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Letter from the Editor: Fall 2020

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Letter from the Editor: Fall 2020

Amanda Pullum

“You can gauge my love by how much food I’m willing to share,” says the hand-sketched pigeon on my wall. I bought this picture at a street market in New York, between sessions of the American Sociological Association’s annual meeting. It was the sort of market we should probably not be holding right now, and the sort of conference that would today be cancelled.

It is Monday, March 9, 2020. I think about the pigeon as I email my journal kids: the student editorial board of Culture, Society, and Praxis, who are neither “mine” nor “kids.” I tell them that I will not be baking the weekly batch of cookies I share with friends, colleagues, students. We are social scientists; we know that in normal times, sharing food strengthens our relationships with others. But right now, I love them too much to bake for them. Have a cookie recipe and a cute animal video instead; it is the best I can do.

Tuesday, March 10. My normally cheerful student is worried about her research and volunteer project at a senior center, where services are rapidly being cut to keep the elders safe. You have data, I assure her; your research will be fine. Let’s talk about the people you serve. Her goal, after all, is reducing the loneliness that many seniors feel. Phone interviews might add something to her analysis, but they also provide human connection in a time of social distancing. She leaves my office hesitantly, without our usual hug, and then stops in the door. “Long distance hug!” she says. I open my arms, she does the same, and we embrace ghosts of each other from six feet apart.

I think of Putnam, all of us bowling alone, of fearmongers who claim that technology will lead us to isolation. Now, we speak of the same technology as though it will save us. I worry for the students who have cried in my office and my classrooms as they described their anxiety, their depression, their burnout. Technology cannot replace human interaction, and yet it may yet be a lifeline. Have a call, an email, a nice Zoom meeting instead; it is the best I can do.

In ordinary times, there are two ways a student can publish in *Culture, Society, and Praxis*. In the more traditional publication model, the author or artist submits work for double-blinded peer review. However, students at CSU Monterey Bay also have the opportunity to take an Academic Publishing course, in which we spend the semester workshopping and revising papers for publication. In my biased opinion as the instructor of this class, I think it is both a rigorous and joyful experience. We work hard, have fun, and--in pre-covid times--eat cookies.

Now, of course, some things are different. Our publication process is the

same, though most students hone their submissions through the Academic Publishing course. The course is still rigorous and joyful. Our weekly Zoom calls have become “academic therapy,” as my students put it: a place where they can connect, vent, and relax for a few minutes before we get down to the business of reviewing and revising their papers. I can’t bring cookies, but we still spend plenty of time discussing food. Students’ children, siblings, and pets eventually show up; we’ve even found a home for a feral kitten this semester. Our writing is important, but so is our community.

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Culture, Society, and Praxis

This was the inspiration for the theme of our Fall 2020 issue: “Together, Apart.” The articles in this issue, though they were all written before or very early in the pandemic, speak to ideas about place and distance, difference and togetherness.

We begin with Alicia Cabral’s work on female miners in rural Spain. Cabral describes her difficulty in overcoming the male-dominated history of mining as she sought out women to participate in her research, analyzing the effects of gender roles on whose voices were deemed worthy of being heard. Next, Raquel Urquizo examines the formation of friendship networks through online gaming, arguing that multiplayer games can benefit players by promoting relationships that extend beyond the game.

Our third article, by Baard Pettersen, compares and contrasts the ancient Norse and Egyptian civilizations. Pettersen focuses on

the physical landscape to explain differences in the two civilizations’ development. Finally, Ethan Quaranta and Gerhard Gross use GIS technology to study ambulance service and hospital access for nursing homes in the Monterey Bay area, highlighting shortcomings that could leave vulnerable elderly populations at even greater risk during the pandemic.

I began this letter with words I wrote in early March 2020, just before our campus closed. Those words still feel true today. I am profoundly grateful that the CSU system is dedicated to keeping our communities safe, and my heart hurts for the many, many students who are coping with enormous struggles. While we must be physically separate, our connections to one another become even more important.