

Some Thoughts I Had While I Was On My Computer in Quarantine

Isaiah Bertagnolli  
Dr. Terry Smith  
CLST 2050/1040  
27 April 2020

First serious day of self quarantining. I didn't leave once. I've had the suspicion that news media necessarily inflates the situation on account of two reasons. The first, that it's good for business. More crisis means more viewers, more viewers means bigger advertisement sales. The second, that it is inflated because more people will take it seriously. Of course, that doesn't discount the very real consequences of this pandemic. People have died, and even if that number is (God willing) small, any number is still tragic.

I've been tracking news updates and new cases like anyone else, not as devoutly as some, but my nerves are motivating me to do this and I have little else to do. So I've seen the same maps from the *New York Times* every day as the situation changes. Tonight it is clear that the graphs, charts, and statistics are all ways of visualizing the world, and we're seeing the world being pictured in a totally unique way. The very systems the virus is putting under pressure, and at the heart of much of the response is a desire to interrogate and condemn the systems around us which are being disrupted and arguably failing.

Sitting in isolation, I'm recognizing the ways the world is being represented to me. To begin, the maps charting the pandemic are exaggerated and perhaps misinformative because the proportions are off.

Fig. 1

Which is certainly a world picture—the Mercator projection was popularized during the Cold War because it exaggerated Russia's size. The largest circles over Europe and China and Southeast Asia. Strictly according to the forms of the map, Europe and China are gone.

The coronavirus maps on the *New York Times* are also disproportionate! This can either be heralded as a great triumph of crisis design or derided for being, well, a triumph of crisis design.

Fig. 2

This chart visualizes everything we know about the pandemic entirely. Over 150,000 people have been confirmed positive. By presenting information in this way, we still picture recovered people as a part of the total number of cases. Somehow I read this as saying there are *still* 150,000 people sick. But it doesn't explicitly tell us that. It's coded.

Fig. 3

This map really stuck in my craw. It offers no key or legend to interpret scale, only that circle size represents the number of people. I guess the smallest circle represents one case. But look at Montana, for example, which is where I am from and so I know the geography. The circle over Missoula, Montana (the most northwest) is slightly larger than the rest. Which means probably 2 people are infected. The other circles represent one person. But of course, a person is not the size of a city! Like the map from Google, the size of the circles over New England, Washington, and throughout California, make this situation look like entire states are infected. I can almost imagine this map moving these are radar pings.

There are ways to justify presenting information like this, absolutely. And there are limitations for which this is the compromise. How else is it possible to convey this information?

I saw a screen grab of a tweet a few days ago, and of course I didn't save it and cannot find it, but it basically said "This pandemic has made me rethink globalization. Our supply chain should not be so far removed from us, medicine and medical equipment should not be produced on another continent." Of course, this immediately reminded me of the flat-Earther Thomas Friedman. I wonder what he would say about this.

Fig. 4-7

Because of my persuasion, on my Instagram feed there's a lot of emphasis on capitalism's instability, the impact on workers, and especially visual comparisons of healthcare systems. Here are some of the posts Decolonial Atlas on Instagram has posted today.

This account shows us a world where the coronavirus pandemic is interrupting these interconnected systems. It is startling that this information is formatted in this way.

Fig. 8-11

Facebook on my phone offers similar vignettes. NPR suggests an extremely dire situation. Posts about limited tests, our representatives getting sick, and potentially disruption in what is implied as the totality of the food supply are sandwiched between posts hailing Angela Merkel as the leader of the free world and Elizabeth Warren calling for a stimulus package.

Fig. 11

In the thumbnail posted here we see a very Prussian world picture. Angela Merkel is captured in front of the Reichstag building, a building which is arguably itself a world picture, having moved from empire to republic to Naziism to division to reunification, seated next to the flags of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union. Germany is now the leader of the free world, what would Heidegger think of that?

**3/19/20**

Is this a captain's log? Is the Bridget Jones's diary? If I'm isolated are there gender connotations to either of those questions?

It's amazing how information is so easily transmittable nowadays, and how immaterial it is. My friend sent me a photo, but I didn't think to screenshot it and because of how picture messaging works on Instagram, the picture isn't retrievable after a certain amount of time. What an

ephemeral way to interact with people. Instagram probably has a copy stored somewhere, but why would I bother with all that effort?

Figs. 12 and 13

A lot of my friends work service jobs and are being faced with a harsh economic reality. Of course the human loss is tragic, but the long term consequences are going to be economic. Some of my friends already have tried to sign up for seasonal unemployment. But the sheer number of people applying online shut down the platform.

Fig. 14-18

Socialist Future posts examples of private corporations prioritizing profits over human lives in this situation. Good to know.

Fig. 19-21

Saatchi Gallery posts information sketched by Mona Chalabi. On my feed, this came up under an advertisement for Bottega Veneta, a luxury company whose majority sales come from the Asian market.

Fig. 22 and 23

Scrolling back through Vogue Business' page for that post breaking down proportion of sales in the Asian market by brand revealed another post:

65.3% of *Vogue* China readers surveyed won't let something like the coronavirus get in their way of shopping! More delectable caveats.

Fig. 24

NPR posted about this a few days ago, and I remember being scared, too scared to click. This is the same issue as those maps I discussed yesterday: the headline "New Analysis Suggests Months of Social Distancing May Be Needed to Stop Virus" is a terrifying way to frame the situation. What it doesn't include is exactly what Jeremy Young has to say: "what happens if the US does absolutely nothing." And the fact is we have done something, and that has largely been up to the jurisdiction of cities, counties, and states, so we can't say this has been an effective all-over approach, but that headline is deeply misleading, and contributes to a general feeling of panic!

