

MEL Y. CHEN AND TIM K. CHOY 

Corresponding in Time

Opening

The pandemic of COVID-19 and its relation to contagion would seem to call upon our identities as scholars who maintain research interests germane to these phenomena. In some way, to respond in a scholarly journal is directly in line with the habits of our disciplines and our situation as academic thinkers. What to do? To write. However, in these pages, in these words, are an exploration not only of the “quick and dirty”—let’s say, directly in-line—response to the pandemic—“writing about it”—applying our “analysis”—but of the feeling, and perhaps an argument for the ethic, of delay in response—responding out of time, responding too late—as well as the possibility of “never” responding in the ways our habitual work and the institutions it is attached to might demand.

Our response comprises a set of bundles, artifacts of many exchanges about the knotted demands of the moment, their paces, and the peculiar charge of them as they register in conjunction and disjunction on our skins and interiors. One challenge we would avow of the present moment, and would speak from, is that the words emerging from us as we correspond wear everything on their surface, or maybe turn us inside out. Or maybe the difference is becoming of no difference. Maybe this is appropriate to a COVID time when so many are hyper-conscious of a structural extimacy of breath.

One artifact of the way we worked together is that this piece is, for the most part, not citationally anchored in the traditional sense. This is a lack, and it was also what enabled us to get somewhere different with

each other. We are honestly relieved that against our own expectation, we've moved through vague feeling and given it form and some order, made emergent in correspondence (co-responding). Con- or co-forming. But we present this to you with some caveats: first, that we eventually came up with words should not invalidate the will away from words, from coherence, from fluent response, the fully palpable, common, and still felt by us, tearing of the will *away* from words. Some of our writing is will, some capacity, some stuckness, it is so many things. Our own tearing into words—insideoutness, exposure—approached the rawness/incoherence of the moment with a kind of rawness/incoherence of our own. We wish to resist the performance of mastery as an ideal for such a published format.

1) Quick and dirty

Who are we? We are two people who, in scholarship and life, have been drawn in different ways into air and sensitivity to the airborne for some time—**Tim** was drawn into air since 1999 via the sensitivities of a partner, **Mel** was drawn into air via chemical sensitivities since 2008 (despite lifelong asthma). Much of what we have written has been in response to those pulls. We have wrestled with issues of sensitivity, attunement, what it is to dwell and move in explicit negotiations with surrounds. We have posed questions of how atmospheric qualities or properties might inform or shape conditions for political action or thought. And we have tried to explicate the force and form of toxic and atmospheric animacies.

And now. We find ourselves, already, amidst a breathless proliferation of COVID/virus work. We feel it, we're in it, we live it. We feel compelled to respond because it is urgent. And we know we have things to say. And yet we are also aware that saying anything now, with its basis potentially on partial "data" or partial information that is all we have, is necessarily going to be a voicing of the "quick and dirty," using old habits of knowing to face this moment even as we feel our sensibilities are necessarily under transformation, and no less, taken by a novel mix of conviction and confusion that is nearly impossible to wield in the existing scripts of academic knowledge production, professionalism, and public service that continue to surround us and, for better and worse, support us. Indeed, we needed to ask: what *is* a proper response at this political moment, since COVID-19 is never just itself, but a phenomenon woven into fabrics of ongoing violence and dispossession? "More" scholarship, right on time? A turn away from the expected churning? Participate in emergent events and performances as reflexes of collective agitation? A realignment with forms of

protest ever more antithetical to the modern university? A quieting, a tending to the trauma of this time?

All this in addition to disturbing moments of recognition that existing scripts of the quick and dirty can be weaponized to ends that go directly against our convictions. We watch public health advisories being used against the Black Lives Matter protests (displacing early statements that the protests against inequity and racial violence indeed contribute to public health), pitching care and preservation against risk and theft. Not acting, sitting only in confusion, allows these perversions and cooptations to happen. There's an ongoing, ambient, already existing emergency. We recall what was already said by Black Lives Matter in 2014 here in the SF Bay Area during the shutdown of the Bay Bridge: the banner laid over the road, BLACK HEALTH MATTERS. Our necessary recognition is that these statements come already from dynamic, shared spaces of knowledge and conviction.

