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13 ways of looking at lockdown

Abstract:

The extremities of a state of pandemic lockdown intensify, through physical and emotional constraints, an aesthetic of perceptual experience involving the senses, or sense perception. Part of this pandemic perception requires living “with uncertainty, [...] which involves living with the [cognitive] dissonance” (Aronson & Tavis, 2020). So many artists found sensuous aesthetics to live with these dissonances (Sarasso et al., 2021), such as street performances while emptying the bins, or orchestra members performing via Zoom (managing transition delays to suggest harmonies across isolations). Wallace Stevens enlarges an aesthetic of the sensuous through a non-mimetic form of practice, what he terms “the phenomena of perception”. The phenomena which illustrate the pressures of imagination and reality infuse Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” the model and catalyst for this poetic suite on lockdown. This suite is rhizomatic, exploring Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) “rhizome [which] has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo”(27). The intention is to map a mass of roots, avoiding a structural tree system (beginning, middle and end) which suggests binaries or dualities. This rhizomatic presentation of extreme moments of “being between” presents an array of mappings or tracings, “migrations into new conceptual territories resulting from unpredictable juxtapositions” (Berry & Siegal, n.d.).

Biographical note:

Karen Le Rossignol is a Senior Lecturer in creative writing, editing, publishing and freelancing skills in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University, Australia. Her interdisciplinary applied research across narrative and digital storytelling focuses on creative nonfiction perspectives and perceptions in the development of empathy.

Keywords:

Pandemic perceptions, rhizomatic mappings, extremity of lockdown

I

Solitaire, for playing in isolation:

Shuffle,
play out the cards
in patterns replicated till complete.
Restart.

II

A builder's screeching saw,
a staple gun that thumps,
and raucous voices
 drifting across fences
reduce eerily.

III

Emptying supermarkets
jostling elbows
full-packed trolleys
 survival prepping pantry.
Next lockdown: repeat.

IV

People meet in little boxes
across a zoom computer screen,
muted till released.

V

I smile but no one can see
beyond my home-made mask.

VI

I make cakes
from neighbours' limes
left dangling
on my fence
in plastic bags.
The freezer fills.

VII

A virtual coffee catchup is
a cluttered desk or table,
background figures blurred,

too-close, shadowed faces
...frozen...

VIII

In our island home,
threatened by what comes from over there
we tightly hug our coastlines to ourselves.

IX

Garden loam is damp and rich
with wormy compost
ready for randomly selected seeds,
grabbed to ward off shopping trips.

Two months on, there's triffid-like
dark stalks, strong glossy leaves.
The vegetables grow too fast
to pick and cook.
Most go in the compost.

X

The sky is high
and blue
today I see;
and free
for eyes and mind
to drink in
openly.

XI

In the park
the multitudinous dogs, no masks,
lick faces, sniff bums, cavort

XII

Spring flowers peep out,
perfume the isolation,
start the itch.
With illicit picnics on the green
the masks are edging down and off.

XIII

On the island,
the perpetual tumbling ebb and flow of sea waves

beats at the obdurate rocks,
eats into the beach,
spits out sand along the coast.

The patterns incrementally repeat,
in/out
back/forth
push/pull
reshaping shorelines.

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