Is that necessary? Is this the approach we have to take to get people to take necessary precautions like washing our hands?

**3/20**

Fig. 25 and 26

The map on the *New York Times* now has numbers, and the graph has more data.

Fig. 27

Here is the world on NPR's website. They don't include international cases, but they do chart significant death rates on their map.

Fig. 28

Here we see another way of representing the United States.

How accurate is this?

### 3/21

Figs. 29 and 30

Can I *dérive* in my apartment?

As it turns out, if I turn to schoolwork I miss out on world picturing.

Animal Crossing: New Horizons is a new installment in the popular live-a-life game, and it seems like a lot of people I know and follow on social media are playing this game.

The premise is simple. You begin the game moving new town which is populated only by anthropomorphic animals (though your avatar is still recognizably human). There are no long term objectives in this game, there is no big bad to fight (even though the raccoon shop clerk to whom you pay your mortgage keeps remodeling your house after you finish paying your loan, so that your house continues to grow in square footage and you have to continue to participate in the game economy). Instead, you can plant trees, fish, capture bugs, sell these things to the shop clerk for a sum so that you can pay your mortgage (though you're not really obligated. There are no penalties for not paying, only incentives like having another room added to your house), or donate them to the museum. You have to interact with the townspeople, flag them down to chat, write them letters and give them things, otherwise they move out of your town.

At the best of times, playing the game reflects a desire to live in a picturesque, quasi-agricultural almost pre-industrial small town where everyone knows everyone. It reflects a desire to live elsewhere, without the pressures of our modern economy. In quarantine, those desires still persist, but it facilitates digital conviviality and sociality, friends can visit other friends' towns without leaving their homes. Is this not what Guy Debord wrote about?

There are no pandemics in Animal Crossing.

This is a kind of world-picturing. The game isn't our world, of course, but a vision of a world delivered by flat screens and gaming consoles. There is a world picture represented by the software of the game and the hardware of the console and monitor. These are artifacts of labor and of an immense global network of trade. Nintendo is a Japanese company that relies on Chinese workers and an international distribution network to deliver to a massive community of consumers.

This is the world that the game confronts us with, while simultaneously offering the participant a distraction.

Capitalists/corporations/vector class understand consumers have a desire to escape their lives under capitalism, while also understanding that people probably don't want to farm their own food anymore (though there are trees that grow fruit in the game, your character is never hungry, and agriculture is not incorporated into gameplay). Capitalists can sell the ultimate fantasy to us, a life without capitalism. They understand that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, no one is *really* going to do anything because the major alternative to capitalism in the popular imagination didn't work. Is this China's moment?

You can tell I have a BA in art history because of the way this comparison is formatted.

On the left is a screengrab of the coronavirus map from the New York Times today. On the right is a map of a town in the new Animal Crossing game, as taken from:

<https://animalcrossingworld.com/2019/06/7-important-new-discoveries-from-animal-crossing-new-horizons-island-map-analysis/>

Towns in this version of the game have an airport! When I played this game in elementary school, I remember my character being taxied in. I wonder if the same turtle taxi cab driver is now a pilot? I wonder what an airport is like in a fantasy world without 9/11 or COVID-19.

Appropriately, the game is an island. Every man is an island, no? The island occupies a special place in our popular culture. Marx wrote about Robinson Crusoe. Is this the island from *Lost*, is it the island from *Lord of the Flies*? Interesting that the island is trisected by a river. Is it a map of our psyche? If the line dividing the light green from dark green on the map is the line dividing consciousness from subconsciousness, then it is funny the id houses both the airport and the local shop (marked by the leaf symbol).

Can such lines be drawn on the American map, have those lines already been drawn, and are those lines already on that map? The map clearly reflects population density. In Montana, it looks like it is now close to the Fort Peck Reservation, and in Billings, which is next to the Crow Reservation.

Figs. 31 and 32

This is a screengrab from the last scene of a model published on twitter by the *New York Times*. What do they mean "no control measures"? Is this what's going to happen, what is happening?

They have to publish worst case scenarios. All red. Is this the map President Trump will claim is the electoral college results in 2020?

I wonder how the Chicago School of Economics is going to rationalize this?

Fig. 33

Photos of swans and dolphins returning to the now pristine canals in Venice and drunk elephants napping in Yunan are inescapable virtually. **I think there's a desire to imagine a world without people, especially when as a part of a capitalist mythos we would rather share blame and buy Animal Crossing than take action against the handful of industry captains who are poisoning the earth.**

Non-human animals seem central to this situation. COVID-19 probably jumped from an animal to a person. Now that Venetian canals have washed themselves of pollution the animals are back. A lot of people are playing Animal Crossing right now where the characters are anthropomorphized animals. Where is the world we're living in right now?

