

Affirmative Ethics in the COVID-19 Moment: Perplexities, Paradoxes, and Surprises

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Abstract

Posthumanism locates, progresses, and asserts knowledge in the openings for interconnection. In this article, we undertake a collective biography using an interconnected arts-based practice that affords us complex relations with each other and material ways of thinking and being together. With a shared interest in posthuman theory and memory work, the authors connected online from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa to address the question: What can we learn about the perplexities, paradoxes, surprises, and frustrations associated with our academic work during COVID-19? Using an arts-based methodology and a cartographic analytical approach for our critical posthuman research, our assemblage charted the power relations operating in and immanent to the construction and circulation of academic knowledge during COVID-19.

Keywords: Affirmative ethics, assemblage, vital materialism, memory work, arts-based research, collective biography

Introduction

Writing at a time of physical and social isolation associated with the global pandemic, entangled poetic memory work provided the authors with a way to work and care for each other despite lockdowns and university campus closures. In this article we address the question: What can we learn about the perplexities, paradoxes, surprises, and frustrations associated with our academic work during COVID-19? As part of our (pre-COVID-19) university work, the authors individually accepted an invitation from an academic at the University of Maynooth, Ireland, to attend a workshop titled, *Collective Memory Work*. We came together online in March/April 2020 when the effects of COVID-19 were starting to be felt and lockdowns were being implemented in our respective countries of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

In our workshop groups, we engaged in a collective biography and a creative poetic endeavour with the purpose to examine affective flows in assemblages that make up academic work (Davies & Gannon, 2006). Assemblages, simply put, are natural or contrived groupings. Operating within these groupings are “processes whereby individuals, groups and societies are constituted and reconstituted and heterogeneous human and non-human elements interrelate via unexpected and productive connections” (Mayes, 2016, p. 107). In the context of this paper, the processes of our assemblage involved the shared analysis of a set of individual memories. The approach was pioneered by German socialist-feminist sociologist and philosopher, Frigga Haug (1987), who developed the approach with her colleagues. Memory work, and collective biography, in particular, have been used to address “incurable melancholia” which according to Braidotti (2011a) and Charteris et al. (2017) can emerge from constitutive frameworks of subjectivity associated with normative subject positions within the neoliberal university (p. 19). We felt that this approach was justified given the melancholia that many academics, including the authors, experienced during COVID-19 because of the forced isolation.

In this article, we describe the playful writing that was part of our collective memory work workshop, and our subsequent dialogue and analysis based in *affirmative ethics* (Braidotti, 2011a). Affirmative ethics is the freedom from relational negativity, but not necessarily pain. The affirmative ethics associated with our writing processes afforded us solidarity and affective support so that we could do the work of recognizing negative neoliberal threads and identify affirmative opportunities and new directions (lines of flight) for our academic work (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It enabled a collaborative approach to posthuman, complex, materialist thinking (Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2013).

Our data consists of two parts: accounts of our academic work during the COVID-19 moment reframed as poetry and transcripts of Zoom conversations/dialogues about our poems. Our hope is that this article invites readers to engage in collective memory work using a poetic cartography and an affirmative ethics, as we did, to reshape the nature of academic work and produce an assemblage of passionate scholarship and collegial care (Braidotti, 2020).

Affirmative Ethics and Vital Materialism

The affirmative ethics we propose extends relationalities between self and others (including the non-human), rejects an individualistic obsession with self, promotes an enlarged sense of community, and the “ability to grasp the freedom to depersonalize the event and transform its negative charge”, thereby putting “e-motion and the active back into activism...” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 144). Affirmative ethics, for us, provides a way to engage with and enact a theory of depersonalization as “liberatory practice” (hooks, 1991, p. 1).

In addressing the nature of academic work during COVID-19, we draw on posthuman knowledge, specifically, notions of affirmation and relational care, interspecies intersubjectivities, and ongoing critiques of the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in the university (Braidotti, 2019; Haraway, 2016; Taylor et al., 2021). There is transformative potential in Braidotti’s (2019) notion of “reworking” negativity to produce new knowledge and empowerment. This reworking allowed us to detach ourselves from the toxicity and anxiety associated with the individualistic corporatized pursuits of the neoliberal university (Braidotti, 2019a; Charteris et al., 2016). In a similar way, by talking and writing together, we were able to engage “the ugliness” of COVID-19, but detach

ourselves from the anxiety it was causing, and enable us to “act and not be squashed by it” (Braidotti, 2014, n.p.).

