

Editorial

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The writing projects that *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* has established reflect a preoccupation with a need for the systemic practice community to feel ownership of our journals, to feel connected to the texts they read, and feel entitled to take up space with their writings.

Our most recent writing project, *Pandemic as Systemic Flux* (see systemicflux.com), has offered a platform for many different sorts of writing during the first pandemic wave. We have been asking for contributions from systemic people across transdisciplinary communities to join different perspectives and create new connections. We asked for writings from the heart, from the kitchen table, from the care home, the streets, the relatives' waiting area, from our shared or personalised life-work spaces.

Many writers in this first wave special issue of *Pandemic as Systemic Flux* address social injustice in health, economic and governmental practice and policy. And cutting right through this landscape of the pandemic is the matter that Black and Brown lives need to matter not simply *more* than they do but that they need to matter in ways that genuinely alter how we practice, how we conceptualise, how we talk, think, relate and resource. The writers in this issue and across the *Pandemic as Systemic Flux* website speak in ways which require new listening - a wide openness - which suspends taught theory and received expectations from dominant cultural values.

Critical times need ways of responding; ways that invite different kinds of writing to bring forth stories not yet heard and practices not yet valued. We invited poetry, flash tales, papers and imagery. We asked for writings which are not formulaic, which retain the sound of the speaker-writer – and in a form which honours the authenticity of voice, cultural groundedness, geographical situatedness.

Professional writing needs to be disenwhitened so writers can happen upon a way of speaking suited to their context, to that which needs expressing. This might allow more members of our communities to expand what counts as knowing and showing, so leading the reader to move alongside others or enter into a fragment of their complex worlds and feel their presence in ours. As we read, we learn how we can be in our professional and personal lives.

Systemic flux is a term we use to draw attention to emergent processes with many kinds of relational consequences. This shape-changing affects and is affected by human and non-human lives/materials, ideas, narratives and values. These movements can unfold at a snail's pace or in a lightning flash. As systemic or relationally attuned people, we are well-placed to capture our observations and use writing as a similar form of flux in shaping and reshaping our ideas and noticings for ourselves and others to learn from.

The ten poems in this issue endorse the performative power of writing intended to be heard; words spoken, sometimes whispered with an urgency of prayer, take the reader directly to the heart of otherwise hidden moments too intimate to compete with public headlines and social media. People are wrestling with an entanglement of emotion tortured by time and - that word again - uncertainty. And yet beauty sometimes makes unexpected appearances in amongst these challenges.

The opening and closing "book cover" papers by Ray Becvar and Stan Amaladas and by Celiane Camargo-Borges and Sheila McNamee invite us to consider how systemic, social constructionist and constructivist theories can take us further in conceptualising and responding to the virus and the pandemic. The practice-based papers show innovation, collaboration and reflection. The word "uncertainty" arises frequently but in a number of ways that attempt to make fresh emotional, theoretical, ethical meaning. These papers continue the theme of adjustment to working under unexpected pandemic conditions, in particular the shift to online working. There are illustrations from Leah Salter, Nana Bonsu, Cinzia Taffagli and colleagues, Jenn McKinney and Sarah Helps of constructive and collaborative responses to what we can do now to move our work online or outside. The theme of connection is central in attempting to "humanise" technology channelled dialogue or embrace having become techno-humans in multipurpose households.

The shift to online working requires that workers and organisations are choosing between *replication* or *innovation* of existing practices. There is a loosening of the clinical grip on the rules of engagement. Many are saying the necessity for improvisation has a revitalising effect following an era where clinical practice had become straightjacketed by a narrow interpretation of evidence based practice. During this pandemic era, everything has been thrown up in the air. There are no longer clear boundaries between personal and professional lives. Or one might say, there are no longer artificial descriptions of boundaries. Are we, as a profession going to continue asking "Does it work?" or instead ask, "What matters to whom?" and "How are we listening and evaluating what counts as meaningful connection?" Some of the writers address a rebalancing of power relations in that all participants are together in a learning curve, or as Leah Salter writes, in a learning community.

As we publish this issue, Europe is entering into the bleak prospect of an extremely difficult second wave of the coronavirus with new strains set against a backdrop of civil war between a public health agenda and economic-political agendas; where attachments to different truths are in play with far reaching consequences. Health, like education, and like ecology, is not an equal playing field. We know many will die of coronavirus or another normally preventable disease, most from population groups whose lives appear to matter less in the anthropocentric schema of superiority. Meanwhile, there is incredible pressure on carers and members of physically and emotionally vulnerable groups to stay safe and resist pressure to be exposed to the virus. As mental health professionals we are facing a deluge of pain and fear and loss from those affected in many ways by this pandemic. We also have to find ways of looking after ourselves, those close to us and our professional integrity.

Writing and reading is a way of witnessing but also archiving this era. It is also a way of processing and making sense of what we do as we move forward living with more uncertainty and worry but with our systemic bag of spontaneous, improvisational and pragmatic creativity that characterises the history of our systemic fields of play. Let us carry this adventurous spirit and concern for new rigour with us during these times. Let's keep sharing stories of experience and new learning in ways that feel right and can take each other and our organisations further.

Do visit the new Systemic Lives M Talks with Harlene Andersen, Laura Fruggeri and Monica McGoldrick and also the soon to be relaunched Second Wave of the Pandemic as Systemic Flux website. Perhaps some of you will sign up for a Murmurations hosted writing retreat – online for now. Many thanks to our contributors, our wonderful reviewers for their constructive and supportive feedback, and to the editorial team for all their input. If you are able to make a donation to this independent journal which runs on your contributions, sponsorship and endless goodwill, it will always be appreciated.

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