

letters suffering
(from the exhaustion
brought on by incessant
hot takes)

The Packet

The Packet seeks to make work located
in the playful and the intimate
in response to a stratified and
exclusionary world.

Choosing the question 'What do we see?'
we draw from direct experience, from
micro-moments located in the immediate.
Instead of speaking to, we speak from,
and with each other. Suffering
from the exhaustion brought on by
incessant hot takes, we converse
and question, resisting the rush to
theorize.

Cassie Machado

Apr 1, 2020, 2:30 AM

London, UK, 20.51, 31st March 2020.

A few of the minute headlines from a number of sources;"Coronavirus rise in Italy, US and France deaths takes global confirmed toll past 40,000" (The Guardian) "UK death toll from Coronavirus jumps by 381 in a day" (Financial Times) "US crude oil falls below \$20" (Financial Times) "Migrants watch as Coronavirus shuts routes down" (Financial Times) "Llandudno marauders: the herd of goats running riot through a Welsh town" (The Guardian)

On our call today Sandev spoke of an uncle who had called him out the blue and told him "I will pray for you". This recalled a whatsapp conversation I'd had with a friend who was lying very sick in hospital in Hawaii a few days ago, although I should say not

from Corona. I'd shared some recent news and a couple of pictures of the light falling inside my apartment. And one of recent fallen Magnolia blossom covering a grass verge on a street in my neighbourhood that I'd captured the other day on a walk on route to the supermarket to stock up on groceries.

He had responded "I can see and feel your presence right now. I am going to take a break and lay with you for a little while. Please get me up to speed when you have a chance. Until then, lay still".

I also chatted to my Mum on the phone today and she told me about her neighbour whose children had put up a painting of a rainbow in their window facing the street for neighbours and passers by to see. My Mum had found an old painting of mine, of a rainbow from when I was a child



and posted hers up in her window in response to the children. Like all of us finding new ways to communicate and to stay connected.

What struck me about the two statements "I will pray for you" and "I am going to lay with you" and the image of these two rainbows in conversation with one another was the simplicity of the desire to slow down and be connected in solidarity with one another in the present, wherever and however that may be.

If any reality is clearer to me now than ever it is how everyone and everything is connected. The idea that we are separate, disconnected from our surroundings and each other is mere illusion and is responsible for much of our world and humanity's suffering. After this cataclysm is over if we could reconstruct our society based upon this value system the planet would be a much more peaceful place.

In Rebecca Solnit's book *A Paradise Built in Hell* she wrote "We don't have a language for this emotion, in which the wonderful comes wrapped in the

terrible, joy in sorrow, courage in fear. We cannot escape disaster, but we can value the responses both practical and psychological".

Good night,
Cassie

(Subsequently Rainbows have popped up all over our city, I learned after writing this, it had become an emblem for giving thanks and respect to the dedicated work of all the Doctors, Nurses and staff of our NHS, National Health Service).

Venuri Perera

Apr 1, 2020, 11:24 PM

Thank you Cassie for your sharing. It was really nice to read your thoughts and see the photos.

The gesture of neighbours putting up rainbows on their windows to cheer each other up...a beautiful image.

The window made me remember something that happened just before the curfew. When we had been told to stay indoors and social distance. I was writing an application. My mother was making a *mallung*. There was a loud knock and shouting at the door. I went near the door but didn't open it as they didn't look familiar, and I wasn't really dressed. (I was also self quarantining as I had been to an event that weekend with a few French, German and Lankans who had just come into the country) I was worried that the itch in my

throat could be Corona. They were peeping through the window, one of them holding on to the bars. My mother came out from the kitchen to the front, she was in a *redda*, *nambiliy* in one hand, the other full of coconut. She said "ah... what are you'll doing here? I'm cooking lunch." They (the one holding on to the bars) said loudly "What! At this time?" She said "yes." They said "ok can we come in?" Pointing to the group behind her, "See see who is here..." My mother said, "No. I'm sorry. I can't let you'll in." They were a bit shocked. She went on "you see my son went for the Royal-Thomian so we are self quarantined" They said "Aiyo, we are not scared." She said, "That's ok you can't come in." You could feel the mood change. They backed up. They said "ok ok. We'll go." They left.

It turned out to be a whole jingbang of my mother's friends from her school. They seemed to have been aimless and

had come to the neighbourhood on a joyride. Being tea time must have felt like surprising my mother and dropping in for a good gossip. My mother is known to be an easy-going, jovial sort with her friends. She said about the one who was talking "she owns half of Nugegoda. Must have come here to look for property." I said. "Wow. Well, you treated them like untouchables!"

After that, we had a good laugh.