I wonder what the environmental impact of this is going to be, how much waste will be produced because of plastic gloves, masks, plastic water bottles, frozen food. Last Friday I went to try grocery shopping, I knew if I was going to get sick I should at least have food in my house so I didn't have to leave. I'm not going to lie that in the back of my mind the movie *Contagion* was playing on a loop, and I think a lot of media surrounding pandemics has informed the way we think about them and this. I stopped at CVS to buy cleaning supplies and hand soap. They only had dish soap. I went to Dollar General. I got dish soap and some canned soup and snacks. I went to Aldi, got some nonperishables. I went to the Rite Aid next door. An older woman rang me out. I hope she'll survive. It wasn't until I got to Walgreens next to Whole Foods that I found one lone bottle of Mrs. Meyers. By the time I got to Trader Joe's the shelves were empty. Apparently nationwide this was the case. BuzzFeed (which it turns out is a Deleuzian social experiment testing identity formation, the founder used to write Marxist social critique) published a list, with accompanying photos of empty shelves and overflowing carts. "23 Tweets That Show How Chaotic Trader Joe's Has Become Because of Coronavirus Panic Buying" shows a dystopian nightmare where the food supply is gone. One shopper had a cart full of ground beef. That's probably all going to go to waste! Not to mention the environmental impact of farming meat to begin with, and each pound is sold in plastic. Trader Joe's is going to have an impossible task beating last year sales next March. It is apparent that a capitalist mindset is at work here. I think there is a specifically American "I gotta get mine" mentality which is to blame for people immediately hoarding resources. What's worse is it seems most people don't know how!

Fig. 34

Photo from: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/tweets-that-show-that-trader-joes-has-become-ground-zero>

I think this photo is a world picture. Look! The modernist grid manifested in the shopping cart, organizing itself almost like lines of latitude and longitude around a globe.

This is perhaps photo of the year. Its composition is pretty ok, [later addition: the fact that it was so hastily taken without regard for aesthetics indicates the stress of the surrounding environment. You can't manufacture that kind of spontaneity!] The photo reveals to us a massive history and global network which had to happen in order to get this photo.

First, we can start with the situation. Coronavirus has spread in part because of the rate of international travel, [later addition: and the increasingly smaller degrees of separation between all us. Modernity!]

Next, we can think of the contents in the cart. Well, there's plenty of ground beef, and what looks like a case of Trader Joe's "natural" chicken in the bottom cart. Animals had to be domesticated for them to be farmed. There's a whole history of agriculture as well as transportation that got that meat to where it is now. In America that comes with farming subsidies as well as government regulation. It comes wrapped in plastic, so we can assume that another industry (oil) is involved, and therefore more government oversight. The metal and plastic used to make that shopping cart had to have been mined, processed, molded and assembled into its final form. That's more industry and more oversight, spanning an international network of mining and manufacturing. That cart might have been made in China! The location: New York, New York. That city itself carries a massive history. Working backwards from the 2008 Great Recession, 9/11, to British colonization, to Dutch colonization, to a time before 1492. The photo was taken with a phone! Probably an iPhone, but certainly a smartphone. An artifact which was designed in California, manufactured in China, bought wholesale by a retailer, and sold to a consumer. The world is distilled in this photo, and reveals to us the psychology of the cart-pusher. Clearly they arrived in time to get their hands on goods. And they prioritized beef. Hopefully it's not the cow character from animal crossing, the game's new geography and airport suggests they have an import/export economy.

**3/23**

Fig. 35

Am I just a *New York Times* distributor? Here is the world picture published on the *New York Times* website today.

There are few countries on the map which remain at, and I wonder how orange the world is about to get. Is this was an intentional color choice, an attempt to connect the virus to a person in the liberal imagination. Codename: Agent Orange?

Fig. 36

This graph has been updated for the first time in a number of days. The number of current cases noticeably outnumbers the number of recovered patients, whereas before it seemed current cases only nominally outnumbered recovered.

Fig. 37

It's hard not to read this map like it's been pockmarked, and it's even harder now not to imagine this in a situation room in 1983 mapping nuclear fallout zones after a massive attack.

How can a country that for so long, so recently, lived under threat of nuclear annihilation have been so catastrophically unprepared to bunker down indefinitely? If the infrastructure was there to begin with, it has been dissolved, as with any emergency preparedness skills.



John J. Curley wrote a really wonderful analysis of Warhol's soup cans in *A Conspiracy of Images, Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War* (Yale: New Haven, 2013), and unpacked the significance of shelf-stable soup in a bunker scenario. By careful examination of *Life* magazine, he argued that canned soup would have been associated with disaster preparedness. The last Friday of Spring Break I had walking passed Dollar General to see if they still had hand soap. They didn't, but I did pick up two cans of Campbell's tomato soup, now sitting in my pantry. [Later addition: Was a Campbell's soup can on that shelf 50 years ago?]

3/26

Fig. 38

Here is the *New York Times* map showing reported cases on 3/25.

Fig. 39

And here it is today.

Comparing these maps to those from the beginning of this journal, it is clear the *Times* had to reconfigure the scale.

Fig. 40

The chart tracking the global situation reflects the increase as well, illustrating the massive jump of confirmed cases in only a few days. [Later addition: Yikes.]

4/4

I have a fear of blackholes. When that horrible image was published last year it sent a shock of existential dread through my system. It made me feel absolutely nauseous. C'est la vie.

Il social interactions are mediated on a screen. Telephone calls have been replaced by FaceTime in an effort to feel social. Classes are on Zoom. I wonder what kind of world is going to emerge after this? Will we prioritize face to face interaction after spending weeks, or months, alone? How will our economy look? **I don't mean how will the Dow Jones fair, but will we reorganize our economy around people's needs rather than lascivious greed?** I am hopeful the mutual aid networks established in cities across America will be sustained and fostered as viable alternative economies. Hope for the best, expect the worst.

The situation has changed drastically in the past few days. Here, I will chart those changes with the screen grabs I have taken since my last entry.

Fig. 41

Here is the map from 3/30/2020

Fig. 42

Here is the same map from 3/31/2020. In one day, Michigan went from over 5,400 reported cases to 7,600 reported cases.

Fig. 43

Here are confirmed cases in Europe.

The situation just keeps getting worse for Italy.

