love in the truest sense of the phrase, and we could not be more thankful and proud of our contributors: thankful for their contributions, proud of their survival (and/or their lack thereof). These stories are testament to the power of those ignored, overlooked, and exploited by academia. We bring them to the center of knowledge in the face of collective trauma and profound social reimagining. We bring them to the center in the face of the endless calls to be productive despite the death, loss, and anxiety surrounding us. We bring them together to challenge academia’s (not so) hidden white supremacist-capitalist-cis-heteropatriarchal-ableist social fabric. *We bring them together to say fuck you, productivity, fuck you, racial capitalism,*

fuck you, academia, we’d rather keep resting, surviving, creating, and simply existing.

We would like to thank the authors, creatives, and dreamers who contributed to *New Sociology*. A special thank you also goes to our peer reviewers, editorial team, advisory board, York Digital Journals, York University Printings Services, and the York University Sociology Department. We would especially like to acknowledge Audrey Tokiwa for her unconditional support. Finally, we would like to thank Erika Mulder for designing the first six proofs of the issue and Brittany Myburgh for designing the rest. Brittany, in particular, is a main reason we were able to get the issue out on time and her thoughtfulness, reliability, and overall respect for our work allowed our issue, in all its power and beauty, to shine through and out into the world, giving our senior editors and authors comfort in the face of so much uncertainty. Thank you.

Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, NS Founder and Editor-In-Chief, with Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, NS Chief-Deputy-Editor, and Giovanni Carranza-Hernandez, NS Chief-Deputy-Editor