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That Distancing Feeling
Curated by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer



Six feet. We've gained a new radar for this radius. Proximity has become a problem. We improvise real and imagined protective screens in front of and around ourselves. The spheres we are able to safely occupy have contracted into lonely bubbles. Space gets measured by an empty arm's reach. Empty chairs, empty benches, empty sidewalks, empty stores, empty restaurants, empty everything. The dream of a vast, deep, unpopulated beach has become an emblematic yearning for me, alongside the nightmare of any crowded place. This incomplete sadness of approaching family or friend, not too near and never making contact, circling like repellant magnets, this sustained dull sadness rolls over my inner landscape like a fog. I can only hug the two bodies with whom I live, so I try to hug them more. Living through the pandemic has immersed us in unprecedented contrasts and stark shades of isolation, distancing, and solitude—and the complicated ways that

those involuntary states coexist with and produce different, compromised kinds of intimacies, exposing newly heightened sensitivities. On the one hand, I look to communities that have faced pandemic and survived through calculated separation and the refuge of private communion before, like the gay community. On the other hand, there's also a new diachronic awareness of space, for instance, that we have honed, thinking about airspace shared not only concurrently but separately, sequentially over different spans of time that correlate to different levels of risk. Are droplets still lingering? What else from when and whom is in the air or, for that matter, in the ground? Space becomes experienced temporally, too. Or, the closed, hermetic family unit comes to mean differently, too, in sweet and uneasy ways: at the same time that we are isolated from friends and extended family, we are also in forced, full-time, relentless proximity with those at home. No break from that either, which throws off and taxes intimacy's fine balance.

Covidian life of these past three months has been defined by various large and subtle losses and absences, waves of scarcities, cutting away and cutting off. That said, while the loss of habits and life as we knew it is extreme, I am reminded that not all cancelations are losses, many may also be a relief.

—Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer