

BECOMING (UN)PRODUCTIVE:  
GRIEVING DEATH, RECLAIMING LIFE (VOL. 2)

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*The image that undoubtedly captures the embodied reality of living in the 'post-pandemic' world as a Black grad student is the viral blurry Mr. Krabs meme surrounded by an angry mob\*—yeah, that one! I have no idea what's going on academically—I haven't fully recovered from the plague of Black death that has become 'the newly designated disposable bodies of the pandemic'—my world has shaken. This meme encapsulates the disorientated state I currently occupy. The once urgent and ignited public discourse regarding systemic police reforms are now stagnant, thwarted by state and public debates of the vaccinated vs. unvaccinated that places responsibility on BIPOC to stop the spread of COVID-19. In the 'post-pandemic world', death and freedom are immutably interwoven; the freedom to die is set above the unfreedom of containment and 'forced' vaccinations—and the freedom to live longer; relatively free, is through the unfreedom of mobility. So, what does life feel like as a Black grad student navigating social media/public feeds that choose to strip colonial, racist, and imperialist histories from strict biopolitical regimes of COVID-19 containment in Canada and at York University? It feels suffocating—it is violent.*

- Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, Chief-Deputy-Editor

*These days, COVID-19 is consistent background noise, while the movements for racial justice are distant memories. We're so distracted by technology; we don't hear the stories of tragedy or hear the politicians lie casually when they promise change passionately—do those ideas ever really come to life? Time passes and the masses' attention turns to the next day, but the next day brings Black, Indigenous and People of Colour dying in daylight. So much pain, too many emotions, and just to listen, is a fight. Time is life and these days that's a luxury. So today, I sit here daydreaming and realize that tomorrow brings the best yet to come. So tonight, I lay here dreaming of an otherwise that fights the tragedy of reality. All while thinking of my son, holding him close, so I don't let him drown, so I don't let him down.*

- Giovanni Carranza- Hernandez, Chief-Deputy-Editor

*I don't know what time is. I have long joked that "time is a construct." It's an occupational hazard to make such philosophical declarations. But now, I feel the words in my marrow. Was it not a minute ago, that everyone cared about the state sanction killing of Black and Indigenous folx and PoC? Was 2019 not last week, a few sleepless nights away? When was it, that my home went from a mundane reality to an uncanny fact of life? When did today stop being tomorrow? Being Brown, a grad student, queer, enby, femme, it's always timeless, but now, time is the chokehold of staying still and propelling simultaneously. I am me tomorrow, yesterday, today. I am the construction to which I used to attribute time.*

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

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

As we did with the first volume of the issue, we begin this volume 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. But this time, we are postCOVID<sup>1</sup>, writing from places of prolonged exhaustion, of slow death, and of an unwavering commitment to justice nonetheless soured by time – Beatrice's piece, reminds us that the state will always find a way to mutate or forget public interest in racial justice; that is *has* found a way to reify anti-Blackness and white supremacy– a global social currency so easily erased and consumed within and by our postCOVID imaginations and discourses; in our dystopia masquerading as futurity. Giovanni's piece, on the other hand, reckons time against the (now false, or perhaps, wavering?) promise and demand that inspired our issue, highlighting our simultaneous need and inability to dream of an otherwise, of a new tomorrow, so that our children, our future, will not drown in the death of today, of yesterday. And in a similar vein, my piece is the words of someone who fears the relevance and futurity of our authors' visions will be immediately archived in a world defined by the white settler's fantasy of linear progress and development, of endless productivity and loss.

Unlike with our first volume, these epigraphs are not intended to mirror the exhaustion and resiliency pulsating throughout the pages to follow. On the contrary, they are meant to highlight the gap between the cultural urgency and intensity that had only a year and a half ago brought the pieces of our latest issue, *Becoming (Un)Productive: Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life*, forward, and the dying hum of performative activism and COVID-19 CareMongering in which the second volume of the issue has now emerged. Both this volume and the issue writ

large has become a falsity in time, a thing conceived both decades and moments before it was brought into existence – a constellation of art and vision intended to declare that racial justice and COVID and all the social abuses we cared so deeply about this time last year, are not over.

We continue to imagine, dream, and hope for an otherwise, for a world beyond productivity and death, but now, we lace that vision with an exhaustion that we intentionally gift you, the reader, with, wrapped in a reminder that the death, toxic productivity, and state sanction killing that inspired our second issue, in both incantations, is still alive, rampant, and in need of extinction and transformation. Time may be a construct, but something still has to give. Too tired to think of an otherwise is a chronic battle for tomorrow, and being just.so.drained is violence.

