

Post-Apocalyptic Interpretations of the Pandemic: A Precautionary Tale in Four Parts

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“Facts are much less frightening than ignorance and rumors.”

–Christiane Amanpour, on Amanpour PBS – Airdate March 16 2020

Guidance Protocols Day 3: Social Distancing and its Challenges for the Close Talker

Despite best practices, society’s reverted to mechanisms
of discrete foraging. The general public left to their last resorts,
resorted to melancholy vagabonds, subsisting
and deprived of ubiety.

Their scheduled destinies postponed until further notice,
but upon further inspection
the coordination of logistics was a bitch.

Casting aspersions aside, you keep your social distance,
the new unspoken courtesy triggered
by the signal of wary eyes, secretly gauging
your suspicious measure with a glare,
belaying bad habits.

Social creatures urged to isolate, immediate families
closer knit, huddled in close quarters
while lone inhabitants suffer
the recommended sentence in solitary confinement.

Isotopes on a cargo hold manifest
procured to fill the void left by stockpiles of mental anguish
as the mind manifests and grapples with abandonment.

In memoriam to the expired, and the ringing tolls
across a curvature of rising tides, named
as numbered cases, but more than that in name
and in life—on no occasion nonessential.

To the rest of us: adhere to diligent practices
and stay clear of swerving on that statistical curve,

sheltered in a fitting place.

Recall the familiar faces refreshing from across kitchen tables,
Jesting with exaggerated gestures of refusal—

Please, don't pass the salt!

A flashcard communicate for the new millennium family.

A stinging dose of seasoned reality to calm
the surmounting hysteria, stinging with clarity
like a slap to the face or a snap on the wrist, kept close
and always sharp like a valuable pain.

2

"...with closed eyes, I see worse things."

—Miranda, 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider' -Katherine Anne Porter 1939

Guidance Protocols Day 7: Supply Runs, Impulse Buys, and One Per Customer Per Day

Masked marauders on frontiers of surreal fantasy
greet each other with eye courtesy—tongueless
and ever suspicious—
primed and readied in paint-by-numbers,

avoiding proximity.

Drop down the makeshift mask—cowboy bandana—
at a sociable distance, and motion with eye direction
so as not to spray spit with unnecessary speech.

At a late hour, days before the evening curfew was executed,
patrolling eyes scan barren shelves, and worse, barren aisles
void of patronage.

Overhead, a soothing, but robotic feminine voice emanates
to broadcast calming and compliant advisements
like some future-dystopian movie, putting you eerily at ease.
With apparent caution you approach your cashier,
a supermarket associate on the frontlines
segregated behind a clear wall of riot-shield plastic,
protected from your exhaled assault.

Oncoming Hospital vicinity street signs now warn
healthcare workers fraught to serve their calling,
but not at the expense of the child coping
in distress, while black market PPE thrives
on the scales of a moral economy tipped.

Though denying purists defy ubiquitous quarantine
as conspiracy, chanting a mantra of social engineering
that would attempt to facilitate their unauthorized transaction.
Something about prying from cold dead hands...

In adapting to new calamity, overall, we commit to act
as the responsible citizenry within a global commonality

to be obsessively compulsive in disorderly fashion.

Like all things glorified, we admire the portrayal of ghosts
until their disturbing imagery
tortures us with recurrent hauntings.

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“...keep your eyes open, and listen to the science, the experts, and the evidence.”

—Christiane Amanpour, on Amanpour PBS – Airdate March 16 2020

Guidance Protocols Day 13: Strategic Maneuvers for dealing with Panic during the Pandemic Crisis

Reporting from the press pit, two empty chairs
apart, here to swallow unsolicited
aggrandizing or unprovoked diatribe
in the absence of Sharpie-altered graphics;
assured by fireside spats of the excessive
washing of hands (of all this).

Isolation, curfew, shutdown—
voluntary measures mandated.gov
in our best interest, and against our better nature.

Millennium underlings years ahead of the curve
are already nestled in, a learned and remote
force employed to take the evolutionary leap
fully transitioned within the embrace

of emerging technology.

All the while, beyond the overload of network
buzzing across powerlines, a lifting fog
of rush-hour traffic apparitions unveils
highway congestion thinned to near empty.
Bereft of non-essentials, the populace recast
to the set locations of drive-thru test-kit parking lots,
cordoned off by lane cones, and instructed
by the muffled commands emitting from yellow
hazmat garb wielding nasal swabs.
A panoramic aspect ratio of surreal cinema.

Pandemonium—the new abode.

Informatics for the new normal curbing
novel crises for the new age.
A blacklist extinction enabled at the behest
of barons of broken things and blame inherited
with hubris enough to lay claim to accomplishments
to date never attempted nor imagined.

In Greenwich, meantime, hourly processions float
one after another, each one a pall of blue covering,
up the ramps of refrigerated trailers
to become a closer gathering in the stillness,
averse to the advice of living habits.

Somewhere, an undying flower plagued by hope
blooms into life, unseen under isolation tents.

paws slung down like dripping molasses.
Zooming through space and time zones:
the common streets condemned to abandon
for an isolation in exhibition; the cheering crowd
muted, the air a captured silence in abundance.

A repopulation of wildlife has taken notice
of the vacancy, arriving in droves to fill the void,
beckoned by the uninterrupted elongation of birdsong.
A deer on Euclid Avenue props up its head,
as a dozen more calmly cross the street
to graze beside it in noiseless daylight.
Along Long Branch beach my eldest son, his eyes
fishing, catches a glimpse in the sun-glinted surf:
dolphin heads greet the empty shore in waves,
popping up in quick succession with approving nods
to applaud the comeback of clear skies.

Tried by an encounter out of thin air,
we still strive to become better warriors
for vanquishing sculpted enemies.
And rising from the ground, gravel drops
from the open palms it stuck to, leaving temporary indentations
as tokens of smaller blessings for later recollection
when depressing the flesh of hands
within the right angle of reflected light.