I feel quite cut off from our surroundings in the oasis of a house I am in with my mother, three cats (two semi-wild, one fully wild), fish and a *Thalagoya*. Our visitors are a troupe of monkeys, endless birds, squirrels. Our back 'garden' has a few jackfruit trees and dead leaves. Till now we hadn't really eaten from them. No idea why not. Now it's one of our main sources of nourishment. My mother makes Jack fruit *mallung*, jackfruit seed curry,

jackfruit *kirata*.

Today I woke up to this fb message from someone I do not really know.

"Hey! I had a dream about you last night. I got off the shuttle from the airport in Mallorca to Las Palmas and bumped into you. You were with a burlesque performer I know and told me you wrote a poem called Tiger Frisbee. Then the rest of the dream was me trying to convince you to show me your poem and you not agreeing to it. Your show in Edinburgh 3 years ago made a strong impression on me, looks like. I'm looking forward to seeing you perform again. I hope you're well."

He went on to tell me that he has plans to invite me to the UK with this 'show' next year. All his shows for March were cancelled/postponed. It was then that I realised he must be a producer or curator. In my one on one performance,

we were both in complete darkness, so we had not really seen each other when we 'met' - but he had gotten in touch via FB later, to tell me his thoughts. This piece is about borders, visa processes, and there is intimate whispering in the audience member's ear, with very close proximity - touch. I have no idea how this sort of work will be allowed or how it would be seen in the future.

In general, people are reaching out, saying hello, asking how I am. People I haven't heard from in a long time. I find myself doing the same.

What has become palpable to me is. We know nothing. Every day, from moment to moment things are shifting. Changing. What are we preparing for?



Imaad Majeed

Apr 1, 11:51 PM

Reading these are really helpful in feeling less isolated in a sense. Thank you for sharing!

A few days before the curfew came into effect, I took an Uber Car from my home in Rathmalana to Boswell Place. The driver called after accepting the hire and asked if it's okay for him to have lunch and then come. I asked how long that would take. He said about 10-15 minutes. So I said of course and he eventually turned up.

He wasn't wearing a mask. He coughed a few times, and it made me a little anxious. He made a comment about the lack of traffic, and I told him about how the skies have cleared in China since lockdown. He was quite struck by this.

He started talking about something the Buddha had said, that, eventually, the world will burn. It wasn't easy for me to grasp everything he was saying as he spoke in Sinhala, but the impression I got was that he was quite knowledgeable in Buddhism.

I don't remember all of the conversation, but I do remember how it felt. There was a humble profundity to the way he spoke, making observations about humanity and our treatment of the environment and our self-centeredness.

He said, if you shout at a dog, it may bark back at you. If you hit it, it will bite you back. He said this is because, unlike humans, they are not as conscious. However, even humans shout back when you shout at them and hit back when you hit them, instead of being conscientious and mindful of the other's suffering.

Again he returned to the image of blue skies. He seemed to interpret it as some sort of sign.

Before he dropped me off he apologized if he had spoken too much and for going into religion, and I said there was no need to as I enjoyed listening to him. I gave him a tip through the app and a 5-star rating, tagging "good conversation".

I wonder now how he is managing, as he cannot work due to the curfew, and if the image of blue skies is of any comfort anymore.

Of what I've seen in my immediate environment since curfew was imposed, the image that struck me: a child dancing gracefully, almost ballet-esque, on our lane, with the sound of a Tamil song playing from my brother in law's radio.

There was something to that slightest violation of curfew by their body being outside their "home".



SP Pushpakanthan

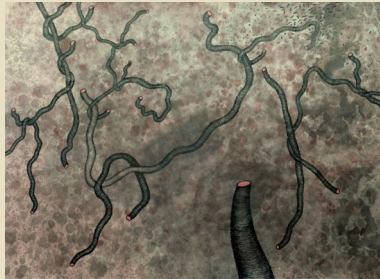
Apr 2, 2020, 12:01 AM

When the curfew has started in Sri Lanka and the quarantine began, several questions came to my mind like how people were going to deal with the lack of income and therefore the lack of resources or mental stress? The stigmatization based on the mere suspicion of being infected, or the general feeling of panic experienced within a closed space? Consequently, I felt paralyzed for the whole first week and then I started to draw. I think of myself primarily as a studio artist and I love to bring the surrounding nature to my studio. Indeed, solitude is essential to me since I become more inspired to work on my own and try to transform all the pain and trauma I have experienced into art. To me, it is a therapeutic, healing and individual process. The world is full of panic, distress, inequality and hopelessness. I think this is a horrible situation and for

some people this state-of-being, forces them to relive old memories; memories their minds would like to forget. The situation we are all are living in now - the constant state of fear, the confinement at home, the long queues to get basic goods to survive - is daily life for many humans all around the world; it's only now that it is affecting everybody, now that we have enough time to think while safe in our homes that we have become aware of this. This is the time to understand the pain of those who suffered, suffer and will suffer all around the world before, during and after COVID-19. This pain is inestimable so instead we should all focus on the hope for a better future, not only one without a virus but a future without the social viruses of war, racism, lack of empathy or the disrespect of nature.