Fig. 44

On 3/31/2020 I catch this NPR post.

Through this project I want to make it clear that I do not think the USA is the world, but when we consider the rate of transmission in the United States and Europe with this NPR post, we can surmise a bleak world.

Fig. 45

On 3/27 *Women's Wear Daily* posts this. Interesting language for sure. This is for her *creative* staff, not sales people. As a former Bloomingdale's Sales Professional, I wonder if the sales people at Vera Wang are keeping up with their clients and trying to make sales happen for when stores open again. I wonder if their managers are advising them to do so.

Fig. 46

The fashion world is hopeful that this situation will reconfigure the rate of fashion production and consumption. Notice that the final part of their question is "fewer markdowns?" Neiman Marcus Group is salivating at that prospect, we love profit and visible class distinctions. [Later addition]

Even Donatella Versace wants to slow down! This is the industry that over-pressures designers to maximize output, and often the blame gets shifted on an over eager consumer rather than on luxury conglomerates which maximizes creative output for profit, so the real issue is overproduction I had this thought yesterday. When it comes to living sustainably, there's a lot of rhetoric that people don't do it because it comes at convenience, or that they don't make smarter, greener purchases. And sure to some extent I believe that. Who wants to grow their own food anymore? But that becomes a way of thinking which shifts blame away from the people that are actually culpable for climate change. Corporations are not victims of some innate human desire to consume. Corporations aren't helpless entities that have no other choice than to bend to the will of the market. Corporations make decisions, and the issue with sustainability is a problem of over production, not only over consumption.

Fig. 47

We can look to emissions charts over China in the aftermath of COVID-19:

This map was taken from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-51944780>

Sure people aren't driving as much, but pollution is concentrated over industrial manufacturing areas. It is imperative that becomes part of the climate change conversation.

Fig. 48

To conclude this point, I commented on that *Women's Wear Daily* post and tagged Vera Wang. She responded.

Figs. 49 and 50

These screenshots from the *New York Times* were taken two days ago (4/2). They have decided to change their map's style, and are including deaths this time.

Figs. 51 and 52

Here are those maps updated for today:

Fig. 53

Here is the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus map webpage, which was taken at 4:09 today when I sat down for this entry. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

Fig. 54

Here it is at 6:14PM.

In a matter of hours, 10,000 people were confirmed positive, 414 people died, 1,735 people recovered. And it's being presented on the infamous Mercator projection!

Figs. 55 and 56

Here is the *New York Times* map compared to a map of US highways taken from Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Numbered\\_Highway\\_System#/media/File:Map\\_of\\_current\\_US\\_Routes.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Numbered_Highway_System#/media/File:Map_of_current_US_Routes.svg):

Along the south and midwest, the dots appear to be formed in straight lines across a grid. When compared against the same map from the beginning of this project, we can track transmission. This pandemic shows us how connected we all are, and that we're only strangers by a small degree of separation.

**4/5**

Today, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II addressed the commonwealth. This is her Blitz.

Tim Barker wrote for *Dissent* magazine a piece entitled "It Doesn't Have to Be a War" on 20 March 2020. He sees comparisons made between coronavirus policy responses to the New Deal and World War II, as brings up Trump invoking the Defense Production Act. He concludes "It may be that, in the end, the coronavirus leads to a real global conflict, a prospect that will likely spell the ruin of progressive politics. There is no reason to resort already to the analog of war."<sup>2</sup> Are being primed to go to war? Barker is right to point out the phenomenon, and we see it made in Queen Elizabeth's speech.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/coronavirus-defense-production-act-industrial-policy?fbclid=IwAR12mTsj5nBRxBWNxyUYTCtYSff1OU23Vtd8abTh1AyDmBY1J2VQSY8DtA](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/coronavirus-defense-production-act-industrial-policy?fbclid=IwAR12mTsj5nBRxBWNxyUYTCtYSff1OU23Vtd8abTh1AyDmBY1J2VQSY8DtA)

The video posted by the BBC to Youtube begins with a brief sweep of the grounds of Windsor Castle, her family's fortress and namesake.

I knew she'd bring up the war. And she did! HM Queen Lizzy is nothing if not dependable. The two lines stick that stick out to me the most are:

“I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge, and those who come after us will say the Britons of this generation were as strong as any.”

“It reminds me of the very first broadcast I made, in 1940, helped by my sister. We as children spoke from here at Windsor to children who had been evacuated from their homes and sent away for their own safety. Today, once again, many will feel the pain of separation from their loved ones, but now as then, we know deep down that it is the right thing to do.”<sup>3</sup>

She does acknowledgement that this is different than the war. Yet connecting this crisis to the War invokes a sense of patriotism. For Queen and Country.

British industrialization and colonialism have helped to mold the world to where it is today, and the pandemic is the consequence in part because of the infrastructure Victorian England helped to expand.

Fig. 57

When we look at the map on the Johns Hopkins website today, we see the specter of the Cold War, but do we also see the specter of the Boxer Rebellion? What about Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire? The Atlantic slave trade?

Fig. 58

The specter of the transatlantic slave trade, the Great Migration, and redlining appears in Chicago. My former coworker at Trader Joe's posted a link to Chicago Public Radio's website. In Chicago 70% of COVID-19 deaths are Black. Chicago's segregation is going to be made apparent in people's access to medical care, which is already strained. Meanwhile I'm still getting advertisements from the MCA trying to sell me designer merchandise.

I realized today I'm missing part of the picture by omitting responses from news sources I don't usually engage with. Fox News, for example.

Fig. 59

Here is a screenshot from their Coronavirus webpage taken 5 April 2020 at 6:05PM.