With that, I will introduce the pieces of the second volume of our second issue, hoping that you carry forth our refusal to arrest these words in time and, like us, refuse to pretend that shit is okay now, because it is not – as the authors, artists, and creatives of the volume will remind you. Akin to part one, the second iteration of *Becoming (Un)Productive: Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life* is broken into three parts, once again organized by one overarching theme. However, this time, each theme (or section) contains three to four pieces, with a book review at the end. The three themes are: *Academic Outsider*, *Artologies*, and *Dear Academia*. The first theme, inspired by Audre Lorde's formation *the sister outsider*, denotes those of us, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour (BIWOC), who, as a result of letting our embodied belief in social justice guide our work, are at once inside and outside academia – a place the purports to advocate for social change but, in reality, merely uses it as a

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<sup>1</sup> As before, 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>

brand to guise its obsession with whiteness and wealth. The scholars of this section, all Black and Brown women, are academics in the ways we yearn for, not in the ways we typically confront, and are thus outside the traditional bounds of academia, both in the literal sense of being excluded from it but also in the figurative sense of being beyond it; better than it; they are the promise, not the lie.

The section begins with the featured piece of the volume: “Pandemagogy and Online Teaching: A Case for Online Teaching”. Composed by scholar-educator Shehnoor Khurram, this reflection essay, peppered with screen shots of real online communications between educators and students, is a testament to a reality known to many teacher’s assistants who have struggled, since March 2020, to effectively teach online in a world where internet access and education are as inequitable as health care and vaccine distributions have proven to be. Written with the same sincerity and dedication Khurram illustrates in her commitment to teaching amongst a global health pandemic defined both by digital learning and profound injustice, *Pandemagogy and Online Teaching* is a relatable, striking, and intelligent exploration of how pandemics contort and mutate our commitment to critical pedagogy into something else, into pandemagogy.

The second piece under *Academic Outsider* is a reflection piece by emergent scholar Natalie Stravens, entitled “The Memeification of Black Women’s Trauma”. Here, Stravens reminds us of the power of extending academic critique beyond “traditional” data sources and exploring the political meaning and impact of social media on our everyday lives. Specifically, Stravens examines how online discourses casually promote, or “memeify”, the pain of Black femmes and non-binary people and the irony and hypocrisy of this fact in the wake of the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement – a movement generally mobilized by Black women/femmes/enbys. A brilliant exploration of how misogynoir has come to plague the online sphere the same way it defines the material

world, and the subsequent ways Black feminists fight back, online and in person, this reflection essay is unrivaled in its cleverness and insight.

The last piece of the section is a thoughtful, honest, and methodologically impressive reflection essay entitled “‘Say Their Names’: Uncovering A ‘Good Story’ Among Protestors”, which is written by scholar and local community organizer Melissa P. McLetchie. In this essay, McLetchie draws on her firsthand experience of a prisoner rights protest in Lyndsay, Ontario, using the grace and wisdom only possible for academics who are genuinely connected and committed to the issue at hand, to explore Dr Katherine Bischooping and Dr Amber Gazso’s notion of a “good story” within the activist scene (from their book *Analyzing Talk*). A blend of narrative and analysis itself, *Say Their Names* is both a powerful testament and an intriguing examination of the power of storytelling within academic analysis and critique.

The next section of our second volume is entitled *Arology*. The pieces under this theme all show the diverse critical and analytical power of art, whether by showcasing the raw political energy of poetry, exploring the affective resonance of fiction, or highlighting the sociological prowess of modern sitcoms. Piece one, entitled “My Life Matters: The Cost of Being a Black Youth”, is a poem by scholar-creative Fiona Edwards. Detailing the complicated reality of being Black and young, abject and hopeful, haunted and wonderful, Edward explores what it means for Black youth to live and evolve in a world (still) defined by whiteness and anti-Black racism. Following this, is a reflection essay by emergent scholar Celia Ringstrom, entitled “For the Insane in the Insane World”. A blend of cultural critique and narrative, Ringstrom engages in an auto-ethnographic analysis of their mental health experiences under COVID-19 and pre-existing biomedical ontologies through a reading of *My Brilliant Friend* (and the associated quadrilogy). Most striking, is her use of the novel, disability theory, and the newfound chaos of COVID-19 to reframe time as circular – perpetually nourishing

and always evolving and forever complicated – and, in so doing, provides a brilliant critique of our racial-ableist capitalist society that demands linear productivity and the forward marching of time in service of the settler’s fantasy.