Collective biography and poetry making became the action to counteract “the ugliness” and through this action, we were able to celebrate our vital materiality. Vital materialism, which appreciates the liveliness and entanglement of more-than-human entities, enabled us to question human exceptionalism and the nature-culture binary, especially in the context of the COVID-19 virus. It enabled us to collapse the separation between humans and matter. Bennett (2010) writes that we can recognise the vital materiality of our own bodies and understand that they are never “fully or exclusively human” (p. 112). When we sat with vital materialism, we reframed the status of humans and acknowledged that non-human bodies were “actants rather than...objects” (Bennett, 2010, p. 10). This was significant as we considered the COVID-19 virus and the vaccine within us together with our work over Zoom, using computers and the internet. In our Zoom conversations, we also examined the materiality of our work/home spaces. We worked with these material-affective-corporeal entanglements as we performed our technology mediated memory work to write our accompanying texts and conducted embodied mapping through regular meetings.

Collaborative Poetic Memory Work

In March 2020, we each developed memory narratives in response to the prompt from the University of Maynooth, to think about and remember the perplexities, paradoxes, surprises, and frustrations associated with academic life in the COVID-19 moment. We used memory writing to story our experiences of working off-campus during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Hawkins et al., 2020). This structured methodological approach helped us to gain insight into the processes that sustained the social structures of the pandemic and its relations of power as we revisited our experiences (Hawkins et al., 2020). We hoped that our memory work would open up spaces for us to see and acknowledge the political workings in our personal lives as academics.

Our collective biography generated data that lead to a political, yet embodied and situated analysis. As we read our stories aloud to each other, we drew connections between the stories, the circulation of affect, our embodied struggles of living with lockdowns, and the pressures of working within the entrepreneurial university (Barnett, 2013). Our Zoom discussions were largely framed by the feminist writing of Rosi Braidotti (2019a; 2019b), Donna Haraway (2016), Elisabeth St. Pierre (2017), and Carol Taylor and Susanne Gannon (2018). We kept the Zoom recordings and transcriptions from each meeting and used them as data to extend our thinking and as a place to revisit ideas. We recrafted these stories in the context of our discussion then created poetry texts, which we describe as poetic memory work.

Our poetic memory work which consisted of the poems that were created individually were then shared in meetings. We leveraged an arts-based research process to deepen our collaborative inquiry into the poems (Pillay, Pithouse-Morgan & Naicker, 2017). Like Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2020), we created a virtual bricolage by combining memory work and found poetry. This was an embodied process that involved sharing imagery and reading aloud. It provided us with a way to engage with poetic imagery as a slow dialogue. This process created moments of vulnerability. In these moments, we experienced care, connectedness, and a sense of becoming—together—which afforded affective connections that assisted us with our analysis (Khanolainen et al., 2021).

Although we had never met together in the flesh (and still haven't), the regularity of our meetings and the experience of care, solidarity, and support we felt towards each other encouraged the cohesion of the group. We shared academic perplexities and surprises in a time of COVID-19 and found a space where we could sit with our uncertainty about what it meant to be academics when we needed to work apart from colleagues and needed to reframe the rhythms of our days through physically distancing from our institutions. The process was richly visual, textured, and performative, and our Zoom meetings, not surprisingly, produced their own perplexities, paradoxes, and frustrations.

An Assemblage Cartography

We use a cartography to reframe power relations that operate in and are immanent to the production and circulation of knowledge. A cartography can be defined as “a theoretically-based and politically-informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity... to expose power both as entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potentia)” (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 33). As a form of generating “shared understanding”, cartographies show the kind of subjects we are in the process of becoming in/through our work in the academy (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 52). Despite the dangerous, unproductive power relations and isolation produced by COVID-19 in our personal lives and academic work, our poetry leveraged the non-linearity of memory and imagination, allowing our scholarly work to transcend the apathy and despair of neoliberalism that afflicts the academy. As Deleuze (1995) wrote, “It’s not a question of worrying for or hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons” (p. 178). By this he meant, finding new ways to fight oppression. For us, our collective biography was such a weapon. We leveraged affirmative ethics, both as relational and embodied, to celebrate the vitality of our real and present materialities. Our poetic assemblage became a “collective intervention” juxtaposing memory poem with “analyses in action” (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 84).