It's not very well designed according to standards of good taste. Why would an advertisement for their religious programming block takes priority over pandemic statistics?

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2klmuggOEIE>

Fig. 60

I clicked the advertisement and was taken to a sign up page. It's not religious programming per se, but it is conservative streaming service. They have Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, and just look at ranks of membership.

Yikes.

Fig. 61

The sidebar on their website which is tracking the pandemic. Only the United States is represented pictorially, the world is condensed into statistics.

Fig. 62

Red is the dominant color of the pandemic. It suggests urgency. Is this is their 2020 election forecast?

Fig. 63

I have revisited this map from Johns Hopkins after completing this entry and this is how the situation has changed in the hour and a half. There is a lag between when they update and when I access, but an additional 3,800 have been confirmed, 1,222 people have recovered, and 669 people have died.

Figs. 64 and 65

Why is information on this map represented so differently? Why are all of the cases in Russia represented by a single large red circle in the middle of that country, but in China, Australia and the US, information is broken up to be more representative? Is it ease of is this the extent of the information countries are willing to share with one another?

**4/15**

I'm not keeping up with these every day. That was an overambitious task. [Later addition: This is going to be a more stream of conscious entry.]

It's going to be hugely disappointing that in 5 years from now we're still living the lives we were before this. [Later addition: McKenzie Wark was right.]

Fig. 66

I start on JHU. Yikes 2 million people.

Fig. 67

And then went to the *New York Times*.

Figs. 68-69

Then to Google where that map came up.

Allegheny county, Pennsylvania, United States, Global, blue dot picture. God what's the point

even. What is up with that like what is up with space. That's so preposterous. I'm so frustrated that like i am a teleology of the universe.

Fig. 70

Facebook has an update page. Facebook we read in class. Facebook—

God why am I thinking about *Sex and the City*

Thinking about the Facebook ad on Instagram about being connected.

God Facebook owns Instagram.

Of course they're gonna be like "let's all be together" [later addition: and of course it's going to be emotional.] oh god anyway map, map, map

Figs. 71 and 72

Oh yes here's recommendations of what to do in quarantine  
oh great ok i'll meditate thanks Facebook.

Oh wait look at that take a break from news sources. Rodger that, 10-4

Fig. 73

Facebook of course encourages users to video chat your friends, they sell a technology just for that. capitalism doesn't innovate it replicates, it doesn't breed competition, it inundates us with choices. Why do I need a whole row of a 20 options of laundry detergent and why is that conflated with freedom

there's a tweet screen grab i saw a while back of a guy taking photos "in a cuban grocery store" and there was only one brand of tissues or canned tomatoes for example and that was an example of socialist tyranny. One person was like uh he's in a restaurant supply store. I don't know if any of that is credible, either my memory or that discourse.

Government is not real. Neither is the economy.

Fig. 68

Copy/paste: Allegheny county, Pennsylvania, United States, Global, Third Rock From the Sun, blue dot picture. *The Magic School Bus Episode* when they go to Pluto.

God what's the point even. What is up with that, like what is up with space. That's so preposterous. I'm so frustrated that I am a teleology of the universe. That's too much pressure. Are you kidding me? We are all unbroken lineages tracing back to the first time amino acids started replicating. There have to be aliens, right? I hate extraterrestrial discourses. They're so vapid and anthrocentric. All these so called "brilliant minds" come up with all these "paradoxes" about life on other planets. That's absurd. Are you kidding? Are scientists aware of what they're doing? It's so narcissistic to assume that aliens will resemble us in any way, even

psychologically. Our concept of intelligence is so narrow, it's tunnel vision to a single narrative end. We don't know what that conclusion is, but Elon Musk and that guy from Google are gonna kill us all to get there. Immortality research— who wants to live forever god get me out of here. Olivia Coleman watched I'm a celebrity get me out of here to prepare for her role in *The Iron Lady*. Maggie Thatcher.

The dinosaurs didn't have space ships and they had complex social systems. you know? Why do we assume alien life shares our faculties, our priorities. What's that movie with Amy Adams, not *Enchanted*. She plays a language professor that learns how to talk to aliens.

That was a good movie.

That's so absurd that we are all just chimps. Chimps worship trees. Chimps also can be taught sign language. Why the PETA lobby insists on blocking my research is beyond me.

Why can't we teach chimps sign language and get them to describe what they're doing when they perform their rites. Why can't we teach them to use fire. Let us give fire to chimps, let us be a Prometheus. Oppenheimer, that really excellent installment in the *Alien* franchise. Everyone hated it but you knew what it was about if you watched enough Ancient Aliens. Frankenstein.

Scientific "ethics" are only there to serve the dominate hegemony. Science isn't real.

#### **4/26 on data collected 4/21**

I'm deep cleaning my bathroom grout. All men become their mothers!

Fig. 75

Checking into John Hopkins, their map is slow to load, and the red circles appear before the maps of all those borders around the world. I was going to remark about how you can easily see the shapes of continents just by those big red circles, but it just struck me that it is so interesting that this is the way the world is represented, clearly pointed north with Europe just right of top center. These red circles are data points projected onto a pictogram of the sum total of the course of human history or at least of the last few centuries—no we had to know how to draw, and to figure out representation, so yes this is the sum total of human history! But the very fact that I can see the shapes of countries just because of the way data points are organized tells me three things: (1) we are inundated with a variation of this image constantly; (2) This style of map projection, which situates Europe essentially top center, and represents borders the way it does comes from a Eurocentric ideology disseminated from colonial Europe to its colonies, reflecting that history but also its cousins by proxy (economics, racism, Christianity, European language, the social construct of science, modern globalism But since the COLD WAR ended and the Soviets disappeared this map also erases evidence of communism, and reflects the triumph of contemporary globalism, capitalism, etc.! There are a lot of counter parts to that which will be discussed later but I must get back to my point); (3) I've forgotten my point.