Kind regards,
Pushpakanthan

letters suffering



The Packet



Sandev Handy

April 2, 2020, 1:19 AM

I am touched by the tenderness living in all your bodies. It makes me want to find more in mine.

A month ago I had a wonderful date with a woman from Moscow. We were supposed to go see some art around town, but never made it past the cafe we had met up at for drinks. Instead, we sat and talked for hours. She had decided to take a break and move to Sri Lanka for some months after she had lost the feminist magazine she founded through a hostile take over by the Russian Government.

We spoke in-depth about religion and our struggles through it. About our parents and how the specificity of their paths had led them to spiritual lives. Our parents, or rather our understanding of our parents had

too much in common, and it made for honest conversation.

She was going back down south that night. She asked if I'd be able to visit sometime. I told her I hated the south but would try. She said she'd be back up on the 18th to renew her visa and would spend a few days in the city.

Later that night I received a message from her; our conversation was still playing in her mind. It was shocking to her to have found that she shared so much with someone on the other side of her world. She had felt a connection and was looking forward to the 18th. I said I was too. I was.

On the 18th I was finding out over video call that an endeavour I had poured my life into for the last 6 months had lost its funding. All the funds were being re-directed to fight

the pandemic. I had woken up with a sinking feeling in my gut. The woman from Moscow had taken a flight home the night before.

A few days into being confined at home I received a phone call from a number I didn't recognize. There was familiarity in the voice on the other end.

"What men! You've forgotten us now no?" "No uncle this is just a new phone." "Ah okay, putha just called to see how you were doing? Crazy time we are living in nuh?"

It was an uncle from my parent's church. I hadn't talked to him in years. I used to be terrified of him as a kid, often reprimanded with "Be careful, Uncle K***** will see you!"

"Anyways putha these are truly the end-times. Before this the rich thought they could get away from

anything because they had money, now with this, even the rich are affected. This is Gods judgment. Anyway, son, I will pray for you!". I politely said "ah okay uncle thanks so much for calling" and was about to put down the phone when he began, "God we come to you today, as you are in the middle of exercising your judgement on us..."

'Oh he meant pray for me like NOW now, oh God.'

"Lord this is just as you punished Sodom and Gomorrah for their immorality and hedonism...You are setting the world straight again lord... Lord I pray for this boy, may he turn back to you and honour your calling."

I mumbled 'amen' with him and said goodbye. I felt I had been assaulted in some way. I didn't have the words for it. I hated it. I went to my room, shut my door and went to bed.

It's quite striking to me that at a time like this, occurrences tend to organize themselves with the sole purpose of pulling at the seams, compartments of ourselves that we've neatly tucked away into little crevices.

Much Love,
SandeV

Dinelka Liyanage

Apr 2, 10:46 AM



Everyone share their own experience.
I would share my own experience
(I dunno if I am so good at in language
to write but as much as I will try to
write the way I talk)

After this corona has been started I
also stuck in one place but there's so
many things I have questioning about
myself and come up with the realization...

So one day I really wanted to go outside (it's always easier to go outside cause the where I stay it's judge privet office complex and around the බේර lake... so I just walk to the car park (it was an a old car park but they were renovated it. but still it's got half done cause these things happen) so when I went there there was these Chinese person who always sit on this block and having chat on his phone... (These people are construction workers who are build some of buildings that you see... if your coming in to Colombo). Even though I passed him he didn't realize I was there...I felt like he just more into his phone. Then I went back another day he was sitting the same place but when he realized I am that way he just went. I thought how being alone in another place how it's feel like to him. A people who are work every day more than 12 hours, suddenly stuck in one place what happened to them?





I also realize car park is the only place that make them feel good/and then I walk in to top of the floor I found these things. (I don't know my story is much experience than yours but this is what I hear/what I see.

So these are I found on roof top. I thought I would photograph it as black and white...also these all are in one place different positions/ and each thing different to others... so that block and this has a dialogue cause before curfew happens this is under the construction but now it's kind of abandon.

Sharika Navamani

Apr 2, 2020, 1:11 PM

A few days ago we found out that our neighbour was actually selling vegetables and other groceries for a few days. We had no clue cos we kept to ourselves. This was on a Sunday, the day after we completed two weeks in isolation/curfew.