Reading the poems aloud to each other produced affective, spontaneous responses and resonances. As Brady (2009) writes, poetry can enable us to embrace “sensual immersions, subjectivities, mutual constructions of meaningful relationships, and sometimes deliberately fictionalize realities that ‘ring true’” (p. xiv). After the readings, we engaged in verbal analysis, which we transcribed through the Zoom function. We then read these transcribed analyses with a view to finding the bits that stood out (glowed) and provided opportunities for non-linear (rhizomatic) departures and insight. The opportunity to engage in reflexive dialogues, work through the transcribed recordings, and collaboratively edit the “analyses in action” texts, afforded us a “second look” and “second think” of our passionate and ethical scholarship (Charteris & Smardon, 2013).

The analyses in action (including the second look and second think transcribed texts) were developed into the Mapping Poem script that follows each of the initial poems (1-4). They comprise the analysis component in this article.

Poem 1: The Opiate

Around the country
 universities implode.
 The 'international student sausage factory'
 is disrupted¹
 influential universities
 are deemed at high risk².
 There is an imperative
 To recreate normalcy.
 Frightened of a fast
 Lockdown lift and a 'second wave'
 Frightened of exploding
 Political unrest.
 Clawing back compliance
 For draconian lockdown measures,
 Mobs became desperate with job losses and bubbling
 old race tensions.

In Zoom sessions,
 Colleagues press
 To return to work.
 Seeking to escape
 The loneliness of living alone.
 Works seeps into the homelife
 I want to 'shush' them to
 Tell them that they are lucky.
 Work is an opiate.
 It is intoxicating.
 It is all-encompassing scholarly subjectivity
 Where I am the university.
 I can be the university where I am.

¹ See Skidmore, M. (2020). Disrupting the international student sausage factory, *Campus Review*.

² See Larkens, F., & Marshman, I. (2020). 'Larkins and Marshman warn: Seven unis at financial risk' *Campus Morning Mail*.

Mapping Poem 1

Violet: This was written right at the start when so much was unknown, and I think we were all in a bit of shock still.

Briar: Yeah, also you don't know – with all the #MeToo and COVID related riots.

Jasmine: How is it vital matter?

Briar: I see crowds – the humans pressing against each other, like the mobs.

Holly: With an element of Pink Floyd's 'The Wall'.

Violet: And the unrest and affect circulating.

Briar: There's this notion of the masses – mass produced education. Universities are imploding. There is the commodified bodies of students. We've got the massification of education, as well as the unrest with people protesting.

Holly: It sounds so contradictory. If Universities are a place of research and learning, an implosion would result in all that learning disappearing, being swallowed up...and yet unrest spills out...and unrest provokes a new lens to view through.

Violet: It feels very precarious doesn't it?

Briar: You've got the virus – an agentic organism – producing an affective entanglement as it circulates the globe.

Jasmine: It is just a poky little ball. (All laugh)

Briar: It is agentic matter. It lives with us, through us, but at the same time it lives beyond us, in the way that comes *to* us, working through all the bodies and working those discourses of social injustice to mobilise the masses.

Violet: It's not just the perceived justice of those who feel that freedom is being eroded. There's a sense that 'my and me' is more important than 'we'.

Jasmine: There *is* something around 'Be quiet. Stop your moaning about zoom sessions'. Other people are losing their jobs.

Violet: Yes, at that time, people were losing their jobs. Financial support didn't come until later.

Holly: To me it sounds dystopian and beyond our control.

Violet: We use affirmative ethics in reworking the despair. We reframe what 'matters' at the end where work is described as an opiate.

Briar: The work opiate creates a dreamlike state. I'm losing time and I love it. I am part of a universe-ity through this computer.

Violet: Ethicality with affirmative empowerment.

Briar: We are part of the capitalist-neoliberal-entrepreneurial University. Yet, at the same time. I find my opiate in it. I find my joy in that space.

Jasmine: Wherever I am, I can still be all of that – relational and embodied. In academic life we allow ourselves to be all about productivity units, performance, measurements, generating funds, writing short courses. We need to feel the intoxication – the opiate so we can relish being embodied and vitally connected to the world around us.