Public health advocates came out early to support the 2020 resurgence of Black Lives Matter, to say that structural racism is a threat to public health. In so doing, they came together with people in the movement to carve a meaningful and powerful space joining lay and expert knowledge: what people under threat knew so well, and field experts. They said, together: Protests are not the public health threat; antiblackness is the public health threat. (We think here of Christina Sharpe's account of the antiblack ambient.) That's a quick and dirty that, depending on how we value certain types of shared knowledge spaces, might qualify as either "dirty" or, in fact, much cleaner than that which is so tainted by colonial legacies of scientific and medical racism.

Airsick

Quick and dirty: COVID makes explicit an airy condition that has been true all along. We live and breathe in shared air space, we share a substrate that is a surround that is a medium, whereby our interiors are interior to each other. Here, that medium becomes a vector, which is not new, but also now new, for this disease has other vectors, including airplanes, that have helped make the perhaps unwanted atmospheric kinship one that is global. That's a very quick gloss, but it is getting elaborated as epidemiological tracing of carriers on flights, who inhale here, then exhale there. The planetary intimacy of the atmospheric envelope is replaced, or overlaid, by another planetary connection of a potentially shared condition: Of anxious, nervous breathing, explication of breaths, and vapors, attention to the airborne, to airflow in a room, sudden interest in HVAC systems, as well as the size of droplets, their capacities for suspension, their range.

Thus air thickens. It is not good or bad that it does so; we note it just to mark how air is now becoming explicit among more publics as an object of attention and mobilization. In its thickening, it becomes more available as medium for conceptualizing harm, scale, and proximity in the doing and thinking of politics.¹ In the process, COVID takes airborne danger from the domain of the externalizing plume, or off-gassing couch, and locates it in another person. This reenergizes some latent and disfavored habits, including the linking of Asian bodies to contagion, the turn from public spaces to households for safety. Yet, if articulated in an idiom other than purity, an explicit given condition of shared air might take us to something more like harm reduction. It is obviously futile to try to contain your airspace. How can you help someone else?

In the thickness of the air of contagion, protests for Black lives and thriving, after George Floyd's killing, layered another thickness of breath, yoked as they were to the visceral repetition, across seconds, places, and years, of different Black people's expression of their inability to breathe. They opened a moment of broad movement against White supremacy that has broadened further after the non-indictment of the officers who shot Breonna Taylor. The demand to mask to prevent COVID transmission while protesting initiated an unequivocal commoning, as the gathering of masked bodies activated a common condition and iconography that was related yet vastly different to the condition of not being able to breathe in White supremacist conditions. (Have some respect if you as a white person are going to cite, "I can't breathe.") These gatherings and movements have yielded a powerful image whose verbal explication will probably never be adequate. First, the optimism. "We're all in this together" (also said about COVID), "I can't breathe" was, for some, supposed to suggest the making of a shared condition of vulnerability. Then, the pessimism. When protesting in Oakland, **Mel** couldn't quite say "I can't breathe," feeling my nonidentity and differential racialization, differential privileges. Simultaneously, **Mel** was energized by unprecedentedly numerous sign carriers stating "Asians for Black Lives." Despite the inadequacy, or wrong feelingness of repeating the utterance, "I can't breathe," there was another repetition in the masks for COVID that marked for **Mel** an air relation that was orthogonal, or touching, the peril of air for Black people. Where Eric Garner said "I can't breathe" and was recognized by many as an asthmatic, with a chronicity shared by many asthmatics, George Floyd was asphyxiated in a short and terrible moment (this breathy delimitation is not to exclude, as some friends of Floyd have noted, the interminable slow-death forces that deprived him of the resources he should have had to thrive throughout his short life).

Thus, citing George Floyd's asphyxiation, the possibility of sharing suppression of access to air, did not feel appropriate to Mel, whose asthma may or may not be tied to questions of environmental injustice. For **Tim**, too, there's a danger of the gathering of all these politics of breath together, and also a sense that they are doing something to and for each other, when some people gather them. We could also tell the story about all those uncomplicated weekend warrior protesters who went home and, satisfied with their one-time performance, had a beer.