The last piece of the section is a reflection essay entitled “In Defence of #blackAF’s Celebration of Mediocrity”, which is written by writer and independent researcher Aharon Joseph. Most impressive about this piece, is not only Joseph’s welcomed refusal to fall into the academic trap of “critiquing for critique’s sake” but his concerted ability to go beyond the tired eyes of academia and engage Kenya Barris’ Netflix series #blackAF outside woke culture. Specifically, Joseph draws out the either seemingly buried or willfully ignored critical potential of the show to expose the hashtags #blackexcellence and #supporteverythingblack for what they are: ideological blankets masking the unfortunate reality of Black life under late western modernity. Framed and decorated in philosophical references, clever metaphors, and strong critical analysis, this essay adopts a well-formed and cleverly jargonistic academic frame to explore something “established” academics would self-righteously dismiss as meaningless pop culture and, as a result, truly embraces the name of the section in which it appears: *Artology*.

The last section of the issue is called *Dear Academia*, and, keeping in line with our anti-academic yet still academic approach, this theme is a nod to the Netflix show *Dear White People*, whereby “White People” is replaced with “Academia” to illustrate the intimacies between the two. This section, unlike the other two, is united by tension, bringing the raw poetry of two non-white femmes and the political reflections of two white researchers together in diametrical juxtaposition. The first piece of the section is a reflection essay by scholar Amber-Lee Varadi, entitled “a collective grievance, a collective acquiescence: Rememberings and hauntings in our pandemic of racialized violence”. In this piece, Varadi explores how our present world is

haunted by an insidious past of anti-Black racism and settler colonialism but, instead of posing these insights as novel, uses them to critically invite other white academics to engage the presence of racial haunting within academia and the meaning of “allyship”. Following this, is a short but powerful poem by scholar-creative Kwene Appah, entitled “so Black, so Angry”. This poem is a visceral incantation of the realities facing Black women within white academia; within western society; within cis-heteronormative and androcentric Black spaces; within a world that, even post-2020 and, as previously described, the public’s heightened (and now discarded) interest in Black Lives Matter, demands their silence, death, and literal and symbolic erasure.

The next piece under *Dear Academia* is a reflective essay entitled “Reflections on Conducting Community-Engaged Research during COVID-19”, by emergent scholar Peter Duker. Drawing on his own Master’s research on (international) community-engaged scholarship, which he conducts as both a privileged white man and a disenfranchised graduate student, Duker illustrates how COVID-19 has underscored the importance of researchers to check ourselves. In his thoughtful evaluation of his need to reconceptualize time, re-evaluate his project, and embrace flexibility and accountability, Duker at once exposes the institutional abuse of universities towards graduate students as well as the need for the more privileged of us, such as white men like himself, to advocate more than ever on behalf of research participants.

We conclude the section and the issue with a poem by emergent scholar and poet Gloria Park, entitled “Affections and Afflictions with You”. This piece is an emotionally honest and raw engagement of how white beauty standards and interpretations of worth affect Asian women’s sense of love, belonging, and becoming, highlighting the genuine intimacies of white supremacy on the soul, mind, and body, thus revealing it for the plague that it is. Taken together, the pieces of this section remind us that

white scholars should take on the work of calling out (*not* in) their white peers, and to amplify racialized and Indigenous voices, while we all most do the work of never letting white voices speak louder than the raw insight, pain, beauty, and talent of BIPOC: those most impacted by and committed against racial injustice. Then, to wrap up the volume/issue, we have our first ever book review, a two-page engagement with the book *Dealing in Desire* written by emergent scholar Patara McKeen, whose obvious love of the book is only matched by his commitment to write a thoughtful and enticing review of it for our journal.

As stated in the last volume, and in an intentional effort to be redundant – both to hammer the pulse and continued relevancy of our whole issue home and to save us some labour – we declare once more: 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 *Becoming (Un)Productive*. This issue was a labour of love in the truest sense of the phrase, and we could not be more thankful for and proud of our contributors: thankful for their contributions, proud of their survival (and/or lack thereof). These stories are a 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 – again, still – fuck you, productivity, fuck you, racial capitalism, fuck you, academia*, we'd rather keep resting, surviving, creating, and simply existing. We *have* continued resting, surviving, creating, and existing.

We would like to thank the authors, creatives, and dreamers who contributed to the volume. 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. As always, we especially acknowledge Audrey Tokiwa for her unconditional support. Finally, we would like to thank Erika Mulder for designing the two poem proofs and the cover of the issue and Brittany Myburgh for not only designing the remaining nine proofs but once again for being a pillar in a chaotic and ever-changing time. Thank you to all the people who make this journal a possibility and believe in the power of critical praxis; in the power of Femme, Queer, and Trans/Black, Indigenous and People of colour students and creatives.

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.

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