But let me return because I suddenly find I'm very interested in this.

Of course Cuba is there and so is North Korea and China represent exceptions which resulted because of the rule, and China is an exception which participates with the rule. which has special economic zones that allow it to participate in a global economy. This is the extent of what I'm really able to recite on China's economy let me bow out.

I love this trail from Europe to Asia—is that the Silk Road? I wonder how well this maps up with modern trade but like Siri show me a map of the silk road

Fig. 76

I remember this! China wants to build a silk road! And that maps up, but Alexa tell me something I don't know show me the ancient Silk Road

I love how that part of the world didn't have its history eviscerated from it and it can rely on a millenia old trade route as an infrastructure for modern trade.

Fig. 77

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_Road#/media/File:SeidenstrasseGMT.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road#/media/File:SeidenstrasseGMT.JPG)

This is from the Wiki article on the silk road the map is a different projection but I bet it lines up with that train from Europe to China on that JHU COVID map! I mean certainly we can look to the Americas and look at the trade routes which supplanted indigenous ones.

Fig. 78

I found this one from:

[https://www-jstor-org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/stable/24938943?seq=7#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/stable/24938943?seq=7#metadata_info_tab_contents)

sorry i mean

Harbottle, Garman, and Phil C. Weigand. "Turquoise in Pre-Columbian America." *Scientific American* 266, no. 2 (1992): 78-85. Accessed April 21, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24938943](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24938943).

But unfortunately COVID cases aren't represented in Mexico like they are here, so I can't see city by city and maybe see if the big population areas are identifiable and if they're the same from this pre colonization trade route.

Fig. 79

Looking at the New York Times the wave is cresting and I'm thinking of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Hokusai.

**4/26 on data collected on 4/26**

Wow this semester has been wild.



Anyway.

109,000 in New Jersey, but again I'm thinking —

brief interruption, i won't be returning to the Kanagawa painting, but are we in that boat? Yesterday I went for a walk through Oakland to Schenley and there were a lot of people out, more than I have seen in weeks to where it seemed busy— in small groups without masks. So there's something to it?

—A few weeks ago there was that many in Italy. As an Italian I weep for my people.

I started watching the Sopranos and forsake that I am not culturally Italian. Mine is a culture fired in the kiln of the culture industry

Anyway back to the topic at hand. I suppose the only thing to think about right now is how the world has changed I started what was it in March? This year?

Yes this started March 3/18

Ok I'm going to do my best to keep this more on task and to edit. Actually writing down my thoughts may have been really obnoxious.

Well we've come so far.

Fig. 80

Wikipedia is a feat of human achievement. When acolytes of Adam Smith tout their beliefs on human nature I should rebuttal by showing them the Wikipedia home page.

I'm listening to music and the song *This Fog* by Wet (I know, awful name) just came on, if you're looking for an audio component. It's making me sentimental about Wikipedia.

But Wikipedia is a world picture! I feel like i'm in one of those Apple commercials that makes you feel good about capturing family memories with their products. But this is so much less evil.

Wikipedia is a world picture which is made up by countless other world pictures, pictures of the world, global systems, universal systems. I cannot get over how big the universe is. Don't even get me started on the multiverse. The fact that the universe facilitated our creation and allowed us to have these thoughts.

But Wikipedia! The very fact that it is a nonprofit made up by countless volunteers and countless hours. And about good things! Things about ourselves and what we know. Every absent entry only indicating what information hasn't been prioritized to gather, so that even what we don't know is still a part of the whole. What treasures! The Swiss Federal Council! Machu Picchu! The 2014 Geico 500! The caves at lascaux! interesting that europe—specifically France, to their delight—finds a way to be at the beginning of human history but allow me to return to the romance. The pyramids of Giza! The splendor of the Nile, the grandeur of Heliopolis, the majesty of the Theban kings. Wow we really came into this world right. I was almost an Egyptologist. In

another universe Isaiah can read hieroglyphics and hieratic. I would love to do a history of the development of Atum, read the sema tawy through Barthes, look at mortuary temple reliefs through Foucault. Or... One wonders thinking about funeral *ka* statues through Donna Haraway's Cyborgs! That would be so interesting thinking about technologies and bodies and souls comparatively in such a way.

I truly believe humans are fundamentally good, it kills me we've been living like this for so long. We truly deserve better! The state should not be distinct from ourselves, it should be an extension of ourselves,

*Nous Sommes L'etats!*

But in a way where we can generate a system which works for us, so that we can live, work, go to school, have clean air! God why couldn't Russia get it right!

But that's what happens when you build a state economy like that. I don't know much about that. I know it's been argued that the soviet economy was state run capitalism, but I wonder how the structure of the government—

Wait if capitalism began to develop in the 1400-1500s and many of the governments in europe happened after that, and gets based or evolved after the other to mimic or improve on fails and successes then it makes sense that by the 20th century a communist state was liable to fail because its government was based on the government structure of capitalist western europe.

Then a dictatorship of the proletariat should be modeled from something different! Wow honestly how fabulous would it be to be a part of world building it's a shame that it's being done so poorly and that it's driving us to extinction. I hope they got it right on other planets, in other universes, beyond the great infinite in all direction cinderblock wall that is the boundary of the multiverse.