Now for the cautious optimism: Maybe this is also a kind of repeating, the masking requirements of COVID-19 are part of what *thickened breath for everyone*. Put another way, in the spaces of the marches, the thickening of breath became a thickening felt in common: not "just" a performance, maybe not "just" a reenactment either, but something in between. The marching among masks was bodily, and also maybe pedagogical—a partial connection between nonidentical modes of impaired breath and respiratory danger. The charge of the feel of the bodily citation of one, accompanied by the utterance of another.

Pandemic as excitement

As scholars and residents of Northern California, we find that the fire and smoke in the western regions of North America makes palpable the inadequacy of an analysis which exceptionalizes contagion through aerosols. By this, we mean something that includes air for analysis only to talk about contagion may in some way be broken. Rather than proposing an airy, *more* spacious mode of analysis, here we will shift from what we understand as a more expected roll-out from the images of our respective scholarship, and move toward an account that sits *beside* the airy account, starting with the foil of COVID-19's enveloping structuration of "pandemic." What is a pandemic? According to various definitions, it can be a disease that has occurred or spread worldwide, over a very wide area, crossing international borders, affecting a large population. Denoting that an epidemic has spread across countries, regions, it is an exercise in scaling, which is to say that it draws a qualitative line for degree of alarm. The pandemic is the disease that has spread across imagined borders, it is not isolable in place.

But it is clearly not a precise term. The term itself seems quite empty. Rather, it seems performative: its declaration is a judgement among contingencies and its use is pragmatic, which is to say that it does things. It enlivens networks of international governance. It can activate resources. We are reminded here of the term, Anthropocene, which seems to behave in similar ways. Furthermore, both pandemic and

anthropocene have resulted in mixed networks of optimism/pessimism, positivism/dissolution. That is to say, their use at an international level by no means guarantees a monolithic spread of scientific knowledge, medical infrastructural changes, and science-based behavior modification.

As a term of international governance, pandemic's use is *eventful*. It excites networks such that the organization and availability of resources is different after it is used. This is justified: After all, the disease is real and potentially grave. We note that we, and so many others, have and continue to feel alarm, terror, worry. But we feel resistance to being excited by it. We are suspicious of others being excited by it. Why? We remember that, in some contexts, it might be good to not be excited. In others it might be a great help.

To be excited by the pandemic is to be caught in a nervous system of trained, entrenched excitations. We are reminded here of Joe Masco's description of the affective machinery producing the U.S. nervous system around Cold War and nuclear annihilation. This same excitement, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, works in the imperial United States, to toxify the notion of China and enliven old cold war fears and antagonisms. The excitations are xenophobic and align around national insecurity in ways that alarm us as scholars and as human creatures. Not unrelatedly, masks's symbolic value as protection, as well as a sign of an upsurge in the activity of the welfare state, excites resistive, ableist masculinities. It is no less relevant that masks mess with whiteness. They might "feel," to both secular and fundamentalist white masculinities, like Muslim facial coverings, or like the effeminized East Asians whose ostensible mass vulnerabilities are marked by society-wide masking practices.

Instead of a disease that crosses borders, then, security's excitations are a pervasive condition, spatialized in the everyday. We think here of Priscilla Wald's work on literary cold war investments in immunity during late-20th century pandemics, Nayan Shah on racial formations of public health in San Francisco Chinatown, and Linda Nash on the mutual mappings of race, place, and disease.

The notion of excitement is not unrelated to questions of electricity. It was, after all, electrical storms of unprecedented length and breadth over Northern California that brought a round of three of the four most massive fires in history. Simultaneously, we note that the effectivity of the N95 filter is primarily due to an electrostatic charge as part of the filter operation. We think here of Karen Barad's work on electricity and transmaterialities, the alternative imaginings of electric potential.

