

Excursions

Volume 10, Issue 1 (2020) | Chaos



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Essays: Research in Times of Chaos

Heidi Cobham

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Heidi Cobham

University of Sussex

Life as a PhD philosophy researcher is, invariably, chaotic. Days consist of reading and *re*-reading my thesis, interpreting journal articles and book chapters, meeting with my supervisors, preparing a conference paper, attending a workshop and preparing next week's lesson for my class of twenty-six undergraduate students. Time seeps through my fingers and sleep has become but a vague memory.

Then Covid-19 happened, *abruptly*.

Covid-19 forced a standstill, a shutdown to life as we know it and a lockdown. All physical plans had to be converted into virtual plans; life became more digital than ever before. We were separated but had to look for innovative ways to stay connected. We were alone but had to find ways to be together. We were forced to pause, to be still, to stay home and not engage in the usual chaotic hustle and bustle to which we were all so accustomed.

“Lockdown” promised us safety and stillness, the underlying implication being that with more time at home we would have more time on our hands. Yet, this could not be further from the truth, especially for a researcher. Reading and *re*-reading my thesis now meant reading and *re*-reading an unprecedented number of emails about changes caused by Covid-19. I could no longer read journal articles and book chapters at what had become my second home, the library, and had to resort to online versions and, where not available, purchase a copy. Supervisory meetings now had an

additional member: either Skype or Zoom. Preparing for the conference meant also preparing to pre-record and upload my presentation. Workshops were now over the internet and no longer over a cup of coffee. Preparing next week's lesson meant that I became somewhat of a student who was learning how to teach online. On top of this, Covid-19 brought with it a wealth of confusion and a lack of clarity. Keeping up to date with the changing information and better understanding Covid-19 required research of its own.

The strength and energy required to navigate this new-found chaos was equivalent to embarking on an additional PhD degree. The chaos was mentally draining. I think it is safe to say that I am now a PhD researcher of philosophy... *and* a PhD researcher of Covid-19, so I'm awaiting two degrees.