Post-Script and Reflection (May 30, 2020)

When I was asked to write a reflection for this project, I was unsure of how to do so. This week it seems we are at the nascent stages of a tremendous cultural shift. This shift seems only to

have been made possible because of how the pandemic has been handled. I feel it necessary to comment on this situation before I discuss the content of my journal.

Quarantine in America has gone from bad to worse. In addition to the deaths, millions are unemployed, and the stimulus checks were insulting, if even delivered. We are being forced to reckon with the realities of our way of life. Our global economy is our detriment. We should not be so far removed from our supply chains. Necessities shouldn't be manufactured on the other side of the world. Our food shouldn't come from 1,500 miles away. We shouldn't have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. Our healthcare system should be better equipped, and our government should have our interests at heart.

Every COVID death is a tragedy. It is made all the worse that much of this could have been prevented through adequate preparation and response on the government's part. I do not just mean the federal government. I believe states, counties, and towns also have a part to play. There is an individual responsibility, of course. Wash hands, wear a mask, stay six feet apart, don't congregate in large crowds. Some people do a better job than others, and some are reckless in their negligence and denial. But the blame should be levied against those in positions of power. I believe government should be formed and act for the interest of the people. I believe that government is a means by which we can organize ourselves, and that government is an extension of ourselves. I believe government should be at the mercy of the people. I do not believe people should be at the mercy of the government. I believe some members of our government should be held accountable for the lives lost to COVID-19.

The way Americans conceive of government needs to be overhauled. Ours is an archaic system designed by slave owning, landed elites to enrich themselves and minimize market oversight. That it should happen during the Enlightenment was a coincidence. Remember who was granted citizenship when the United States was formed. The American political system functions precisely the way the founding fathers intended.

For so long we have been at the mercy of an economy which works for so few by taking from so many. We have been trained and conditioned by a system to labor more and more, and for less and less. We have been trained out of collective action.

Without quarantine, we wouldn't have been able to mobilize like we're seeing in Minneapolis this week. Who has the time or the energy to attack the system when one has to work two jobs to afford necessities? Who can take the time off from work, even a few hours? That is the system at work: it prevents dissent by taking time away from you.

I am horrified that black and brown folks are being massacred at the hands of a militarized police. But what we're seeing in Minneapolis should energize us. I am hopeful and optimistic that we will not return to the way we were living, and that we are at the early stages of a revolution which will see us living cooperatively, sustainably, and with one another's wellbeing at heart.

When I started this journal, I wanted to catalogue my hunch that the ways the media might be exaggerating the situation either for page views or to make people take this situation seriously. I had written in my first entry that people have begun to interrogate and condemn the systems which were being disrupted and failing. Almost three months later, and we are seeing people in Minneapolis take action against those systems. Now, more than ever, I believe human dignity, happiness, and wellbeing for all people ought to take precedent above all else. We deserve better. In thinking about my thinking, I notice that my stance is motivated by

recognizing and condemning systems which I have deemed to be unfair. I am asking myself constantly: how is what I do justifiable when people are suffering? The idea for this journal was to engage with the themes of this course by thinking about how the world is being distilled into maps and cold statistics, conjured up on an Apple machine.

There are five points that I made in the journal that I think merit further contemplation, elaboration, rebuttal, and synthesis. They are all approximations of one another, and central to is my belief that a better world is possible. So, this discussion should be brief.

On March 19, I wrote that the long-term consequences will be economic. I still believe that but am hopeful that a depression measured on the Dow Jones indicates a flourishing alternative economy which cares for the needs and welfare of all. The welfare of corporate stock is not how we should be measuring success. This entry also considers a NPR post which said months of social distancing may be required, and I was too scared of what that might mean. I was imagining the movie *Contagion*, and so I derided NPR for using a scare tactic. While I maintain that NPR stands right of center in the name of journalistic objectivism, this is a warning that should have been heeded.

On March 21, I wrote the new *Animal Crossing* game sells us the fantasy of the world we want, which distracts us from the world we have. The success of the game, I think, tells us that people truly want to live in a community where they can spend their days in leisure, and the game is the only way so many are able to experience such a life. They don't call it a live-a-life game for nothing. I asked whether the same lines on a game map which seem to delineate the ego, the superego, and the id might have been drawn on American geography already. Such an interpretation remains contingent on one's persuasion. Who can say what is the id or the superego?

On April 4, I articulated a point that I will make again: the problem with our system is not overconsumption, it's overproduction. By this I mean that companies, whose sole interest is profit, overproduce cheap, disposable goods and incentivize us to buy more. That chair from Target sure does seem like a steal at \$100, but it's wrapped in an obscene amount of plastic and will break irreparably in less than a year, and it will have to be thrown away. But by then, Target will have other options for us to choose from. This time it comes in a different color! On 4/15 I made a similar point, why is it that freedom means having options for consumer goods. Is such preference truly freedom?

One must consider human nature. Collectively, we are neither covetous nor mercenary. We have been trained into that behavior. We wouldn't have communities, friends, or close familial bonds if we were fundamentally selfish. It is anathema to our survival. Yes, people hoarded resources and, yes, the prices of goods were drastically gouged. Yet, that such a response is limited to certain areas, and in fact certain stores, reflects a cultural, rather than biological, behavior. The laws of the market are not infallible, they are not determined by nature. The market is a social system. Therefore, the law of the market is a social contract. It was a person who raised those prices. That same person has the ability to do better.