2) Not Yet, Not New

We have managed to “do” the forms of analysis our training called for (along with a dose of proper learning from circles outside of academic habit). And yet, before we set off to do so, we found we were dragging our feet at the prospect, because something didn’t feel right. We were forced to wonder what forms of scholarship are right for this moment. Some of this depends on the prior question of how one characterizes this moment of pandemic excitements. Does it ask for a new synthesis of the environmental and medical humanities? Does it ask for work towards an abolitionist university? What is publishing built on, and what does it reproduce?

Part of our hesitation in response comes from feeling like we know too little. We feel humbled by the in-built unevenness in our expertise, which is carved by our itineraries through certain fields of institutionalized knowledge. Hesitation is justified. We are right now witnessing an explosion of amazing teachings from shared spaces of struggle for liberation. They feel wise. They have heft. Stepping back and learning and feeling takes time.

So part of our response, and what we think constitutes an appropriate response, is another repeating, rather than a claim of new insight. The pandemic is not a pandemic in a literal sense; it may have spread across national borders, but it is not in every person, and groups are differentially vulnerable to exposure and infection, as well as to ill effects when infected, along predictable lines of racialization, systemic poverty, caste, and more. COVID is a force multiplier for already existing structural racisms. This has been said, but we repeat it to say yes, that utterance also makes sense here, from this situation in our pockets of the university, within these formations where we work and study. Here, too, it needs to be said: this pandemic is both awful and not new.

Perhaps this is all to say that while we feel the press of the now, its temporalities and speeds encompass more than the trigger of rapid response. And perhaps this is also to avow some resentment of a call that can sound at once like a call to productivity, a call to innovate, a call to intellectual mastery—quickly, while the iron is hot.

In some ways, I (Mel) tell to myself and sometimes publicly, a certain disability history. I had a lot of cognitive problems growing up in reading, processing. The story I tell in my “brain fog” piece is that what I managed to say was deemed smart enough or racially appropriate enough (in a model minority sense) to make it through the educational system despite some serious issues of understanding. I am often called a theorist not because I am necessarily oriented as a theorist, but because of the way I feel I make sense of what I read or think about in

relation to things that are out there, books but also artifacts, sensory things. My scholarship is thus in a kind of recessed position vis-a-vis the traditional, normative way of doing scholarship. I don't know if that's a story of synthesis, or of the sensory. I often tell my students in my theory classes that I don't expect them to fully master the text, or understand the theory only in the most formal way; rather, sometimes the most useful way in, and one that I had to rely on historically, was "getting the feeling of the text."

When I (**Tim**) read and write, it feels like that. I feel a shape and movement in the words that I can get inside, shapes I can try elsewhere. I am not yet comfortable telling a disability history, but I sometimes wonder jokingly, how an aspect of my vision marks my thinking. I have a slight prism, a tiny drift in one eye, which makes words split if I don't work hard to focus; focus, in turn, tires my eyes so things drift or I feel sleepy. This makes reading an alternation between tight effortful focus and drifts into shapes and structures. The sensation is at once associative and dissociative. In my relaxed state, people and things can become diffuse so that I feel like I'm looking through or around them as much as at them. Seeing and feeling thoughts and things as shapes in the world, at my most self-critical I fear I'm drawing half-lidded analogies. Yet I also work comfortably in a generative drift where metaphor and material double and converge.

This means, to us, that we both have a particular ambivalence about the activity of scholarship as it relates to responding in time. If proper scholarship requires an enormous work of (citational and genealogical) excavation, we know already that we can't do it "in time" because of how we think and feel. In terms of proper scholarship, we are always belated. Being sensitive to different degrees of ability and capacitation, we believe that there needs to be a proper "drag" on the normative progression of majoritarian streams of knowledge.

