



Re: bare time

Sohrab Mohebbi

Tue, Apr 14, 2020 at 12:27 PM

From: **Alex Reynolds**

Date: Tue, Apr 14, 2020 at 12:27 PM

Subject: bare time

To: Sohrab

Hey,

So, here goes. First of all I was thinking about what you said, that for someone with PTSD the current situation might feel closer to 'normal' than the one that preceded it... And then I thought, how long does it take for an exceptional situation to turn into normality?

One thing that surprised me about these past weeks was the scramble to make life as we know it continue as usual, to fill it up again. The day after school closed, we got an email asking for our plans to teach online. It took one day! And many of the teachers replied with plans and ideas. I finally wrote to say I had no fucking plans or ideas, that I didn't know how teaching something based on presence like performance would translate online, that I was busy understanding where we'd all landed and trying to take care of friends and family, like everyone else I guess. And that I didn't understand the rush. Isn't an art school a good place to sit and think critically, act differently? Sure, life goes on, but maybe it can go on differently and after we can check where our feet landed?

I've seen a rush of artists offering their films online for free –for one week only!–, art centres asking me if I'd do the same, exhibitions posting more and more content, opening up their archives, doing virtual shows... Is the idea to fill up the time? To stay as visible as possible? If you can't come to me I'll come to you? And then zoom parties, online dinners, apps to watch films together at a distance... So yeah, I guess you're right, no one can stand the empty day ahead of them. What's surprising to me is that many artists and institutions are as much a part of that as anyone else.

With all this overload I wonder if it's actually bare time for that many people. But it definitely opens up the possibility or the question of a life closer to it. I think it could open up something closer to the body, to listening to the body. There's such a pleasure to just waking up when your body wants to. Part of me wonders if the west hasn't reacted so late to this whole thing because of its relationship to the body.

I was also thinking that if everyone is an artist now it is not only because of having to invent our lives, but also because of precarity. And there was something I didn't find in the text, though maybe it just belongs elsewhere, and it's what artists do together. Decades of living in precarious conditions have made a lot of the people around me resilient to it, but also look for solutions, setting up experiments and support groups. I'm thinking of the common wallet project, for example. Many of the people in it have had all their gigs cancelled, but those with a monthly wage can keep the rest afloat. My friends and I have the emergency fund we set up in these past years. My housemate has developed a relationship with a landlady whereby she'll offer to halve our rent. Adva, Kobe and others live alone but together with 10 or so others they've built a community with. I don't know that artists are better equipped, but I think many, or many I know, do have an ongoing awareness and attentiveness to one another's precariousness and vulnerability, and have been thinking about how to live together, how to support one another, for ages. I find it hard to think of the idea of leading a beautiful life that doesn't include others, and the virus has brought up so many tough questions in relation to that. My housemate has a close friend who has cancer, and is terminally ill. In order to protect her they're not seeing her, and the idea is to not see her at all until it's safe to do so, and this might take a while, so they're wondering if this is a life worth living.

So I was thinking, is it about what we can or cannot do, or about what we can or cannot do, cannot substitute, when you're not together? As we speak, the arts sector in Spain has called for a two day strike of cultural content online because the Minister of Culture called a press conference to say there will be no measures whatsoever to protect the cultural sector. He quoted Orson Welles (!): "Life comes first, then comes cinema", and all the press left the rest of the quote out of their headlines, which said "although life without film or culture is hardly worth living". But will a Spanish strike online work when we're all connected to the world wide web? Will anyone even notice that dropout?

Yesterday I sent my students a text by Anne Carson called "Every Exit is an Entrance". It's about one of my favourite activities, sleeping, but it resonated with your text, and with the discussions I'm having with Dora and Andrea for the Dropout Seminar. I liked the idea of inverting the dropout. And it's funny to think that if you drop out of 'normality' you drop into an artist's way of being, that that is the state of exception. The question with the seminar was what happens when the artist drops out, what do they drop into? Or are they extending their work into other areas, merely displacing it?

This is a recurring discussion I have with my friend Adva. She was doing pretty well with her work and at one point she lost interest in making it, in performing, in the world that surrounded it. She kind of lost interest in art altogether, and was mourning that. But she never lost interest in artists, and continued to think of herself as one, she always defends them and how they think and open up different spaces for thinking and acting differently, collectively. Since she stopped focusing on her artwork, she's engaged in other projects like the common wallet, bought a building together with other artists, made a school within the school she teaches in, which is run at a different pace, together with the students... I always tell her all of this is a continuation of her work, the same questions are there, it just has a different space. She started therapy and a couple of weeks ago she told me she'd started to let go of thinking of herself as an artist, and that it's a huge relief to think outside of it. I wanted to ask her what it changed, but I was too shellshocked with news from Spain, I could only listen. I'll ask her tomorrow. I will also send her your text.

I also think about this collective work because I think it's necessary to imagine something new. The protagonists in the films I mentioned the other day, *Wanda* and *Vagabond*, become drifters. In the former I think she doesn't yet know what she can be other than a mother or a wife, there aren't that many other roles available to her where she is, or she can't see them yet... in the latter the protagonist dips in and out of other people's life choices, unconvinced by any of them, and keeps walking. *Wanda* was made at the beginning of women's liberation movements, which took place mostly in cities, Varda's film was made soon afterwards, in the 80s. It's interesting in a way that you quote that book, *Females*, (which I haven't read, but that catchphrase), but that's a whole other box to open up. Anyway, I think this being adrift is what generates a sense of vertigo, but it's full of potential, and it feels like that's where we are now. I hope we don't just cover it up in a rush, and that we carry something of it when things go back to the other state of exception.

I think this email is now longer than your actual text and I've gone off in too many directions so I'll stop there.

Send me that movie! I'm sending [a song](#).

Besos,
A.