Poem 2: Dog-Children-Whales

Scars of the bush fires that burnt
Lack of water, the heat and perpetual smoke
But now the outside is dangerous again
Working from home
Isolation

The days and weeks go by
Work is bustling and bristling.
A steady flow of emails
No time to look back, review, reflect
Barbs and bristles
The days have no boundaries.

Breath drawn,
In the warmth of the sun
Wild growth of the garden
An elderly small black dog
A constant companion
Dozing in the sun

Love and laughter
Grandchildren thrust into a COVID world
We play online games
Will they remember pre-COVID world?

Days without edges
 Worlds are in turmoil and chaos,
 The whales pass by on their migration paths
 Oblivious to the virus that has reshaped the human world.

Mapping Poem 2

Briar: The dog, the children, and the whales don't really get it, because it's not their problem.

Holly: But it becomes their problem by default, at least that of the children.

Jasmine: This poem brings out perplexing relationalities – the dolphins, children, dog fire, work entanglement. Academic life is constituted as separate but it is not. I see how intertwined these lives are.

Holly: How is the detoxing happening here? What desire is coming out of this negative moment? I mean 'scars of bush fires'. That's like death right. There is no life. It is doom and gloom.

Violet: In the bush fires the town was literally on fire. There were photos of huge fires, hundred foot tall flames, just literally, leaping across the road towards the shops. It was incredibly frightening.

We even looked at trees differently. Instead of loving every park that has been saved from housing development, trees became dangerous and frightening.

Briar: I'm thinking that there is a paradox of beautiful bush becoming a peril. We've got a paradox of the world becoming perilous and the dog, whales, and children impacted by it, but not part of its making.

Holly: I see the paradox as being the coexistence with the "shadow". The chaos and turmoil sitting alongside the laughter and companionship. The relaxed and the fraught, the spurned, and the welcomed.

Jasmine: The first stanza points to the lack with the heat, smoke, and dangerous isolation. There is an opening up as the poem unfolds. 'The whales pass'.

Briar: The question 'Will they remember a pre-COVID world?' implies that there will be another reality.

Holly: It speaks to me of tranquillity without time pressure. Barbs and bristles, chaos and turmoil sit alongside that sense of timelessness, marring its quality.

Violet: Well, I think that comes up in the migration of the whales as well, that there are some aspects of the world that will just continue regardless. But say for the children the world has dramatically changed.

Briar: So there is dog time and whale time.

Holly: Lunar time continues unaffected and meanwhile a new epoch has started.

Jasmine: Violet is feeling with the children, feeling with the dog, and feeling with the whales. And she gets into a completely different time and space – a new expression of experience.

Violet: In the first line of the stanza about the dog I start with – ‘breath drawn’, that’s drawing breath from all of the horrible bits. That marks an alternative space where I become sustained by whales, dogs, and children.

Poem 3: What To Be? How To Be? Where To?

How do you see me?

How do I see myself?

What do I want to see in/of me-other.

Experience

Memory work, creative, emancipatory learning space...

Develop curiosity, desire, creative thinking.

Time and space to feel

To negotiate uncertainties.

Calls to write

Please stop the noise

What does it mean to be an academic in times of crisis?

Sad...

Face great fear, anxiety and death

Oppressive!

Institutional discourses narrate lives

What to be? How to be? Where to?

Mapping Poem 3

Briar: I think affirmative effects are in the performance.

Violet: There is a real sense of becoming – becoming in the world.

Jasmine: I think the second stanza highlights the detoxing of the self in the words ‘Please stop the noise’.

Briar: What does ‘Please stop the noise’ mean to you Jasmine?

Jasmine: The bombardment of emails asking us to attend different workshops, to learn about different online platforms and the frenzy to edit journals, write papers, chapters, and books on the COVID pandemic. That has really got to me. We did not even get to come to terms with what it is and it became another production space – used as an opportunity to publish. How cold and ruthless is that! *Consumerize everything, how we can make money.*

Instead, we should be asking ourselves, ‘What is this moment of isolation producing?’ This COVID moment is a time to understand the intense entanglement with nature. The silence was just beautiful – no buses, no traffic. The birds – you could hear the birds...see butterflies and feel the light’s warmth on our bodies. Animals were crossing streets, breaking boundaries and flower, bird, and animal photographs were being shared by people about. And university life should be a space for affirmative ethics, to connect our stories and the silences.