Our examples above, and living their consequences, are just two instances (not aspiring to be representative) of what disabled people, Samuels and Kafer have called/theorized "crip time" which cannot be clearly separated from what Leroy Moore calls "POC time" or "queer time." Debilities and disabilities come so often with being in delay. Being in delay points us to the forms of being and living inhabiting delay, or the disjunction of temporalities and demands. The not yet orients us, or frames us in the expected, or the waited for. Accommodating precarity takes time. There are the forms of economic precarity that attach to people with disabilities, given that in modern economies disabilities directly represent, almost by definition, a cut to productivity; disabilities are pressed with, consequently, the need to hurry and the impossibility of hurrying when well trod paths are

unavailable in the architecture of an economy built without you in mind. Mental health constitutes its own delay, as an aspect of economic reorganization (long time/lag effect/delay), the US administration and policy; accumulation of crises with short and long duree. Mental health, too, has been one of the most significant costs of the management of COVID-19 in the US. Piling upon these forms of disability and debilitation are the stresses of loss, and to many, the impossibilities of catching up to capital.

If we add the above kinds of fog/focus to the “fog of war” — the dizzying array of violences at many scales such as the rise of fascisms, the potentiating of direct bodily violences, and the instabilities of democracy at the time of writing, among which the phenomena of COVID-19 are a fairly small part—then it becomes very hard to enact “proper” scholarship in the present moment.

“COVID Collateral” is one name we might call this array of all-too-patterned effects of distributed harm and precarity accompanying the movements and activities of the novel coronavirus. One version of collateral is the downstream violences of a pandemic handled as it has been in the US. The violences intensify with the loss of social structure, the comforts that are available from some forms of sociality, with the privatization of response coinciding with the withdrawal of the welfare state (this again is the not new). This resembles the collateral damage that was defined in the 1991 Gulf War as the launching of wanton attacks with the foreknowledge that they could cause “incidental” injury or loss of life to civilians. But there is also the sense of collateral that refers to goods that are proffered in order to make “good” a debt or a deal, where the debt cannot stand on its own. We think here of the disavowed indebtedness of the US nation state, or the neoliberal deferral of debt onto individual bodies—collateral as the extension of certain goods to strengthen a falsity, always potentially forfeited/discarded/sacrificed for it. Essential workers are COVID Collateral in this pandemic, renewable but dying bodies (literally disposable labor) that uphold the possibility of transaction. This is to say that collateral damages are not collateral (in the sense of unrelated, unintentional, not targeted) at all. Essential workers help us see this most clearly maybe, but we also see this with the precarious student, the differentially vulnerable or (made) anxious, etc., the prison population, the institutionalized elderly. COVID is thus not new, but is an intensifier. Like tear gas, it is a “force multiplier,” giving weaponized conditions of everyday life “the ability to accomplish greater feats than without it.” Finally, the “alongside” sense, co-lateral, helps us think about the simultaneity, the copresence, of multiple forms of strain on well being that we see today, strains on the possibility not only for life but for thriving such that

COVID-19 became, for so many, not a first or unprecedented emergency (as if that scale mattered) but, rather, “the last straw.”

Endless Frontier

On May 27, 2020, US Senators Charles Schumer and Todd Young and US Congress person Ro Khanna announced the Endless Frontier Act, with the aim to fuel US scientific innovation in a way that out-competes other national efforts. Co-lateral: we see the Endless Frontier Act as in a mutual excitation with the COVID-19 pandemic. They are not the same and yet they are impossible to segregate, since the Act emerged in the global flourishing of COVID-19 with Wuhan as its presumptive origin point, and amidst a decade-long economic competition now spiking opportunistically between the United States and China. In the text of the Act, the terms of competition are not implicit but baldly laid out. As they write: “China and others are stealing American intellectual property and aggressively investing in research and commercialization to dominate the known technology fields of the future. Together we emphasize that without a significant and sustained increase in investment in research, education and training, technology transfer and entrepreneurship, manufacturing, and the broader U.S. innovation ecosystem across the nation, it is only a matter of time before America’s global competitors overtake the U.S. in terms of technological primacy.” Note that the title of the Act suggests the endlessness of a battle for primacy, a technoscientific frontier, or perhaps the permanence of state support; the notion of a frontier (suggesting both coloniality and the inheritance of settler science), and cold war (selectively anti-China) sentiment in the “race” for science and technology. Pitched as defense and security.