Many of us have heard the same critique of consumer culture: sustainability is a personal responsibility. Take shorter showers, recycle, bring your own bags to the grocery store. By this logic, corporations are helpless against consumer demand. Starbucks stopped using straws when enough people demanded it. But it's because it threatened their bottom line, and that kind of activism can only get us so far. Starbucks still uses plastic cups, which still end up in landfills. Plastic and oil corporations still retain their chokehold around our throats, and their grip is getting tighter. It is not enough to bring reusable bags at the grocery store. Corporations are

culpable for the climate crisis. They will be held accountable only through collective action. That collective action should be the basis of a new government.

Others might argue that such an attitude undervalues people's ability to make better decisions. The fact remains that the option to make better decisions is not available to a lot of people, and the system is designed that way. It will not work to make reforms within a system that is fundamentally predicated on disenfranchisement.

In the same entry, I make a point about science not being real. What a claim without explanation! I acknowledge that in our moment, which is patently absurd and nonsensical, there is a desire to cling to a sense of order and reason. By my initial claim I meant that science is an epistemological framework shaped by cultural attitudes, beliefs, and power. Colonial racism found vindication in science. Nazism had science too. American eugenics was at one point scientific. Outside of racism, pathology, in my view, has largely been influenced by European Christian morality. Let us not forget the evils done by the Sackler family. The Sacklers used science too. To be sure, plants grow and photosynthesize, and science helps us to quantify and describe such mechanisms. It could be argued there is a "real" and a "pseudo" science, but that itself depends on what is and is not socially acceptable, not because of science's objectivity or innate moral compass. Science too, like economics and government, is a social system.

My final point, from 4/26 with data collected 4/21, is that our favored standard for designing maps, where Europe occupies top center, occurs because Europe, through violent means, installed itself in the position to make these decisions, and they chose to be represented there. Europe, which is a peninsula and not a continent, could be represented in the lower left corner of the map, and the map would represent the same information. One might say maps were developed for navigation and that orienting the map towards magnetic north is a practical decision. Yes, I agree. But why was that specific system of navigation imagined? Whom did it benefit? Whom does it benefit today? As a gesture we can print maps with the Pacific Ocean at the center, but the map only represents larger problems.

I suppose I feel so resolute in my dogma because the alternatives seem woefully inadequate for our realities. We can enjoy games like *Animal Crossing*, but what does that show us about our own desires? We can continue to shop at supermarkets and eat apples imported from the other side of the country, but what's going to happen when we can no longer get food from that far away? We can continue peacefully protest, but what is that accomplishing? How can we continue to live like this when people are suffering? Another world is on the horizon, and our current world will end. We can choose now how that happens and what that looks like. Will we bide our time until we are driven to cataclysm? Or will we actively reshape the world now? To me, that is freedom. We will have to forego the lifestyles to which we have become accustomed. But are we really fulfilled binge watching Netflix because we're too overworked to do anything else? Mortality is our finality, but people are dying because of the way of life into which we have been socialized. I refuse to believe that we are truly impotent in our situation. Change is possible, and quarantine has given us the space to start.

### Works Referenced

Harbottle, Garman, and Phil C. Weigand. "Turquoise in Pre-Columbian America." *Scientific American* 266, no. 2 (1992): 78-85. Accessed April 21, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24938943](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24938943).

"Covid-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)." Coronavirus Resource Center, Johns Hopkins University and Medicine. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

Kuhn, Anothny. "China Promises \$46 Billion to Pave the Way for a Brand New Silk Road." NPR: Goats and Soda. 3 May 2015. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/05/03/401980467/china-promises-46-billion-to-pave-the-way-for-a-brand-new-silk-road>

Wood, Daniel. "Coronavirus World Map: Tracking the Spread of the Outbreak." *The Coronavirus Crisis*. NPR: Goats and Soda. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/30/822491838/coronavirus-world-map-tracking-the-spread-of-the-outbreak>

"Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak." *The New York Times*. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=style-coronavirus&variant=show&region=TOP\\_BANNER&context=storyline\\_menu](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=style-coronavirus&variant=show&region=TOP_BANNER&context=storyline_menu)

"Coronavirus." *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/category/health/infectious-disease/coronavirus>

"Midtown Bozeman." The City of Bozeman Economic Development Department administers the Midtown Urban Renewal District. <https://www.midtownbozeman.org>

Greenfieldboyce, Nell. "New Analysis Suggests Months of Social Distancing May Be Needed to Stop Virus." NPR: Shots. 17 March 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/17/817214311/new-analysis-suggests-months-of-social-distancing-may-be-needed-to-stop-virus>

“Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Center.” *Facebook*.  
[https://www.facebook.com/coronavirus\\_info/?page\\_source=bookmark](https://www.facebook.com/coronavirus_info/?page_source=bookmark)

“United States Numbered Highway System.” Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Numbered\\_Highway\\_System#/media/File:Map\\_of\\_current\\_US\\_Routes.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Numbered_Highway_System#/media/File:Map_of_current_US_Routes.svg):

McGrath, Matt. “Coronavirus: Air Pollution and CO2 fall rapidly as virus spreads.” British Broadcasting Corporation: Science and Environment. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-51944780>

Stopera, Matt. “23 Tweets That Show How Chaotic Trader Joe’s has Become Because of Coronavirus Panic Buying.” BuzzFeed: Food. 13 March 2020.  
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/tweets-that-show-that-trader-joes-has-become-ground-zero>

“7 Important New Discoveries in Animal Crossing: New Horizons’ Island Map (analysis).”  
<https://animalcrossingworld.com/2019/06/7-important-new-discoveries-from-animal-crossing-new-horizons-island-map-analysis/>

Images from Instagram and Facebook were taken from my social media feeds.