Briar: When humans clear out the animals come!

Violet: I felt a real sense of the up and down, like the waves. When you get to the line ‘*stop the noise*’ it is an agentic moment...and then all of a sudden sad, and it sort of drops again. And you can see a real movement of emotions and feelings and thoughts.

I think, for me it was the ‘barbs and bristles’ that I was talking about and for you it was ‘the noise’.

Holly: With a sense of urgency, not just ‘stop the noise’ but ‘**STOP the noise**’.

Jasmine: Yeah, suddenly this thing that pricks you back to reality.

Briar: What is the vitality of matter here?

There is visceral fear, and anxiety. The affect is circulating through matter, and there are tracings that impact on bodies. There is a sense of the joy that comes with the feeling of connecting and learning. You know, curiosity, desire, and creative thinking. It’s that capacity of being able to joyously express creativity.

Jasmine: It's almost like in your most vulnerable moment, something creative is born to affirm life.

Violet: It is perplexing that there is no resolution at the end. It is still asking the questions right at the end – What to be? How to be? Where to?

Holly: Absolutely, to exist without direction is hugely perplexing.

Briar: And I don't think there is a resolution. It's moment by moment. You move into and out of that sense of entrapment, because you know, you've got to do the grants and all the stuff. That is the trade of academic work.

Poem 4: Broken News

Listening to the news
 Make sense of
 Wash your hands
 Don't touch your face
 Couldn't make sense of scary
 Alert!
 Inevitably
 Lockdown.

Positive tests
 People Dead
 Big numbers rising
 Every day Indiscriminate
 Ring my mother
 Every
 Single
 Every
 Single day

Working from home office garden
 Panicked departure
 Director General of Public Health
 Plans to catch up
 All good ...to start with

Stay home

Stay

Stay

Home

Banding together

Zoom room routine

A dystopian novel, and books

Lined up keeping distance

Quietly subdued

How far would I go?

How far

Would I

Go

To keep my family safe?

Ache for children

No one to notice

No reassuring haven

Well-being compromised

Off the radar

Far away

Distant

Far away distant

To embrace the new norm.

Mapping Poem 4

Violet: I love how the playfulness with the words, towards the end of each stanza.

Briar: So what does it say about affirmative ethics?

Holly: There is an ongoing ethical dilemma throughout...Where and with whom and in what does loyalty sit?

Violet: It's like it's trying to work out how to be in the world. But there's certainly a level of anxiety and worry throughout each stanza. You know, like, especially the words "I ring my mother every day, every single day".

Holly: After the sense making of the first verse the severity becomes evident. I experience a sense of responsibility for my mother, still grieving the loss of her husband, my father.

Violet: It captures that affect – an ache, Yeah, 'Not sustainable, Too much, Not enough, Too little'. Anyway, so misdirected, an equity.

Holly: There is so much to bear.

Jasmine: Yeah. And that sense of being down.

Violet: And there is the pain of separation.

Briar: A sense of fear and relentless.

Violet: So there's a physical ache as well as the mental torment.

Jasmine: There is a resolve to embracing the new norm, which suddenly becomes apparent. All of this gloom and doom and heaviness to embrace almost a sense of coming to some resolution.

Briar: That stanza that begins Ache for children... There is a sense of dislocation and isolation with "No one to notice" and "No reassuring haven". There is a remoteness with "Off the radar", "Far away" and "Distant".

Holly: The notion of embracing a new norm is a very different thought to everything else that's been before. Almost like in all of this darkness suddenly something sparks up.

Violet: An acceptance in some way – of all the things that she's been resisting and fighting.

Holly: Or sitting with the pain and 'staying with the trouble'.

Although we work in different countries with unique socio-political university contexts, the mapping expresses the transversal politics in these research-scapes. We reframed the interconnected relational and transversal politics of university and home spaces through affirmative ethical connections. When the texts were juxtaposed with each other, we could see interconnecting points. These entanglements, intersectionalities, or nodes that were made visible allowed us to delve into concepts, ideas, and experiences that linked them. They also made visible the politics associated with a pandemic and interspecies relationality. Nodes connected the neoliberal university to planetary relationalities, for example, climate change fires which transformed our once revered relationship to trees to a relationship of fear, even loathing as they broke out. Our analysis was a shared and embodied enactment that produced affective solidarity and empowerment between us and for us. Like Hawkins et al. (2020), the memory writing and collective analysis revealed “fleeting glimpses of affect” and the “unsteady and changeable flows of power”, potent for “subversion of power relations and a release of constraints” (p. 3). In talking and thinking together, individual ownership fell away and the many voices become a cacophonous medley “open[ing] the firmament and... [letting] in a bit of free and windy chaos” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 202-203).