What better illustration of how not-new the time of COVID Collateral can be, even when announced as novel? If the idea of a frontier characterizes a novel edge of the growing terrain, it does so by erasing the grounds and claims and belongings and peoplings over which it exercises or marks itself. Akin to *terra nullius*, Endless Frontier’s logic legitimates expansion claiming “owned by no one” while presuming ownership is within its province (rather than a public, a commons, for all). Predictably, against the commoning excitation against Black Lives Matter—which is also an urgent and ongoing claim for the possibility of Black publics in a space whose White ownership is tended to and defended by police—there is a push toward the privatization, a re-muscling of an enclosure machinery.

Endlessness conjures a never-ending, a futurity of horizon, always opening, where horizon is equated with settling, colonization. This is

endlessness not as fatigue, but as something like infinite potential for expansion—and, simultaneously, the anxious repetition of moves to establish and maintain white ownership over spaces not even knowable yet. (We note that this is of a piece with fantasies of Mars colonization.)²

The name is apt, it presents itself now, in the context of COVID, but it is also riding along the excitations around China. Here, anti-China sentiment is mobilized for the protection of proprietary science.³ Trump himself is leading a narrowing and intensification of anti-Chinese discourse (simultaneous to COVID's own intensifications, force multiplications).

Such shapes that science is taking in the pandemic; they figure repeatedly in time and coloniality. We're not yet in a fully retrospective mode for understanding how science works, has worked, in the time of the pandemic. But the Endless Frontier Act gives us some sense of the role that science is playing, or the shapes scientific research is already being folded into, when it is not being rejected outright.⁴

Pandemic may be an empty signifier, but it unleashes certain excitations. Some of them are around the organization of science, intensification of certain forms of science, which go directly against the differential vulnerabilities that have been marked by activists. Endless Frontier marks a brazen rush for property, a rush to propertize, in a race.

3) Never

There is another “not yet” that is already known well to many. It has to do with the unfulfilled promise to Black lives, most widespread in citation in liberal white supremacy's civil rights-era mundanely deferrable commitments to racial justice. It is palpable now, in the baldly obvious trickle-down image of profit-making vaccine distribution, and also in the fact that vaccines are presented as justice rather than a comprehensive correction of the systemic environmental, medical, and public health racisms that form the fabric of impossibility for Black people. In other words, the promise of “not yet” turns out to be a promise that can never be fulfilled. That's not a doomsday prediction. We think here of Sylvia Wynter's work on the formation of a particular form of humanism which became an inevitability under racial capitalism. A weighted genealogy of Western ontologies and epistemologies meant that colonized peoples were foundationally, not exceptionally, expelled from humanity, so that any new developments of rights or equity today were still contestable when it came to Black lives.

Furthermore, the space of the neutral and the delay it engenders are focused only on what can be done, pragmatically, in the now. In its context, we watch endless deferrals of justice. . . abolition, decolonization, that only see in their latest animation in the COVID-19 pandemic and all its tendrils.

More broadly, the “not yet” that was the promise of incrementalist liberal white politics (that which faced civil rights and turned away from radical Black liberation, for instance) has quickly been overturned by outright fascist energies that do in fact say never. They not only say “never,” but “execute” never by accelerating slow death and augmenting the possibility of killing not only inside governmental systems of justice, but also beyond them. That is, the fascist energies engender the forms of death that become our grief; and if we allow ourselves to believe them, our melancholy as well. What we are left feeling, and needing to objectify if we are to “work,” is the digging in of an anticipatory melancholy, an expectation of losses (stuck in time).

If a delay is like what happens when you say never, but are nonetheless compelled, moved to move somewhere, somehow, then maybe never also marks the “otherwise” temporality of the impossible.

We are wanting a more capacious imagination for what can be done. We commit, in ways however small, to interrupting the ongoing alignments of war, Endless Frontiers, perpetual extensions of settler foundations. We are aware that universities are often friends to war, to biopolitical formations such as eugenics, to fascism, and, most certainly, to the terminal logics of neoliberalism. We refuse the ongoing alignments of university-war, whose productions of knowledge are far from neutral yet appear to be the neutral grounds for action, discourse, analysis. (Here we draw from critical university studies, the abolitionist university.)