By the time we got to the neighbour's house, the vegetables were looking sad and wilted. While we were deciding what to buy, another lady that lives in our apartment also came in to buy some food. She was asking us quite casually, partly as a joke, partly seriously, but directing the question to Sandev, "y'all have been locked inside the house all this time! If y'all were married with kids, we would understand. If y'all had come out you would have known that they were selling vegetables. y'all are late! In vain!"

She continued telling us what she has been going through: her buying vegetables cos she doesn't trust her son to buy vegetables. That she's a little sick (I thin diabetic?) and that she needs to buy medicine as well. Sandev offered to buy the medicines for her and Halik chirped in occasionally as well.

And she was going on, almost as if she was letting her stream of thoughts flow out freely talking about our "new lives" in isolation/ curfew. In the middle of these thoughts, she said "he (I think her son) asked me 'why have they put that flag outside?' I said 'how am I supposed to know? who knows what that flag means?'"

I've been dwelling on this encounter. Trying to sift through my memory of it to understand it better.

Today, I'm not feeling too well...

I used to have very vivid nightmares and last night they returned. Sandev and Halik were heading out of the apartment, wading through the mess that our apartment is slowly becoming, dressed pretty badly. Sandev was wearing a pair of boxers that I've seen him wear at home, with a Russian winter cap, the sole ugg in the house and Halik in his orange shorts that he hasn't changed out of, the last few days. Sandev was telling me "We're going to music matters." and Halik quipped in, "we'll see you there later." and I was struggling to communicate to them that it wasn't a good idea with the curfew and that I was scared. But I couldn't make myself say it. I tried to go back to sleep but I was struggling quite a bit and I broke down...

I'm feeling very nervous and anxious today... Maybe it was the coffee. Maybe because our fridge is broken and we're

running out of vegetables. Maybe the isolation affecting me is finally showing...

Recalling this dream, it seems stupid and comical. But I can't shake the feeling of anxiety and nervousness either.



Abdul Halik Azeez

Apr 2, 2020, 3:25 PM

Today is pregnant with a stillness that is getting on my nerves. I read your emails a few hours ago, they are beautiful, thank you so very much, and it feels nice to connect so deeply with you, especially when we are so pulled apart right now in so many ways. I felt so overcome with emotion, in fact, I decided it was time for a nap. Maybe sleep will allow me to process things and write something meaningful. I have been journaling a lot, but not too "lucidly".

I remember seeing Sharika in the living room just before my nap. They were pacing, smoking. I asked "why are you pacing?", they said "I am just feeling very nervous" and they didn't know why. I read Sha's email and found out about the dream. FYI I do live in those shorts but "days" at a time

would be a bit of a stretch. I want to recreate that picture from the dream of me and Sandev leaving to Music Matters, but we don't have a Russian ski hat in the house. And I am not sure if anyone delivers them right now.

I took a nap and had a nightmare of my own. A close friend who cut themselves off from me because we disagreed on capitalism (I said it was bad, he said it was good) and ignored all my attempts to make up, came to visit someone else I was living with (not Sharika and Sandev). This someone had just given birth and it was a formal visit. I was standing by the door on the outside and when he came up I looked at him and said "hey". He ignored me and walked past. This hurt so much that I woke up with a dull ache in my chest. To find Sandev trying to fix the fridge. I think this time we got it working. Let's not jinx it by talking about it.

Last night my grandma called me. She has been calling me more frequently lately. She was the last in our family to really understand the scale of the virus because the news had to do a lot of extra work to pierce her shield of partial deafness and blindness to get to her still very alert mind. She tells me that she will call me everyday from now on. Whether I like it or not. Today I called her before she could call me. She laughed on the phone.

I like to think I live a vibrant outdoorsy life from my balcony. I love watching the man walking on his rooftop every morning. Or at least I am fascinated by him. His shoulders are slightly hunched, and there is a dogged determination in how he goes about his trudge. As if he is bracing himself against everything that is pushing back. As if he thinks that the only way to stay sane is to keep

moving, even if you're only walking around in circles. Plus it's probably just great exercise. Speaking metaphorically, I am also hunching my shoulders, bracing myself, moving simply to keep moving, or trying to. It also feels like I have felt this feeling for a long time, have been trying to understand it as home. It is also probably just great exercise because I have a suspicion that life is just about continuing to move. Continuing to be and not really being something for a future self.

Do I feel a sense of smug satisfaction because my slow "cancellation of the future" has hit the world like a five o'clock office express train hitting a suicidal unemployed father of three? I don't honestly know. I have been trying to track my feelings. But I have also not been allowing myself to feel too much. Or have been channeling my feelings through the various forms

of pacing I do. The strongest thing I feel is a sense of waiting. But it doesn't disturb me as much as it usually does. Perhaps because I know that everyone else is waiting as well? Waiting for what? For our future selves to manifest again? To have something to walk towards instead of simply walking around in circles?



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