Discussion

Vital materialism produced a surrender in us to COVID-19 and its realities. It also made us recognize the human and non-human entanglement of the virus, with human emotion, fear, desire, and relational care. Affirmative ethics produced for us, a creative academic work that transcended the apathy and despair brought upon us by a neoliberal agenda and its harmful competitive and performative practices. Authoring poetry as a collective biography, was a co-creative knowledge-making practice that we found surfaced perplexities, paradoxes, and surprises brought on by doing academic work during COVID-19. We became aware of how negative affects could be transformed through praxis and political commitment, so that even those affects that “freeze us in pain, horror or mourning” can be “de-personalized” and reframed (Braidotti, 2010, p. 144). Collective biography afforded us the space for scholarly conversations, organic writing, and spontaneous thinking. Paradoxically, the act of publishing this care-work simultaneously capitulates to and critiques the pressure to perform in the academy.

Affective flows of anger, fatigue, fear, and anxiety transverse our cartography in multiple ways as shared points of hurt. In **Poem 1**, academic work takes place in a “sausage factory” which emphasises the commodification of scholarly work and the massification of education. In **Poem 2**, the academy is fraught with “barbs and bristles” where there is “a steady flow of emails” and “no time to look back, review, [and] reflect.” In **Poem 3**, the academy as “noise” is a connecting point. In the world of COVID-19, suffering is commodified and becomes a means for the university to leverage economic advantage. **Poem 4** highlights a sense of isolation in work that is “off the radar”, “far away”, and “distant.” The poems collectively highlight the paradoxes of COVID-19 anxiety. There is trauma and death, alongside passion and desire. There is creativity sparked through care, collaboration, and artful connectedness. In all of the poems, there is a temporal dimension. Time sits across all of the poems as a key node. Time is fractured, out of kilter, dystopian, immersed in the unfamiliar, at different moments in the poems. It is even serene as the days of lockdown blur into each other. Affirmative ethics help us reframe precarious perceptions of time, and help us acknowledge anxiety and fear. For example, we noted a sense of nostalgia for all that was missing but also a sense of surrender to the affective

flows that saw the past, present, and future shift and blur. In Poem 2, dog-children-whale time generatively entangled with academic work. Animals cohabit human domains and we experience spaces with them, unlike before. The temporality of the animal-child entanglement juxtaposes the cyber university with affirmative ethics, the latter being the one that sustains, renews, and provides a way to work through the frustrations of academic life during COVID-19 and navigates us through the “noise.”

Conclusion

Using affirmative ethics, we have examined the perplexities, paradoxes, surprises, and frustrations associated with academic work during COVID-19. Each poem speaks to a personal experience in the politics of the academy. The recognition of our collective worlding opened out to living beyond the cerebral work of academia. In an affirmative move, we combined arts-based research and collective biography to ward off the early onset of “academentia”, a condition in which academics lose their connection to in-depth scholarly study because their day-to-day work environment is shaped by powerful discourses of managerialism and neoliberalism (Kilkauer & Young, 2021, para 2).

Working through affirmative ethics, we were able to endure pain, and examine experiences of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic to understand and transform fear. Entanglements reflect the interconnections between civil unrest and a politics associated with the pandemic and interspecies relationality. Embracing the vitalizing impetus of affirmative passion enabled us to move from a sense of despair toward a deep vital engagement with life (and death). Engaging with generative politics, we transformed desire in the academy, not as lack but rather as a sense of fullness by thinking with vital materialism and relationality. As we have illustrated, our ethical work evoked a purposeful shift from a negative malaise to affirmative passion (Braidotti, 2011). This move was not about evading sorrow, pain, and anxiety, rather it was a considered engagement with the affective, embodied, life-enhancing experiences of intersubjective vital connections between species, objects, and each other.

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