Hence, “never” as refusal of such things. We find “never” in the streets, where Black Lives Matter protests equally pronounce “Never,” or “never again,” to police as the active embodiments of fascist energies.

We ask to re-encounter different forms of writing:

Writing whose aim is to strengthen existing “fields of study” as vs.

When will it be time, at least for some of us, to turn away from these consolidated fields, whether or not they are “interdisciplinary”?

(may be worth thinking about “collapse” - my colleague abigail de kosnik is writing about this and feels that it is basically happening)

Collapse challenges maintenance: what is writing through collapse?

Grumpy writing: "I don't want to do this" vs "I want to explore my reluctance to do this"

Whether or not we are talking to the melancholy, there's a pressure for any of our material to be usable. Useful. Melancholy can be made usable. But it's also a point of resistance to the usable. Melancholy is also what it feels like to be unuseful. Even if it is from or after a refusal. We have Sara Ahmed in mind when we think about the diversity gears turning now, and we are resisting those that churn usability out of adversity. What writings become useful, and what writings can do something not for usefulness or reproduction of the self or the same. Can writing be a form of tending?

This is one form of refusal: elaboration of the melancholic condition, and what we want to write toward.

....

It may no longer be apparent, but in searching for approaches to this project on COVID-19 and the tangle it represents, our account of which is in these pages, we called centrally on melancholy; it has taken different lives in the writing, it was the soul of Never. Now we offer it to you as invitation. As we waver between grief, mourning, and permanent loss, we still search for reflections in others, and perhaps ways to move through what feels insurmountable but must not remain so. We began this project at a loss. In corresponding, the tone and stance has shifted in such a way to describe somewhat more structural mappings of temporal relations rather than what we take to be feelings. This shift is not a departure from melancholy, but another way of inhabiting it. Not a working through, but a working in.

NOTES

1. Chloe Ahmann talks about air's materialities and affordances (its circulation and pliability) as being part of what enables for different actors the contractions or expansions of a problem space in Baltimore, including inclusion and exclusion from community or authority. Atmospheric pliability is not necessarily good or bad, but a generative constraint lent via the medium of atmospheric politics.

2. While we note a particular density of the mess that is unique to US apprehensions of COVID-19 that explains our disproportionate attention to this location, we are aware of COVID-19's transnational reach, and obviously of the role of international politics in COVID's character of emergence in the United States. There is also a hard piece around US liberal indictments of

China-bashing: a particular non-overlap between what is progressive in the United States and what is progressive in, say, Hong Kong. The calling out of the cold war logic of anti-communism, itself sometimes married to a leftist critique of capitalism or sense of itself as anti-capitalist and hence irritated by anti-communist rhetoric, is not itself adequate for talking about the Chinese Communist Party as a not simply a “communist” foil for the United States, but also itself an aggressive and invasive state. While this doesn’t make us want to defend the Endless Frontier Act in any way, shape or form, we feel the bind and have a particularly strong motivation to gainsay the broad excitations of US–China tensions, over and above any reaction to newly awakened anti-Asian racisms in the United States. The particular history of Asian Americans in the United States has yielded weird reverberations by which attention to another national government incites domestic racism. Our complex entanglements and identifications put us in the position of greatly appreciating, and explicitly valuing, delay as method.

3. The language in the Endless Frontier Act by which China is “stealing American intellectual property” is, we could say, rich, when the public response to a pandemic should rather be shared, in common, accessible. For instance, in the vaccine legal agreements that accompany US funding of vaccine development, the United States, as an owner, has the capacity to demand that the cost be a minuscule amount. Yet, the manufacturers have mostly committed to pricing vaccines according to rules of profitmaking.

4. The phrasing “increased investments in the discovery, creation, and commercialization of technology” looks a lot like many university appeals during this pandemic year of 2020 to increased funding for “COVID-related research”—an ambiguous phrase to be sure—as well as its self-marketing. This is an alignment, a co-excitation that might as well have some contradictory hostilities or competitive energies against China.